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Lavinia Coombs Papers

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Biographical sketch

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Lavinia C. Coombs

Miss Coombs had been living alone in the large house known as "The Bachelor House." The house had been secured to the mission many years before by Dr. Bachelor, hence its name. She came over at once after her *chota hazaire* (little breakfast) to see us. She came to give us a hearty welcome. In fact, whatever she did was done heartily. She was no ordinary woman. In fact she was no ordinary missionary, and that is saying a good deal. Civilization owes a great debt to missionaries. Miss Coombs came of a seafaring stock. Her father was Capt. Daniel Coombs and she had two brothers who were lost at sea. Her nephew was captain of the sailing vessel, "puritan," and was in Calcutta about the time we were coming home the first time. In fact, he brought home some of our heavy things as part of his cargo. He was very anxious that we should also come with him but we thought such a long voyage would be too tedious and declined. He made that voyage all right and landed our goods but the next was his last. His ship was never heard from again. I fancy her people were also of Puritan stock. No one would ever think of approaching her with any proposition which was not one hundred percent morally upright, no evasion, no subterfuges, no deception. Everything must be clean and above board and all perfectly all right. If she had a weakness, it was in not being able to see things from the standpoint of the offending people, having a charity which covered a multitude of sins. And yet there was no one more ready to forgive and forget when she saw any evidence of penitence for the wrong done.

Her laugh was hearty and contagious and her singing joyous and inspiring. She was really the spiritual center of almost any religious gathering. She took a deep interest in all the affairs of the church and Christian community, in fact with the work of the mission everywhere. She often exposed herself to hardship, privation and real suffering to attend quarterly meetings of the district in little out-of-the-way churches.

She was a member of our household for nearly four years so I think we can say that we knew her very well and the more one became acquainted the more one saw her real worth.

She was most generous with her means. Very often at the end of the quarter she would find herself out of funds. She was most frugal with her own expenses but simply could not see a case of real need without helping. One time when she was out of money I said to her, "Miss Coombs, whatever will become of you when you are old? You will die in the poor house!" She thought perhaps sometime she would get enough together to secure a place in some old lady's home. She was one who was ever ready to accept work wherever she was most needed. If in Midnapore, her first station, that would suit her well; but if called to Balasore or wherever needed it was all the same. If schools needed her or the orphanage, or widow's home or zenana work she said with one of old, "Here I am; send me."

She made eight trips halfway around the world, but none of her furloughs were of long duration and they usually filled with work among the churches.

She was born in West Bowdoin, Maine, Nov. 23, 1849. She attended Litchfield Academy and the Normal School at Farmington and taught school for ten years before going to India.

She was the editor of the little missionary magazine, "Tidings," and also its financial backer. The dream of an old ladies' home which she frequently spoke of jokingly became a reality. The Old Ladies' Home was her own home given to her by a friend, and the Society very justly supplied her simple needs. In this home resided Miss Jeanette Coombs and Miss Luella Williams,

nieces, who cared for her as tenderly as if she had been their own mother. Her last illness was not of long duration. Pneumonia set in following a hard cold and on Jan. 13, 1927, she finished her earthly career. Her funeral was on a day when one of the blizzards of Maine swept the country, but the kind and thoughtful neighbors kept the roads passable. Dr. Geo. Hanlen, a coworker in India, conducted the service, paying a fitting tribute to one who had given her life to a cause.

**"They made her a grave too cold and damp
For a soul so warm and true."**

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