

BOOK REVIEW

Autobiography of Dr Sr Mary Glowrey “God’s Good for Nothing”

Author: Mary Glowrey MJJ, completed by Sr Peter Julian (Margaret) Barrett MJJ

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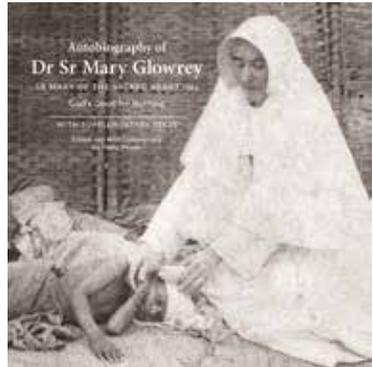
Irene Franklin*

This is a riveting read that made me doubt if such a story will ever be possible in the future because our society has changed so much. It really made me reflect deeply on what are the important fundamentals that guide me and make me who I am. Mary’s fundamentals were her family, her faith and her community; later, also, her vocation to save souls and relieve suffering.

Mary Glowrey was born in country Victoria on 23 June 1887 and died in Bangalore, India on 5 May 1957. Her missionary career spanned thirty six years. She gained her medical degree in 1910 from the University of Melbourne. She worked for a number of years in both public and private practice. In 1919 she was awarded the higher degree of Doctor of Medicine from the University of Melbourne in Obstetrics, Gynaecology and Ophthalmology. The 29 November 1924 was the day of her Solemn Profession as a Religious Sister in the Society of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. She truly had become a unique creation of the Almighty, a Doctor Sister.

The book is essentially in two parts. Part 1 has twelve chapters written by Mary in response to the suggestion by her Superior. It contains the stories that mattered to Mary from her earliest days. The last few chapters are rather

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a truncated tale of her work. She was already very seriously ill when she started and was unable to finish. Each chapter is followed by a Commentary written by someone who was able to expand on what Mary had written.

Part 2 is written by someone who was in the same order and had worked with her for a number of years. This contains chapters thirteen to twenty two and tells of the successes and failures in the mammoth task of striving to bring as best a standard of health care as possible to marginalised women and children. Each chapter also has a Commentary.

The ruling passion that Mary had was to do God's will. Her whole approach to life was deeply prayerful and her focus was on the good she could do for the other. She forgot about herself and her own needs.

Mary arrived in India in 1920, choosing to go to work in Guntur where the people were, for the most part, very poor, poorly educated with all the usual consequences of this. Women wouldn't go to a male doctor so half the population couldn't avail themselves of Western style treatment even if they could have accessed it. Another problem was the huge number of patients in contrast to the small number of trained staff.

When she first saw her Dispensary it contained sodium bicarbonate, potassium citrate and Epsom salts, magnesium sulphate. There was a tiny cupboard made of boxes that contained a few instruments. The building was small and basic. When she started she realised that the people couldn't afford modern pharmaceuticals nor were they physically accessible so she modified traditional medicines that she felt were effective. This primitive place became essentially an emergency treatment centre.

In 1925 the foundation stone was laid for St Joseph's Hospital which opened with only one bed. The number of beds increased rapidly over time.

By 1949 St Joseph's Hospital had become a large complex with everything we expect to find in a modern hospital so it became accredited to train nurses.

The legacy of the health care systems she initiated continues to care for millions of people today.

What an incredible woman. What a gigantic achievement.

To God be the glory.

Her cause for canonisation is before the Vatican at present.