

RANAVALONA II., QUEEN OF MADAGASCAR.

By ABRAHAM KINGDON

(Late Missionary Printer at Antananarivo).



ON the 16th of August, 1861, the dark days of bitter persecution in Madagascar came to an end, for it was on that day Queen Ranavalona I. passed away. This "Bloody Mary of Madagascar" was succeeded by her son, Prince Rokoto, under the designation of Radama II.

As soon as the young Prince had been made King, he at once ordered the captive Christians to be set free; and a proclamation was sent forth declaring liberty of conscience and freedom of worship.

Nor did this edict in favour of liberty affect only those in the capital and the neighbourhood, but messengers hastened to the distant hotbeds of terrible fever, to which many had been banished. Then light flashed upon what had seemed to the weary prisoners to be nothing but "the valley of the shadow of death;" and as they were released from their heavy, murderous chains, many a heart-load of trouble and anxiety must have rolled away. With what delight these long-lost ones sped home! and when the city of their desire was reached they did not forsake the assembling of themselves together for mutual edification and for the purpose of spreading a knowledge of Him in whom they had not trusted in vain.

The young King, whose career opened so auspiciously, soon fell into bad ways, leading a fearfully immoral life; and in the latter part of his star-shoot reign he allowed his better judgment to be perverted by evil companions, idol-keepers, diviners, and French intriguers; the result being that in April, 1863, he was strangled, and his consort (whose name was Rabodo) was made Queen under the name of Rasoharina. But before her election the Prime Minister and other members of the Government draw up a general outline of the policy to be pursued, which she signed.

The document guaranteed the full protection of the Government to all foreigners who obeyed the laws of the country, the maintenance of friendly relations with foreign governments; and, above all, protection and liberty to worship and to teach and promote Christianity was secured both to natives and to Europeans. With the death of Radama II. absolute monarchy was swept away, and with the reign of Rasoharina commenced a very moderate form of constitutional government; and though Rasoharina was an idolater yet she ruled in a merciful and impartial manner.

Our beloved Queen Victoria sent a message to Queen Rasoharina, asking her to forbid the persecution of the Christians, and it was thought that she was thereby very largely influenced.

Queen Rasoharina died (or *niamboho*—"turned her back," as the Malagasy say) on April 1st, 1868, and her corpse was placed in a silver coffin, for which 22,000 dollars had been melted down.

Rasoharina was succeeded by Ramoma, under the title of Ranavalona II., and her accession was hailed with delight, for around her centred the hopes and aspirations of a people bent upon progress in those things which tend to real and solid prosperity, and I think that when my brief story of this wonderful queen has been told, the readers of THE

GIRL'S OWN PAPER will agree that she has justly won the patriotic love of her people and the admiration of Christendom.

When Rasoharina was alive the Prime Minister had placed in the Queen's residence a Bible, which was frequently used by the people about the Court who could read. When, however, Rasoharina lay in state, the present Queen was a mourner, and to pass away the time she read portions from the Bible, and it was what she then read that first led her to pray.

On Sunday, the 25th of October, 1868, the Queen and Prime Minister and a few others met for worship in a room in the palace, and at the close three of the principal officers were sent for and informed by the Queen that she intended to pray to God. Though they said, "That is good," yet they looked sorrowful. In the evening they met again for worship, and also on the following Sunday. Then commenced the stoppage of the great Sunday market; and now in Antananarivo and the neighbourhood the Sunday is more observed as a day of rest than it is in any city of its size in Great Britain.

At her coronation, Ranavalona was not ashamed to acknowledge that she was a Christian, for from the gorgeous canopy where her throne was set there were these inscriptions in bold letters:—

"Glory to God," "Peace on earth," "Good will toward men," and "God be with us."

At the Queen's right was a small table, on which had been placed a richly-bound Malagasy Bible.

This was the first coronation which had been characterised by the absence of idols, charms, and other paraphernalia of heathendom. It was this public action of the Queen which brought about a crisis; for soon after the coronation ceremony the priests and diviners of the idol called Kelimalaza ("little yet renowned") approached the Queen, telling her that they intended changing horns (an idolatrous custom performed when a new sovereign came to the throne). But her Majesty sent out a message, saying, "I will burn all the idols belonging to my ancestors; but as to yours, that is your business."

It has been commonly supposed that the Queen ordered the universal destruction of idols, but such is not the case, for the people voluntarily turned away from idolatry. The Queen, Prime Minister, and many of the officers had become Christians, and they could not, therefore, commit their consciences to the care of those whose chief aim it had been to stir up the bitter hatred and persecution which characterised the reign of Ranavalona I.

Then, too, it must be borne in mind that associated with idolatry was the *tangena*, or poison ordeal, which has been the means of slaughtering countless thousands of innocents! Another part of this system of idolatry was the belief in lucky and unlucky days, and all children born on unlucky days were killed, or evil might be averted by placing the child at the entrance to a cattle-pen, through which the bullocks were made to rush, and if the little one escaped being crushed it was supposed that evil had thus been averted.

It was these and other hateful things which the Queen had determined to uproot, and public opinion had been so ripened by the leaven of Christianity that the change was made without any fear of revolution.

To the kindly intelligent nature of a woman like Queen Ranavalona II. the dark visions of the past must have been very touching. There was that fearful Rock of Hurling, with the huge *cacti* and their terrible spikes; there were the serrated and jagged iron-like granite rocks, and at the base a great accumulation of vile filth, and down this awe-

inspiring place the "faithful unto death" had been hurled headlong. Then there was that spur of the hill at Faravohitra (the northern suburb of the capital), where four of noble birth bravely bore a horrid death by burning. There too were those gulleys and dirty ditches, where the innocent, after being cruelly bound, had been left as provision for the wild dogs which abounded in that neighbourhood. Think of the curs feasting upon Christian outcasts! There were those dark caverns and forest thickets, the compulsory abodes of many who with riven hearts had been driven from home and dear ones. There were those terrible hotbeds of pestilential malaria, to which many members of powerful families had been consigned—all these and many other troubles had been the bitter fruit of idolatry; but now God had raised up a good woman brave enough to dry up in her benevolence the gall-springs of animosity and strife.

Eighteen months after Ranavalona came to the throne, she and her husband the Prime Minister were baptized. Then was more decided action taken with regard to the austere idol-keepers, for they were no longer to be considered as entitled to the privileges which they had through deceit procured, but they were deposed and placed in the position of common subjects. Hitherto they had been counted as nobles, and had been free from Government service. The lines which had "fallen to them in pleasant places" and "the goodly heritage" were taken from them.

From that time to the present the Queen has been unwavering in her fidelity to the good of her subjects.

In her private life, too, the true spirit of Christianity is evinced. Family worship is conducted morning and evening, and within the palace there is an influential Christian Church from which many evangelists and teachers have been sent forth to the dark and the ignorant. One of the most generous supporters of the native missionary society is the Queen of Madagascar.

Where Queen Ranavalona I. sent fire and sword and took captives, Ranavalona II. sends teachers and books.

The Queen is particularly anxious that all her people should be educated; and at her own expense a large number of the more intelligent lads are sent to the capital to be trained, most of them returning to their native villages as teachers, or pastors, or Government employés.

"But what about the girls?" you will ask. Well, most of the schools are mixed, and the girl scholars are very numerous, though one must frankly regret that more is not done for the girls. That difficulty may be got over when some of the vast number of well-to-do British ladies who have no great object in life are prepared to go out to teach. Now there is compulsory education in the central province of Imerina, and the girls, as well as boys, are obliged to learn. There are in the various Christian schools something like 130,000 scholars.

In those schools the Queen takes a deep personal interest, and on several occasions she has distributed prizes to diligent and successful scholars. Only a short time since, after she had distributed prizes at Ambohimanga,* she went out to make the children happy in their games, so that even the little children are unconsciously drawn to love their Queen.

Then, too, she is greatly interested in medical work; and by means of her hospital and dispensary a great deal of good is done, and her sympathy with the sick and suffering is constantly shown.

The reign of Ranavalona II. has been

* It was at this ancient capital that Ranavalona I. confiscated Christianity, but here Ranavalona II. gathers her people to pray.

characterised by radical changes in the laws by which her subjects are governed, and they all show a progress in that righteousness which alone can exalt a nation.

The reforms made have necessitated the sweeping away of many vested interests, and the general ready acquiescence of those affected is a proof of the widespread influence of Christianity.

In Madagascar it was the common custom of the officers to appropriate to themselves the services of those below them in rank. Some of the officers had as many as one thousand *aides-de-camp*. This, the Queen saw, hindered progress, for the more capable a man became the more gratuitous service he was compelled to render. Now the highest officer in the land cannot retain more than thirty. In military matters the Queen has made most remarkable changes. In Madagascar, if a man was made a soldier he was a soldier for life, and in the days of Ranavalona I. a conscription was made, when every lad who could carry a gun was taken as a soldier, and men with wives and families were ruthlessly banished to distant military stations, there to spend the remainder of their days. So oppressive had service in the army become that it was quite a common thing for a man to incapacitate himself for military service by cutting off one hand. But the present Queen has disarmed the poor decrepit old men who were formerly seen struggling along under the heavy burden of an old flintlock. Now no soldier can be retained for more than five years, and a residence of twelve months only is required at a distant station.

Formerly men had to come a distance of forty or sixty miles in order to do a day's drill, but that evil has been abolished.

In 1873 two expeditions were sent out to settle matters with some turbulent tribes to the south-east, but before the soldiers left the capital the Queen sent a message, warning them not to resort to their old practices, but to remember that they were Christians in the service of a Christian ruler, and she requested that the leaders would, if possible, settle their disputes without bloodshed.

These instructions were more than complied with, for there was no violence or robbery, and the enemy's sick were even cared for, and the son of a petty king brought back to the capital, where, for a time, he was under Christian instruction.

This policy is so opposite to that pursued by the Malagasy in former wars that it had a wonderful effect upon some of the outlying tribes, for in former wars prisoners were either killed, mutilated, or made slaves. All honour then to the good Queen who mitigated the horrors of war—which should always be the last resource for settling disputes.

The Queen has also taken the right steps to prevent the judges from being bribed, for it was well known that only the wealthy could succeed in obtaining a favourable verdict, the poor and needy often being crushed by the unjust decisions of judges, or ruined because they had borrowed money at high rates of interest wherewith to bribe the judges. The power of the judges has been very wisely transferred to a number of men far too numerous to be bribed.

The slave question has been dealt with by Her Majesty. According to the treaty it was illegal for Malagasy subjects to purchase any new Mozambique slaves. Yet in contradiction to the terms of the treaty no less a man than the Queen's Foreign Secretary was very largely mixed up in the wicked work of importing Mozambiques. A lay missionary discovered seventeen new Mozambiques within gunshot of the palace, and this placed the Queen in such an undesirable position with the British Government that on the 27th June, 1877, all the Mozambiques in Hova dominions

were set free, the number being computed at not fewer than 50,000.

When these Mozambiques were freed their former masters were not allowed suddenly to cast them adrift, but were bound to provide them with food and lodging for a reasonable time. Domestic slavery, however, still exists, but the Queen has done much to ameliorate the condition of the slaves.

It is now illegal for a young child to be separated from its parents, and slaves cannot be sent from one province to another. Recently Her Majesty has forbidden the sale of slaves in public markets, and the business of a slave-dealer has become illegal.

In the suppression of the liquor traffic the Queen has been most earnest; but her good intentions are, to a large extent, nullified, notwithstanding the prohibitory laws.

Nor is the Queen regardless of the poor and needy, for her solicitude on their behalf is well known, and annually she sends to each church in the capital a considerable sum for distribution amongst the sick-poor. What the Queen has done for the women of Madagascar cannot be uninteresting to English girls.

In a country where a woman can hold the most exalted position in the realm, they are not so degraded as in some eastern countries,* but divorce being too easy and too common, the Queen caused a Divorce Court to be established. Before the establishment of that court it was only necessary for a man who wanted to get rid of his wife to give her a *lamba* (robe) with which to cover herself, to thank her, and to say "good-bye."†

It is only in the reign of the present Queen that polygamy has been made illegal.

The Queen has recently given evidence of her consideration for the brute creation by making a law against cruelty to animals. The writer well remembers when a few years ago cock-fighting was constantly carried on in the public market. One Friday he went down and took possession of a mutilated cock, fresh from a fearful contest, and forwarded it to the Prime Minister for exhibition to Her Majesty. A kind response came from His Excellency the Prime Minister, saying how much the Queen regretted that any living thing should thus suffer in her kingdom. The sincerity of her regret was evidenced on the following market-day, when a proclamation against cock-fighting was made.

Some years since a party in the capital stupidly attempted a revolution, but they failed in their attempt to upset the Government. The leaders, instead of being killed, were banished to a distant part of the island. A few years ago most of them were allowed a large amount of freedom, but at the opening of the palace church most of them were granted a free pardon. One revolutionist, who had been in hiding for several years, took advantage of the occasion and approached Her Majesty with a request for forgiveness, which she freely granted.

My space will not allow me to relate all that Queen Ranavalona II. has done for the welfare and true happiness of her people, but enough has been said to show that her reign has been characterised by that wisdom, mercy, and justice which have placed her amongst the most illustrious of queens. "God save the Queen" of Madagascar, be our prayer!

* In the Ibara province things are different, for a woman is not allowed to eat with her husband, and if by mistake she should use her husband's plate, she would have to pay a fine of two bullocks.

† The literal translation of the Malagasy word for divorce is "Thanking the wife."

VARIETIES.

THE TWELVE GEMS OF THE TWELVE MONTHS.

It is a Polish superstition that each month has a particular gem attached to it, which governs it, and is supposed to influence the destiny of persons born in that month. It is, therefore, customary among friends, and particularly among lovers, to present each other on their birthday with some trinket containing their tutelary gem, accompanied by appropriate good wishes.

JANUARY.—*Jacinth* or *Garnet* denotes constancy and fidelity in every engagement.

FEBRUARY.—*Amethyst* preserves mortals from strong passions and ensures peace of mind.

MARCH.—*Bloodstone* denotes courage and secrecy in dangerous enterprises.

APRIL.—*Sapphire* or *Diamond* denotes repentance and innocence.

MAY.—*Emerald*, excessive love.

JUNE.—*Agate* ensures long life and health.

JULY.—*Ruby* or *Carnelian* ensures the forgetfulness or cure of evils springing from friendship or love.

AUGUST.—*Sardonyx* ensures conjugal fidelity.

SEPTEMBER.—*Chrysolite* preserves from or cures folly.

OCTOBER.—*Aquamarine* or *Opal* denotes misfortune and hope.

NOVEMBER.—*Topaz* ensures fidelity and friendship.

DECEMBER.—*Turquoise* or *Malachite* denotes the most brilliant success and happiness in every circumstance of life.

LAYING PLANS FOR EVERYDAY.—Whatever your situation in life may be, lay down your plan of conduct for the day. The half hours will then glide smoothly on without crossing or jostling each other.

LUCK AND LABOUR.—A sovereign found on the roadside will not do anyone so much good as half a sovereign earned by industry.

A MODEL PUN.—One of the best puns that ever was made is that of Swift, who called after a man carrying a hare over his shoulder, "Is that your own hare or a wig?"

ADVICE GRATIS.—"Why," asked a lady of an old judge, "why cannot a woman become a successful lawyer, I'd like to know?" "Because," said the judge, "she's too fond of giving her opinion without pay."

CARRYING THE LADIES UPSTAIRS.—A Scotch lady gave her servant very particular instructions regarding visitors, explaining that they were to be shown into the drawing-room, and no doubt used the Scotticism, "Carry any ladies that call upstairs." On the arrival of the first visitors, Donald was eager to show his strict attention to his mistress's orders. Two ladies came together, and Donald, seizing one in his arms, said to the other, "Bide ye there till I come for ye," and in spite of her struggles and remonstrances, ushered the terrified visitor into his mistress's presence in this unwonted fashion.

ANSWER TO DOUBLE ACROSTIC (p. 647):—

D A V I D
E Z R A
B E L
O M R I
R A C H E L
A S S Y R I A
H A M A T H*

Deborah. Dalilah.

* The Macedonians altered the name of Hamath to Epiphania, in honour of Antiochus Epiphanes, but that name has been forgotten, and the town is now Hameth.

