

## *From the Archives: Phebe Ward Goes to the Mukti Revival- The Papers of Ernest F. Ward*

I want to add to a story I shared with you in an earlier *From the Archives*- the story of Ernest and Phebe Ward.<sup>1</sup> In the Spring issue of 2015 (Vol. 70 No. 1, pages 172-180), I shared the obscure story of the first Free Methodist missionaries to India, Ernest Ward and his wife Phebe (<https://place.asburyseminary.edu/asburyjournal/vol70/iss1/11/>). As I shared the interesting account of Phebe's description of Pandita Ramabai's Mukti Mission from her diary, I did not realize how many of the intervening years of my academic research would become involved with this material. That account made me seek to understand why the Wards were near the Mukti Mission, and also to understand the nature of Holiness missions in that area of India. The Mukti Revival of 1905 is one of the founding narratives of modern Pentecostalism, as speaking in tongues seems to have occurred at Mukti before the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles in 1907. So, I ended up exploring the early years of their mission in a longer article in Spring of 2020 (Vol. 75 No. 1, pages 88-106) <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/asburyjournal/vol75/iss1/7/>. I also explored people close to them and involved in their story, such as Albert Norton (in *Pneuma* Vol. 42 (2020), pages 5-24) and the Pentecost Bands (*Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* Vol 23 No. 22 (2020), pages 147-168). Along the way, a doctoral student at Asbury Theological Seminary took up the task of doing a dissertation on the Wards and has recently come out with a subsequent book (Shivraj K. Mahendra, *Lived Missiology: The Legacy of Ernest and Phebe Ward*, 2021). I never set out to invest so much time in promoting a small, almost "hidden" collection in the archives, but I have learned so much in the process about mission history and the Holiness Movement, and also its early connections with Pentecostalism. I thought with all of this work, I would be done with

the Wards, but recently I came across an additional addendum to their story with the Mukti Revival, and thought this might be a good place to include it, since it was a journey which started *From the Archives!*

For a quick overview of the Ward's work, they left the United States in 1880 and arrived in Bombay (Mumbai) in January of 1881. They went completely by faith without any support, but prayer support and the official recognition of the Free Methodist Church. They set up a mission (Pilgrim Faith Mission) in Ellichpur (Achalpur) and worked closely with Albert Norton in what would become the Kurku and Indian Hill Mission. Primarily they did evangelistic preaching in the local bazaars and sold tracts in an early Holiness effort to convert the people of Central India. In 1892, the Wards sold their house and left the mission field to return to the U.S on furlough, which is the first known time they reference visiting Pandita Ramabai. As they left, they also met two young women from the Pentecost Bands, one of whom was Bessie Sherman (later Ashton), who would be important in the story. By 1894, the Wards are listed among the Pentecost Bands in their work.



**An Early Image of the Ward Family Including their Daughters: Ethel, Bessie, and Louisa**

After the Wards returned to India, they started a new work in Raj Nandgaon doing similar work in evangelistic preaching and selling tracts. But a major famine in 1897 forced them in a different direction, helping to bury the dead, caring for orphans and helping to feed starving people. They were incredibly overwhelmed, and this same famine also moved Pandita Ramabai to start her Mukti Mission bringing Albert Norton back to the field with her from Rochester, New York. The Pentecost Bands sent a group of workers out to start a work in India, and this group ended up joining the Wards and taking over their mission work. In September 1898, the Wards returned to the United States on a furlough as part of the Pentecost Bands. Conflict with the new leader, Frank Hotle, led the Wards to break from the Pentecost Bands in 1901, and as a result they were forced to leave the successful mission and orphanage they had created.

From December of 1901 to April of 1902 the Wards stayed with their friends Albert and Mary Norton at the Dhond (Daund) boy's orphanage which was close to Pandita Ramabai's Mukti Mission and partnered with her in numerous ways. It was at this time that Phebe Ward gave her in depth description of Ramabai's mission work quoted at length in the *From the Archives* essay in 2015. From May of 1902 until May of 1904 the Wards worked with the Vanguard Mission in Sanjan, which was part of the work of C.W. Sherman, another holiness leader (and the father of Bessie Sherman Ashton who had also broken from the Pentecost Bands by this time). In June of 1904, the Wards formally rejoined the Free Methodists and their work in Yeotmal. Their daughter Ethel, also finally broke from the Pentecost Bands at his time and joined with the Free Methodist work as well. The Wards began work in an outstation of the Free Methodist work in Wun Berar. The larger more informative diary of Phebe Ward ends at the end of 1904.

The Mukti Revival at Pandita Ramabai's Mukti Mission began in late June of 1905, and rapidly spread to other parts of India including Norton's Boy's Christian Home in Dhond and the Free Methodist Missions in Yeotmal and Wun Berar by August of 1905. It was while contemplating all of this, that another check of the archives found a small book (maybe two by three inches, which turned out to be Phebe's diary from 1905. While it lacks the detail of her earlier diary, which was much larger and had more space to write, it does cover a crucial trip she made to visit the Mukti Revival while it was in progress in its earliest days, and as such it also helps us think through the timeline of the Wards, and the possible influence of their work on the Mukti Revival.

From this diary, we can see some important information. Phebe notes her correspondence both received and sent throughout the entire year at the front and back of the diary. While most of her letters are to family, especially her daughters in school near Bombay (Bessie and Louise) and also Ethel, who sailed July 8, 1905 to go to school in America, Phebe also wrote to Mary Norton, Bessie Ashton, and other friends and connections from her time in the Pentecost Bands (Sister Tucker, Sister Whittle, Brother and Sister McCready, Brother and Sister Taylor) and Free Methodist supporters in the United States (Brother Chesbro). Importantly, she notes on March 20, 1905 that Albert Norton had sailed for the United States, so he was not present for the outbreak of the Mukti Revival, even though he was the one to introduce to Mukti Revival as an outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the speaking of tongues in volume one, number seven of *The Apostolic Faith* in 1907, the major paper of the Azusa Street Revival. When he returned from his trip to the U.S. is uncertain, but Phebe's visit precedes any experience Norton would have had of the revival. On July 4, 1905, Phebe first mentions hearing descriptions of the Welsh Revival (which began September 22, 1904) and the revival in the Khassia Hills in Northern India (which occurred in March 1904), which are often credited for influencing the following Mukti Revival. On September 4, 1905 Phebe writes, "Revival news from Shillong Presbytery is thrilling." This refers to a continuation of the Khassia Hills Revival that occurred on April 1, 1905. Wun Berar was definitely off the beaten track, so it is unclear if these were the first reports she heard or not, but they are the first time they appear in her diary. Phebe notes the next day on September 5, 1905 that, "The revival at Yeotmal is gathering momentum in its onward progress. Souls getting saved and baptized with the Holy Ghost." And again, on September 13, 1905, "Revival- good news pouring in from Yeotmal." This clearly supports the idea that the Mukti Revival of late June 1905 reached Yeotmal by August, and it was underway when Phebe heard about it in Wun Berar in early September.

Phebe Ward was a committed Holiness missionary, and she had been involved in seeking for revival in India since her earliest work in the country. Now with no children to tend and Ernest often away on preaching missions in different parts of the region, she must have been eager to see what was going on for herself. She had planned a trip to visit her younger daughters in their boarding school in Poona (Pune) and do some other errands in Bombay (Mumbai) for a while, but in her diary, she suddenly

notes on October 9, 1905, "Louisa's letter decided my starting towards Poona sooner than I had anticipated." While we don't know the contents of that letter, it encouraged Phebe to take almost a month-long trip, and she clearly made a visit to the Mukti Revival a key part of this trip. Her journal describes some of the difficulties of the journey, but also some of the people she connected with along the way.



**The Ward's First Mission Compound at Ellichpur**

Oct. 10, 1905

"Was helped in getting started so I decided to take the night passenger instead of mail so I saved 2-11-0 to Bombay. God helped to get a tonga across the Wardha river. The bullocks pulled it through though the water went over the seat. I went across on the boat."

Oct. 11, 1905

"Travelling all day. Had for a companion a native Christian whose father was formerly a Sikh and converted under Dr. Wilson.<sup>2</sup> They formerly lived in Indore and Lakshman Parshad had once wanted to marry her, but she was then too young. She had lost 4 children and her husband, 2 children died of plague. I tried to comfort her, 'Every heart knoweth its own bitterness.'"

Oct. 12, 1905

"The train reached Bombay rather late. I stayed at Mr. Cutler's and later in the day Mrs. Cutler went shopping with me."

Oct. 13, 1905

"Went shopping morn- after having a precious season of prayer together. I gave them a short Bible reading on Ezek. 16:1-22. Made a mistake and purchased a ticket to Sanjan but afterward bot one to Pardi from Sanjan. Spent the night with Sister Ashton<sup>3</sup> and Reginal. My mistake was fortunate as I left my box at Sanjan and did not have to carry it in the rain to Pardi Mission. Rained hard."

Oct. 14, 1905

"Bro. Ashton's have a neat place at Pardi.<sup>4</sup> Kalyo has been very ill but was saved from death in answer to prayer. The boys had begun to dig his grave! When he came to when they were praying for him. Came to Sanjan by afternoon train. Rejoiced to see the children. Mulji and Ganga have a fine baby."

Oct. 15, 1905

"Talked to the 3 workers. Luema<sup>5</sup>, Srs. Rodabaugh and Friesen<sup>6</sup> on Ezek. 16 at 10 AM. Also led the eve service in Hindustani on the beautiful inner temple of Solomon dwelling on the need of a golden heart for Jesus to dwell in. God blessed me all day."

Oct. 16, 1905

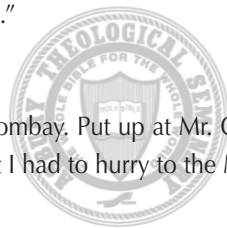
"Have a headache. Think my new glasses may have affected me. Resting quietly and writing letters."

Oct. 17, 1905

"Left on the 11 AM for Bombay. Put up at Mr. Cutler's. As there was some trouble about Ernest's suit I had to hurry to the Market to see about getting it made."

Oct. 18, 1905

"Shopping. Changed Bessie's gold watch for two good silver watches worth Rs. 35 apiece. Had our initials put on them. Had a good time at prayers





and at secret prayer. God encourages one by his presence in the rush of shopping."

Oct. 19, 1905

"Left Byculla at 10 AM and reached Poona at 4:30 PM A young ex-soldier rode with me that played the banjo well. He also had a violin but had no salvation. A bride and groom got on at Lanouli. God helped me to let His light shine through me. B & L (*Bessie and Louise Ward, Phebe's daughters*) glad to see me. Others seemed so too. Had a good talk with Mrs. Eddy<sup>7</sup> on divine things."



**Photo of Taylor High School in Poona, Where Bessie and Louisa Attended High School.**

**This is from a Scrapbook from the Ward's Collection**

Oct. 20, 1905

"Saw the children go through several drills. B & L's classes went through the wand drill. I led the prayer service AM. Fasted PM dinner and tea."

Oct. 21, 1905

"Wrote letters. Bot a few things for Bessie. Mended a little on Louisa's clothes. Heard Bessie and Minnie Smith play their duet in eve. They expect to play it at the Distribution."



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Oct. 22, 1905

"Bro. Cutler preached in M.E. Church 8 AM from Neh. 1:4 a good sermon. I taught a class in S.S. also led prayers at no. 7 Phayre Road. Talking to the girls on Luke 10:38-42. Bro. Cutler again preached in eve from Luke 15:11-21. To my mind the morn. Sermon was the best. Also attended Marathi prayers at noon."

Oct. 23, 1905

"Led prayers at Mrs. Hutchings 8 AM Went to Soonderbai Powars<sup>8</sup> at 5 PM Attended prayers with a few of the girls. Some acted quite strange. They prayed with power and a few told me of the wonderful way God had saved. Shining eyes and shining faces."

Oct. 24, 1905

"Sewed some. Have interesting talks with Mrs. Eddy. God is greatly helping her."

Oct. 25, 1905

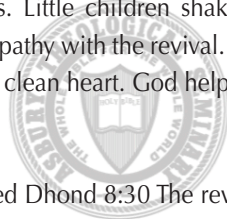
"Sewing for the girls. Held a service in the M.E. Church. Ezek. 16:6-14. Had some liberty but did not feel much inspiration from the congregation. Poor souls!"

Oct. 26, 1905

"Left Poona and arrived in Kedgaon at 8:6 Met by Mr. Gadre. The Revival has struck Mukti. Someone praying all the time. R.J. Ward<sup>9</sup> gave us a good talk at 9:30 just to the workers. I got a chance to testify twice. The evening meeting exceeded anything I ever saw in the way of demonstrations. I shall never forget the shakings. Little children shaking for hours. The English workers are in hearty sympathy with the revival. Prayer with Miss Cole until 12:30 who was seeking a clean heart. God helped her."

Oct 27, 1905

"Left Kedgaon and reached Dhond 8:30 The revival is in progress here but not as extensive as at Mukti. Led a woman's meeting at 1 and spoke in the eve. Prayer meeting."





Oct. 28, 1905

"Did not get up in time for the early prayer meeting. At 8 AM talked to the leaders and teachers in the revival of holding still under trial. Led the women's meeting at 1 PM and testified in the evening prayer meeting. The boys ask forgiveness so much for what they have done and ask the boys to (say?) they forgive them by holding up their hands. Had a burden of prayer for Pro. Luttrell who is ill."

Oct. 29, 1905

"Talked in S.S. on the lesson. Led the 3 PM service speaking from Isa. 40:3-4 and Isa 35:8 a little. Had considerable freedom. Ernest prayer at first delayed the meeting but did not hinder. Gave my Ezek 16 at family prayer at noon and was much blessed. In eve I spoke on it in Hindustani. I was free but not so blessed as in afternoon. Sr. Norton is impressed over some things. Led the children's service at 1 about Mary and Martha."

Oct. 30, 1905

"As I went to the 5 ocl. Prayer meeting Vihila was praying about the roots of sin in his heart so I knew yesterday talks was not a failure. God bless that boy! He is the leader here. After prayer Sr. N. and I went to Eben's grave. Rested. Talked to the children before leaving about sitting at Jesus feet. Left at 8:20 PM."

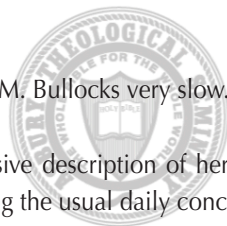
Oct. 31, 1905

"Changed at Mannar and reached Bhorawal 8 AM and Warora 11:5. Ernest met me and read me Ethel's letter from Seattle. She has reached there at last. Thank God! She saw Frank in Chicago."

Nov. 1, 1905

"Reached Wun about 4 PM. Bullocks very slow. Sarjibai is not well."

After this extensive description of her trip to the Mukti Revival, Phebe reverts to discussing the usual daily concerns of work in the mission field. It is significant that in her discussion of the Mukti Revival, Phebe does not mention any "speaking in tongues" or *glossolalia*. She does note that it exceeded any of her previous experiences in terms of "demonstrations" but her main focus seems to be on the shaking experiences of the children.



Given her past experiences with Radical Holiness revival experiences, she seems rather surprised by her encounters with the Mukti Revival. Her year ends with the arrival of another Holiness figure, William Godbey, who was on an extended world tour and who came with Bishop W. A. Sellow, one of the leaders of the Free Methodist Church. Phebe makes two references to his presence.

Dec. 25, 1905

Bro. Sellow preached AM text Luke 2:11. Vermadabai translated. Dr. Godbey came. He preached PM from the great commission, "Go ye into all the world." Bro. Sellow preached in eve from "Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus."

Dec. 26, 1905

Fasted PM. The Spirit fell on the meeting and it was turned into a prayer meeting followed by a testimony meeting instead of a preaching service by Dr. Godbey who said some good things after. He also gave us a talk on Scripture before he left on the tonga. In the eve Bro. Sellow preached from 1 Thes. 5:23.



Later Photo of the Ward Family Shortly Before Phebe's Death

What is also interesting is that William Godbey had also visited the Mukti Mission along with others missions connected with the Holiness Movement. He notes that he spent three months in India visiting various mission stations. In particular, he wrote about his experience of the Mukti Revival in a book he published in 1907.<sup>10</sup> According to his account, Ramabai asked Godbey to preach on entire sanctification. He also notes that he went to visit Ramabai with a certain degree of skepticism,

When I was preaching in India, before I had gone to Ramabai's great work which I had heard so much about, I feared they had gone into fanaticism, and that I would realize on arrival my painful duty to put my foot on some things, but the help of God endeavoring to separate the vile from the pure. When I got there and diagnosed the situation, recognized my environments, and inhaled copiously the spiritual atmosphere, asking the Holy Spirit to put me in perfect harmony with His work in that place, soon the critic's cap fell off, or rather got burnt up by the fires of the Holy Ghost. When I found my eyes flowing like rivers and my spirit melted by the celestial flame, I got like a man whose fine horse was running away with him, when, having done his utmost to check him by pulling on the bit, and seeing he was not availing anything, throwing down the lines he shouted, "Go ahead; I am going that way, too!"<sup>11</sup>

At this same time, Godbey visited Soonderbai Powar, along with a Mrs. Eddy from Ohio and Mrs. Werthein of Denver also in Poona. After leaving Poona, Godbey visited Albert and Bessie Ashton and visited their work in Sanjan and Pardi, in the same pattern as Phebe Ward.

Godbey does not date his journey in his book, which was published in 1907, but Phebe Ward's journal gives a solid date for Godbey's arrival in Yeotmal on December 25, 1905. Since Godbey notes that he spent three months in India and he still had travels to do in northern India following his visit, we can roughly place Godbey's visit to the Mukti Revival around late November or early December in 1905. This is a significant dating of one of the earliest Holiness eyewitness accounts of the Mukti Revival. However, Phebe Ward's short account places her earlier by at least a month. Albert Norton (who was absent from India during the start of the revival) first reports accounts of *glossolalia* at the Mukti Revival in a letter published in 1907.<sup>12</sup> William Godbey gives no indication of encountering "speaking in tongues," although his account clearly indicates that prior

reports made him skeptical of “fanaticism” (which he ultimately found unwarranted). However, Godbey was a temporary traveler to India and did not know the language or culture of the people spoken at the revival, so his account does not necessarily indicate the presence or absence of *glossolalia*. The same cannot be said for Phebe Ward’s account. Phebe had arrived in 1881 and spent most of her time in the same region of India. With 24 years’ experience, including time spent in the Mukti Mission before the revival and at Norton’s boy’s home in Dhond, and adding her time spent learning the local languages, it is significant that Phebe is most struck by the “shaking” of the children. She does not add *glossolalia* to the “demonstrations” she notes. It is important to remember that Phebe was a strong advocate of Holiness revivals, and sought them in her own work throughout her time in India. It is quite possible that *glossolalia* became a prominent aspect of the revival in 1906 before Norton returned from his travels, but evidence from both Phebe Ward and William Godbey seem to indicate that “speaking in tongues” was at least not a prominent part of the early outbreak of the revival.

The archives of the B.L. Fisher library are open to researchers and works to promote research in the history of Methodism and the Wesleyan-Holiness movement. Images, such as these, provide one vital way to bring history to life. Preservation of such material is often time consuming and costly, but are essential to helping fulfill Asbury Theological Seminary’s mission. If you are interested in donating items of historic significance to the archives of the B.L. Fisher Library, or in donating funds to help purchase or process significant collections, please contact the archivist at [archives@asburyseminary.edu](mailto:archives@asburyseminary.edu).

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> All images used courtesy of the Archives of the B.L Fisher Library of Asbury Theological Seminary who own all copyrights to these digital images, unless otherwise noted. Please contact them directly if interested in obtaining permission to reuse these images.

<sup>2</sup> Most likely this is a reference to Rev. Dr. John Wilson (1804-1875), a Scottish Christian missionary and teacher in Bombay. He was involved in the establishment of Wilson College and Bombay University and wrote books on the Parsi religion and other cultural issues in India.

<sup>3</sup> This is Bessie Sherman Ashton, the daughter of C.W. Sherman of the Vanguard Mission, and an early and long friend of Phebe’s from the

Pentecost Band days. Cf. Ashton, Albert E. and Bessie Sherman Ashton. *From Famine to Famine: An Account of Famine Experience and Mission Work in India*. St. Louis, MO: Vanguard Mission, ca 1908.

<sup>4</sup> Albert E. Ashton, who married Bessie Sherman had opened a boy's training department in Pardi to accompany the girl's orphanage in Sanjan, about 90 miles north of Bombay.

<sup>5</sup> Miss Luema Angel was one of the first workers at the Vanguard Orphanage in Sanjan, where she worked about six years until her death in 1907 or 1908 in Missouri, where she was visiting an aunt. She was also a major correspondent with Phebe Ward in her diary list.

<sup>6</sup> Mary Friesen was another worker at the Vanguard Mission girl's orphanage in Sanjan.

<sup>7</sup> Mrs. Eddy is referred to in other works by the Wards as the principal of Taylor High School where Bessie and Louisa attended school in India. It was located in Poona (Pune), not too far from the Mukti Mission. She may be the same Eddy visited by Godbey during his visit.

<sup>8</sup> Soonderbai Powar (1856-1921) was an Indian Christian philanthropist who worked closely with Pandita Ramabai while she ran a teacher training school in Pune and later in Kedgaon. Like Ramabai, she was a major advocate for the rights of women in India, and she also opposed the opium trade with the support of the *Bombay Guardian*. The Mukti Revival spread to her training school around the end of July or early August, before reaching Yeotmal.

<sup>9</sup> Robert John Ward was a missionary of the London Missionary Society and pastor of the Davidson Street Congregational Church in Madras. He was influenced by the Moody/Sankey revivals in England and also the Keswick branch of the Holiness Movement. His wife had also been a missionary with the Church of Scotland Mission in Madras and was interested in work to benefit Indian women.

<sup>10</sup> William Godbey, *Around the World, Garden of Eden, Latter Day Prophecies and Missions*, (Cincinnati, OH: God's Revivalist Office, 1907), 432-478.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 453.

<sup>12</sup> Letter from Albert B. Norton, *The Apostolic Faith* (Los Angeles, Cal.), 1, no. 7 (April 1907), 2. (cf. *Pneuma* Vol. 42 (2020), pages 5-24)

