

**LES PARSIS**

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Les Parsis by D. Menant & Ratanbai Ardeshir Vakil

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**D. MENANT & RATANBAI ARDESHIR VAKIL**

# **LES PARSIS**



# LES PARSIS

BY  
D. MENANT

TRANSLATED IN PART  
BY THE LATE  
MISS RATANBAI ARDESHIR VAKIL



UNIV. OF  
CALIFORNIA

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## INTRODUCTION

## INTRODUCTION

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A SPECIAL interest attaches to this translation into English of D. Menant's monograph entitled "Les Parsis," arising from the circumstance that it is, in great part, the work of a Parsi lady, the late Miss Ratanbai Ardeshir Vakil.

I have still a vivid recollection of the morning in the beginning of the year 1886 on which Mr. Ardeshir F. Vakil, senior partner in one of the leading firms of solicitors in Bombay, brought his two daughters Meherbai and Ratanbai to the Wilson College to begin their career as students of the Bombay University. Although for many years that University had prefaced its Regulations with the sentence—"In the following regulations the pronoun 'he' and its derivatives are used to denote either sex," and had thus opened its doors wide to the



women of India, only one lady student had been enrolled as undergraduate in Arts before these two sisters entered upon their College career. The experiment which was then made awakened some anxieties. Would it be possible for Indian ladies to study in a mixed College class? How would the men be likely to conduct themselves in the new situation?—these were questions which naturally presented themselves. The result of the experiment disappointed from the beginning all such fears. From the first day the presence of these ladies elevated the tone and discipline of the College class in a manner most creditable to the ladies and to the men. The success of this experiment paved the way for the admission during subsequent years of an increasing number of lady students to the privileges of a University education, who are under no small obligation to the courage and character displayed by these two sister pioneers. They both came to the University under the impulse of a real love of learning, and their success in the pursuit of it was assured from the beginning.

In this prefatory note I confine myself to the career of the younger sister. The elder, after her graduation as Bachelor of Arts in Bombay,

entered upon a course of medical study which led her ultimately to London and Glasgow. From the Glasgow University she received the degrees of M.B., C.M., and is now exercising her profession in her native city.

The younger sister, Ratanbai, never left home. The strength of her attachment to her home in Bombay was quite remarkable. She found little enjoyment even in those temporary absences from Bombay during the hot season vacation which prove so attractive to many. Her life moved in two spheres—the College and her home, and these two sufficed.

Born in December, 1869, she was a girl of sixteen when she entered upon her studies for her degree. She passed through the ordinary curriculum of study, which included English and French Literature, Mathematics, Elementary Science, History, and Logic. The subjects in which she was specially interested were English and French Literature. French was recognised by the University as one of the languages which might be studied in the course for the degree of Bachelor of Arts when she entered upon her studies, and she was one of the first to select this language. She had as her instructor the late Signor Pedraza, a gentleman whose name

will always be associated with the history of the progress of French studies in Western India. Under his competent guidance she acquired a great love for French literature, and found in this side of her studies much mental enjoyment. In 1890 she passed her examination for the degree with honours, and was immediately thereafter elected to a Fellowship in the College. This also was a new and interesting experiment, amply justified by its results.

As a Dakshina Fellow she taught the French classes in the College, and had as her pupils not only young ladies but also young men. When the period of her fellowship expired she continued her connection with the College and remained in charge of the French classes, performing a highly-valued service on the merely nominal salary of a Fellow of an Indian College. She maintained her connection with the College simply from love to the College and the work. During her College career both she and her sister had given evidence of their unselfishness by declining, on more than one occasion, scholarships to which their position in the University examinations would have entitled them, in order that poorer students less high in the lists might have the benefit of the aid and rewards which