Anonymous, “The Late Mary L. Whately of Cairo,” *Sunday at Home* No. 1835 (June 29th 1889): 404-407.

The Late Mary L. Whately of Cairo

[p.404]

Mary Louisa Whately, the subject of the following sketch, was the second daughter of Archbishop Whately, and was born in 1824, at the country Rectory of Hales-worth, in Suffolk, where her father resided for some years before his appointment to the See of Dublin. The chief part of her early life was spent in Ireland, where, under her father's roof, she and her sisters received the highest educational training, mental, moral, and religious—from a father and mother such as few are blest with.

A nature full of activity, energy, and intelligence of no common order, distinguished her from childhood; and after the Irish famine, when so many organisations were formed to help the poor and ignorant, she found a field for those energies in active work, especially in the Ragged Schools opened in Dublin, in which she and her mother and sisters were constantly employed.

She often said in after life that the training she received in the Irish Mission Schools, in which she helped to teach, was an invaluable preparation for the work in which she was afterwards to be engaged.

She had learned before this early beginning, that the first step was to give herself to Him who had “bought her with a price,” and in this spirit her work at home and abroad was ever carried on.

In 1858 she visited Cairo and the Holy Land with some friends, and the interest awakened in her mind by this visit was the first preparation for her life-work in the East.

In the winter of 1860 she was ordered for her health to a southern climate, and her thoughts turned to the country to which she had already become attached. While residing in Cairo she was struck with the neglected state of the little Moslem girls she saw around her. At this time no attempt had ever been made in behalf of Moslems in Egypt, and even education for women among the nominal Christians was at the lowest ebb.

In spite of innumerable difficulties and discouragements, she resolved on opening a small school for girls in the house in which she was living, and with the help of a respectable Syrian Christian woman, who knew about as much English as her employer then did of Arabic (which of course was the Syrian teachers' native tongue), she succeeded in gathering a few little girls round her and teaching them the rudiments of reading in their own tongue, sewing, and some knowledge of the Scriptures.

[p.405]

About two years later she was enabled to fix her residence permanently in Cairo—her own home being broken up; and with the help of two excellent and highly-gifted Syrian missionaries (the brothers Mansoor and Joseph Shakoor) she was able to add a boys' school to the one established for girls.

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In 1869 the Khedive made her the grant of land on which she built the mission house described in the present sketch, and ten years later a Medical Mission was added to the work, which has done untold good to body and soul, to multitudes of the sick poor.

From a Photograph by J. Jeanneret, Montreux

The following picture of her work from the pen of a relative who visited her about three years ago, may interest readers who have mission work at heart.

How suddenly her career was cut short, most of those readers know. Her exertions on her last Nile excursion, made when she was suffering from an accidental cold, and not equal to the fatigue she imposed on herself, laid the seeds of the illness which carried her off in a few days.

The worker has been called hence, but the work will not die. Her sister and the devoted friend and fellow-helper alluded to in the sketch (Mrs. Shakoor, the widow of her first missionary associate, Mansoor Shakoor) are endeavouring to carry on the same aims,—Mrs. Shakoor residing on the spot, and continuing the work as she had done jointly with her friend for many years.

The following description speaks for itself: It was a bright evening in the end of October, about three years ago, when two wearied travellers arrived at the Mission House in Cairo. For many years one of our most fond wishes had been to see the work of one whom we had known and loved all our lives, and at last here we were. The setting sun was crimsoning all the surroundings, tinging the yellow sands of the not very distant desert with pink; gilding the distant domes and towers, and the flat roofs of the brilliantly white houses.

On the steps of the house Miss M. L. Whately was waiting to receive us; her face beaming with smiles of welcome. We were brought up the wide stone staircase that led to our spacious rooms, whose balconies overlooked the garden, and there refreshed with the ever-welcome cup of tea which never comes amiss to English travellers in whatever clime they find themselves, and is especially welcome after the dust and heat of the day.

The large dwelling-house of Miss Whately was only divided from her school buildings and medical mission by a garden—which at the time of which we speak was glowing with flowers; the beautiful “consul's daughter,” whose red blossoms mingled gloriously with the deep violet creeper that covered the summer-house and wails of the house—a small grove of plantain trees near giving the background of green that so refreshes the eye.

This site of ground had been given her many years ago by the Khedive; and was specially suitable to the purpose, being out of the town, and with a view of the distant desert from some of the windows.

[p.406]

With the earliest dawn Miss Whately was about her daily vocations; she loved to see the sun rise from the balcony in her room, and often said it was the only quiet time she could secure in the day for her private reading. After early breakfast her work of greatest interest began, namely, reading the Bible and talking to the poor women who came to be doctored by her admirable medical missionary, Dr. Azoury.

It was a sight not to be forgotten; and one feels it a privilege to have been present on some of these occasions. There she sat on a low chair surrounded by women and children. Some of these young mothers were scarcely more than children themselves—looking as if they should be playing with dolls instead of having to mind the big brown black-eyed babies that lay in their laps. It was intensely interesting to note the expression of the different faces. Some countenances looking worn and sad with hard life and ill-treatment, would light up as they drank in the message given them by their “Sitt Mariam,” as they always called her; and her bright smile and earnest words made them grasp the reality of the good message of salvation. She taught the despised wife, down-trodden by the wretched social laws of her country, that hard as her lot was there was One who could sympathise with her. As she spoke of His love, who had wept over the sorrows of His people while on earth, many a dull eye would swim with tears, and the look of hard despair change to a softer expression. It needed the real missionary spirit with which this worker was endued, to sit thus in the midst of disease and filth; no look of repugnance crossing her face. She followed in her Master's footsteps in seeking the good of the soul as well as the body.

In any difficult case “Sitt Mariam” would take her place in the surgery ready with a kind word, and practical assistance. The writer well remembers on one occasion when an operation had to be performed on the eyes of a dirty old Egyptian-woman, Miss Whately stood by the patient as she lay on the surgical table, holding her hand, and patting her shoulder, while she spoke encouraging and cheering words to her: such as “Don't fear, my sister. Trust in God; it will soon be over.” This was only one of the many cases of the sort in which she ministered by her presence to the patient. Can it be wondered that she was loved, and that on the day of her death the cries and laments of those to whom she had been as “a mother in Israel” were piteous to hear?

This medical mission in which she took such interest, and for the maintenance of which she had made such efforts, was undoubtedly one of the most important departments of her work. The medical missionary, Dr. Azoury, a most earnest Christian man as well as an efficient doctor, had always a “word in season” for his poor patients. Many came from villages great distances oft to see him. From among the many interesting cases connected with this department of the work, one incident may be given.

A young woman came one day to Miss Whately weeping bitterly; she was one of the wives of a sheik of a village some miles away, and her eyes were diseased, in fact she was almost blind. Her husband told her that she was no longer of any use to him, and he should divorce her. She was in

a pitiable state of distress, and, while waiting for admittance to the doctor (for there were always crowds of men and women waiting, the men in a separate room where a Scripture reader read and talked to them),—the “Sitt” told her of One who could cure the soul as well as the body, and went about doing good while on earth. The doctor, by God's help, was able to cure the poor young wife completely. She returned to her village in deepest thankfulness, and was taken back into favour by her lord and master.

Some time afterwards she returned again, this time bringing a tall turbaned man with her, who proved to be her husband; he was the sufferer this time, and the good and forgiving wife had persuaded him to come and see the doctor to whom she owed so much. After some time the man was cured, and during his bodily treatment we may be sure that his soul was not forgotten. He showed his gratitude for what had been done for him, by sending many from his village to the Medical Mission; so that the seed was sown broadcast. Whether he was properly grateful to the wife who had “heaped coals of fire on his head” is not known; but if the gospel message had indeed penetrated his heart, we must believe that it would have changed him in this respect also.

The female school was especially interesting to us, knowing as we did the extreme difficulty of getting at the Eastern girls. The boys’ school is full of interest as well, and the education they there receive has been of benefit to them in many ways, as has been fully proved by the excellent appointments obtained by those who have passed through these schools.

Education cannot be carried on so satisfactorily among the girls, who are taken away often before they are in their teens, to be married. Two-thirds of the girls are Moslem, and it is well known how difficult it is to do anything among the Mohamedans, with the views they have about women, and looking on the education of girls as utterly useless and even injurious.

One was forcibly reminded of a flower garden as one entered the girls' school and saw the brightly-at tired children, with their gay cotton dresses, their faces mostly very dark, with large handsome eyes, and delicately-formed limbs. It was pretty to see them stand up, to repeat the verses they had learnt in the Bible, and sing their Arabic hymns in the language, which, though incomprehensible to us, sounded very rich and soft. Though the time these girls remain in the schools is often very brief, the seed sown has brought forth fruit in several cases, as may be seen in some of Miss Whately's accounts of her work.

Perhaps of all this mission work, the most interesting feature was supplied by her missionary efforts in the Nile villages. It seems but yesterday that we had the pleasure and privilege of accompanying her on one of these trips.

It was early spring at that time, and everything exquisitely green—the feathery palms, the verdure

[p.407]

of emerald hue, and the mud huts making a picturesque contrast to the general surroundings.

Memory carries one back to those bright days, and we see her as she then was in her full vigour, seated on the ground surrounded by a motley group of women and children, whose attention she had succeeded in riveting. She would at first be constantly interrupted by questions irrelevant to

the subjects in hand, such as the price of her dress, the ages and conditions of those who accompanied her, etc., but she had the happy faculty of never being put out by such childish questions, and would persevere till she had subdued them in to listening. She had the gift in work of this kind of knowing how to adapt her explanations to her hearers, giving bright, lively illustrations and anecdotes, speaking to these grown men and women as she would to children. On these occasions she was often accompanied by Dr. Azoury (her medical missionary), and her invaluable helper, Mrs. Shakoor.

In the last mission trip of this sort she was alone with her sister; much blessed work was done, and then she came back to die. In the midst of her active work for her Master, she was suddenly called to come “up higher.” Instead of those blue Nile waters which she so dearly loved, she is now beside the crystal waters of the River of Life; instead of the waving palms and glittering domes of her adopted city that she delighted to watch from her window, she now views the glories of the Celestial City.

In a moment, almost without warning, the summons came. She had been ill for some days, but no one thought there was real danger until just at the last those near her saw a sudden change. She was told, “You are going to Jesus;” and a radiant look was her only answer as her happy spirit broke its earthly fetters.

That unselfish and self-denying worker has heard the words, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”
