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Letter from July 15, 1891 - transcript

Lavinia Coombs

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Balasore

July 15 1891

Dear Nellie

I think I have never left one of your letters so long in answering for it is now five months since I received your last which was sent Jan. 4th and received Feb 12th and right here I will say it was rather wonderful that I got it at all for the envelope was open on three sides and just a bit hanging on the forth so why the letter didn't fall out entirely I don't know. However, it did not and I was glad enough to get it. You wrote in the midst of the changing about of pastors and I was very glad for Boston that they had so soon found such a good man as Mr. Lowden; tho' what Portland was to do was another side of the question, but I think you too have been fortunate in getting Mr. Cole according to what I have heard of him in other places, but I haven't heard what they did at Lowell where he left, and whether the circle started by the rascal Marshall has reached the shore yet or is still widening on and on. Perhaps he had better adopt the Methodist rule at once and remain prepared for continual changes but it surely does not seem to me the better way. I think it so good to have a pastor grow old with his people. Isn't it rather strange that Mr. Penny has got back to his first pastorate. You spoke of joining the Church there by letter. I brot my church letter to India when I came & joined the Midnapore church at once and now I've taken a letter from there and joined here in Balasore. I like to belong to the church where I'm stopping if I'm likely to stay any length of time. My stopping in Balasore however is an uncertain quantity. Mrs. Smith has gone normally for eighteen months but she is old and feeble and her stay is very uncertain it seems to me. I know she wants to come back and I think she would rather be here and be buried by her husband. If she comes back I don't believe she will ever live alone again. Possibly some one may come out with her or I may stay on here with her. There are thirty girls in the Orphanage but some of them are quite old-that is seventeen, eighteen, and nineteen years old. At that age it requires constant watching and care to keep them in the paths of rectitude, and sometimes the care seems more than I can endure. I am helped to cast my burdens on the Lord and if it were not for this I think I should drop all and run away. An elderly person like Mrs. Smith does have more authority in her very appearance and I'm sure it cannot be so hard for her to discipline them. This is all such new work to me! The caring for their health, their clothes, their manners, their souls is like becoming a mother to this great family all at once and my work is right in this one spot while all the years I've been here in India up to this time I've been going here and there-to Zenanas, to schools, to villages and outside churches and so forth. I've often thought I was spread out over too much, and now I find it rather hard to draw myself together and concentrate on this one spot. However I know its' all right and I only hope I may do it satisfactorily. Beside the Orphanage there is a school in our yard for Christian girls. Of course all the girls of the Orphanage go there, and besides these the girls, large and small, from the Christian villages so that the school roll has seventy or seventy-five names. I do not teach in this-there are three native teachers-but I have the sewing classes. That is-different classes come and sit by me and sew or learn to sew a certain part of their school hours so that some class is by me from ½ past 11 till 4 o'clock. Some of them sew beautifully. I have a Bible class in the Chapel in the village each Monday morning with the Bible women and zenana teachers & c. and I take the lead of the Women's prayer meeting on Wednesday morning. I have prayers and talks with the girls of the Orphanage every morning at nine o'clock and immediately after that prayers with the men

servants or those working on the place. I have a class of young men in the Sabbath School, and have been chosen one of the Church Committee which meets one evening of each month so that although I cannot go out among the heathen as I could formerly I have abundant chances for work among the Church members. The only chance I get at a heathen is at the servant prayers. The two men who work the garden are heathen and a mason who is building a wall on the place. This is very different from what I should have planned but I know there is great need of work among our nominal Christians and I accept the work given me for 'twas none of my seeking and I must acknowledge the Master's hand. The Star for June 18th is just in and I see Mr. Stacy has written a bit about Mr. Boyer. Dear good man he was! and the taking him away is one of the inexplicable things that do come now and then. Nobody can fill his place and he was needed so much. Strange, strange providence! And yet, we must acknowledge God knows best and we know "He doeth all things well." I shall never forget those nine days in which we all fought that fever and did our best to hold him here but it was no use. Poor man! His delirium was pitiful for the last two or three days, and he passed away without being able to say one word of comfort to his poor stricken wife. She was crushed indeed though submissive, and though she now goes on with the work in her care and has bravely determined to stay on and work 'till her children must be taken home, yet the joy has gone out of her life and she looks so old and worn. They were most devoted to each other and it is like taking half of her being right away.

Mr. & Mrs. Ager have come from Bhndruck to stay here temporarily at least and he is looking after repairs and pushing them on, on the house bot for the High School and in which they now live. The school was to have begun July 1st but now it must be indefinitely postponed for there is absolutely no one to begin such work. The Boyers had moved into that house in the Spring and he had been superintending the repairs. Mrs. Boyer and the children spent the month of May at Chandipore by the sea and he used to go down for a day or two as he could get a chance. I took all my girls down the third week in May and he was there nearly all that week but he did look miserable and we all remarked it and he would lie down a great deal. The next week he was at home all the time working hard and when his family came home at the end of that week he had just come down with fever and it never left him. I think it must have been in his system for days before. Dr. Griffin was here then to help in the care of him but he had to leave immediately after Mr. B.'s death to go to his wife in the Hills (the Himalayas). She and the children went the last of February and we had hoped she would begin to pick up at once but she did not. but rather grew more weak and nervous until at last the Dr. there pronounced it nervous prostration and said he could prescribe but one certain remedy and that was a voyage to America around the Cape but if she could have absolute rest where she was and her husband could come and stay with her and take care of the family she might be able to resume her work by next cold season.

Mr. Griffin went to her but had only been there two or three days when their little boy fell and broke his arm in two places and then shortly after that they were all down with La Grippe and they were having a woeful time indeed. The last letter from them received yesterday said they had all recovered to a certain degree but had bad coughs. The little boy's general health was good but the arm would probably always be stiff. 'Twas broken at the elbow and just above.

Now to complete this doleful letter I'll say that the rains are holding off and we have had almost none as yet and threatenings of famine are heard from many directions and besides this swarms and swarms of locusts are devastating the country in various places. A swarm passed over the house the other day but did not settle.

Mr. & Mrs. Hallam were here on their way to and from Quarterly Meeting and stopped with us

**both ways. They were detained some days on their return because of the great number of pilgrims just going to Poonce to the great Jagasnalte festival & the boat was unduly crowded. Miss Hooper lives with me and is much pleasanter than living alone.
With love to you and Rebecca from**

Vina Coombs