



LMS LADY MEDICAL MISSIONARIES AND THEIR SERVICES IN SOUTH TRAVANCORE



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ABSTRACT

The Lady Missionaries of the L.M.S. rendered yeoman service in the medical field also. Dr. Archbald Ramsay was the first missionary to do medical work at Nagercoil in 1838. As the Medical Mission grew under Dr. Leitch, Dr. Low, Dr. Fry and Dr. Thomson, the need for the services of lady medical missionaries were keenly felt. Further, the doctors found it difficult to take care of the patients without the help of trained nurses. As the natives considered nursing as a mean and disgraceful

profession none preferred to take up the work. Hence efforts were made to bring in trained nurses and dressers from Europe. As a result, the Neyyoor Medical Mission came to be developed chiefly by European doctors and nurses.

KEYWORDS

Neyyoor Medical Mission, Lady Missionaries, South Travancore, LMS, Mrs. Jessie Thomson, Mrs. Annie Fry, Miss M.E. MacDonnell, Mrs. Charles Pease, Miss Edith Annie Hacker, Mrs. Somervell, Miss Wilson Greene, Miss Dorathy Joan Thomson.

RESEARCH PAPER

Mrs. Jessie Thomson

In the building up the Neyyoor Medical Mission, the wives of the missionary doctors played a significant role. With the arrival of Dr. Thomson at Neyyoor in 1872, a new page opened in the history of Neyyoor Medical Mission. In 1872 severe cholera broke out and the epidemic spread all over South Travancore. At that time Mrs. Jessie Thomson took a keen interest in consoling the affected people of Thalakulam, Eraniel, Colachel, Tharavilai, Thuckalay, and around Neyyoor. They selected Thevai and Paripooranam for being trained in midwifery. Besides being engaged in medical work Thevai and Paripooranam preached the gospel to the patients and comforted those in death bed. During her useful services, Mrs. Thomson passed away in 1876.¹

Mrs. Annie Sargood Fry

Mr. Sargood Fry and Mrs. Fry arrived at Nagercoil on 11th February 1886 and took charge of the Medical Mission. Dr. Fry was treating lepers in the Neyyoor Hospital along with other patients. As he felt the need for a separate hospital for the lepers, great effort was made to establish a Leper hospital. Mrs. Annie Fry took efforts to establish an orphanage for the children of lepers. For this, she collected money from her friends abroad and the Medical Mission and it was completed in 1890. The orphanage thus established became an asylum for the children of lepers. After seven years of fruitful service, Dr. Fry and Mrs. Fry left India and joined the Edinburgh Mission.²

Miss MacDonnell, the Nursing Superintendent

In the year 1892 Miss M.E. MacDonnell took charge as the first Nursing Superintendent of the Neyyoor Hospital. She was also placed in charge of the orphanage which was continuously supported by Mrs. Charles Pease of England. Miss MacDonnell started a training class for the nurses in 1893. Miss MacDonnell trained them in all directions with the assistance of Dr. Fells and Mrs. Jessie Fells. Miss MacDonnell helped to build a maternity ward and home for nurses in 1895. She rendered very valuable service and went furlough in 1899. She also preached the gospel to leprosy patients once a week. Her departure in 1911 was a heavy loss to the Neyyoor Hospital Mission.³

Miss Greene Wilson

During the absence of Miss MacDonnell, Miss Wilson Greene rendered valuable services to the South Travancore Medical Mission from 1902-1906. She organized the nurses' section and gave nurses practical training. Because of her ill health, she resigned and left Neyyoor in 1906.⁴

Mrs. Somervell

After the arrival of Dr. Somervell, The Neyyoor Medical Mission entered into the period of rapid growth. While Dr. Somervell developed the Neyyoor Hospital, Mrs. Somervell preached the gospel to the lepers once in a week. On the advice of her mother Lady Hope Simpson and Miss Blanchard, she applied for permission to the 48th Building Committee. With the help, Mrs. Somervell reopened the orphanage on 20th January 1932. From 1932 to 1960 Mrs. Somervell was assisted by a matron called Yesuadial Arumainayagam.⁵

Miss Edith Annie Hacker

After Miss Furgussan's departure, Miss Edith Annie Hacker took charge of the nursing section in 1926. She started a nursing class for the boys for the first time. She was responsible for the establishment of a training school for the nurses and dressers and midwives. In the selection of nurses, Annie Hacker gave preference to the widows.⁶

Miss Edith Florence Mills

In 1926 Miss. Edith Florence Mills joined the Medical Mission as a staff nurse. Miss Mills steered the nursing department with remarkable efficiency for about 20 years. Besides giving training to the nurses she preached the Gospel among the Christians and non-Christians. She taught the patients about cleanliness. Whenever she visited the inpatients she cheered them by singing good songs.⁷

Miss Eileen Alice Pidcock

After Miss Mills, Miss Eileen Alice Pidcock came to South Travancore. She also organized a new section of native nurses, for both men and ladies. Instructions were given in Tamil for the first time. Examinations for the trainees were regularly conducted. It is noteworthy that the candidates trained by her secured jobs in the government also. In 1930, Miss Mills rejoined the Neyyoor Hospital after serving in branch hospitals. Henceforth Miss Mills and Pidcock worked for hands in hand to improve the Medical Mission.⁸

Miss Gwyneth Ida Lawrence

From 1928 onwards Miss Lawrence acted as a full-time Nursing Superintendent. She also continued to give training to the nurses of both sexes serving in the branch hospitals like

Colachel, Kulasekaram, Kottarakarai, Nedunkulam, Agasteeswaram, and Marthandam. She opened a reading room in the hospital for the benefits of the patients. She preached the gospel during her spare time.⁹

Miss Riggs

In 1932 Miss Riggs joined the Medical Mission as the Nursing Superintendent. With her rich experience in the London Hospital, she could train the Indian nurses in various branches. Because of her devoted and loyal service in the hospital, she became very popular in Neyyoor.¹⁰ She introduced the system of washing every patient daily contrary to the Indian custom of not washing anyone during illness. Miss Riggs instructed the nurses to wash every patient daily. Miss Riggs applied modern methods in the management of the hospital in Neyyoor. Further, she started a Bible class for the nurses in which lessons from the Bible were discussed. Miss Audrey Fletcher retired from her service in 1988.¹¹

Miss Dorothy Thomson and Miss Duan

From 1936 to 1950 Miss Dorothy Joan Thomson, a highly qualified English woman, came out as a doctor in Neyyoor Hospital. She worked as a medical superintendent. Along with her, Miss Duan was appointed as a nurse for a period of 4 years. These lady medical missionaries spared no pains to improve the quality of the medical work of the mission.¹²

Conclusion

It may be noted that the success of the Neyyoor Medical Mission under the direction of the missionary doctors was largely due to the very skillful nursing assistance offered by the missionary ladies like Miss. MacDonnell and the cooperation extended to the missionaries by their life partners. The lady missionaries of the L.M.S. made great sacrifices. Living in a country away from their homeland, they worked hard for the promotion of the welfare of the poor downtrodden people supposed to be the low castes. Many of them suffered ill health due to the climatic conditions to which they were not used. Many died young and even honoured not. But their services to people will be remembered forever.

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