

Pastex is a cold water dye in lovely colours, it is easy to use and you need not use the whole packet at once. Evans Fraser, Bombay, sells it.

This rainbow set would make a lovely present for your best friend either for Christmas, birthday or even a wedding gift. I feel certain no bride would despise it. If you wished you could make a tea cosy to complete the set.

GULABI THE DAI.*

(FROM THE DAIS' POINT OF VIEW.)

A story for Health Visitors.

Gulabi sat at the door of her hut spinning in the cool of the evening. She was old, a widow and her children were all dead, so there was no one but herself to provide for. She sometimes felt this fortunate, for it was not always easy to earn enough to satisfy her own hunger. She was a dai by profession and esteemed and thought much of by her neighbours, but they were all poor folk and could not spare more than 4 or 8 annas on the occasions when Gulabi was called to attend on a little new arrival. There was sometimes a share of a scanty meal, but times were hard and although Gulabi was busy enough, she did not earn a luxurious living.

"Ai hai," she murmured as the sun sank below the horizon, "I must cook my evening meal and then I will sleep. I have walked far to-day though I got little for it and I feel very tired. Hai, hai, I have no husband and no son; what shall I do if I am no longer able to do my work?"

Her evening meal consisted of a little chapati and ghi. Meat was too expensive and so was milk.

She shut the door, rolled herself up in her thin shawl and lay down on her bed. Night had fallen and she was sleeping soundly when a loud knocking began and a voice cried "Hey, burhia Gulabi! Uth, burhia, uth!"

"Who is there?" she called.

"Isar Kor's husband. Isar Kor is in pain, come along."

Gulabi did not take long to prepare for a case. She came as she was, merely readjusting her shawl over her head and shoulders. She took nothing in her hand. She locked up her empty house and started on her mile's walk with a sigh of fatigue, picking her steps by the feeble light of her escort's lantern. At last they reached the house and she entered a tiny court-yard, and was led into the main room and then ushered into another room off it with closed windows and lit only by a little wick floating in a saucer of oil. A bed in the corner filled up most of the room and a young girl was crying and throwing herself about. On the floor mixed up with old rags, some bits of rope, a huqa and a spare charpoy was a good deal of miscellaneous rubbish. Several women were present and one had children. The atmosphere was hot and stifling. Gulabi, however, was accustomed to such scenes. She went up to her patient and after examination turned to the women and told them this was a simple case, the child was coming but it was a first baby, so there was likely to be delay. "Lie down and sleep or go home," she said, "I will

* By kind permission of Dr. Balfour, W.M.S.

watch by the girl." Her advice was taken and some went away, some lay down and slept. The husband had retired to another room. Gulabi would have liked some sleep herself for she was very tired, but Isar Kor was nervous and restless, so she sat beside the girl pressing her head and talking in a low comforting voice. She repeated all was simple, and told of other cases she had had, and how easy it usually was, until Isar Kor began to hope even this terrible and dreadful ordeal might end happily, and dozed at intervals. As the night passed Gulabi began to feel anxious. Had she been right in saying all was well? Was the child straight? Even so, disaster might happen. Why was the child not born by now? What was she to do? Anxiously she revolved in her mind one remedy after another. According to her simple creed the patient must never be frightened, so she continued to speak soothingly and to tell Isar Kor all was well, and she repeated the assurance to the women when they occasionally raised their heads.

Dawn found her slipping round to a hakim's shop for some remedies she believed efficacious. On her return the women were alarmed at the delay and suggested to the husband that the Health Visitor, "Choti Miss" might be called. He asked Gulabi if this were necessary and she replied emphatically no. She did not know much about Health Visitors, but she had heard they were out to take away the work of the dais and therefore to be avoided as far as possible. Some weary hours passed and it was easy to see that pain, lack of nourishment and bad air were making poor Isar Kor very ill. The women went out and pressed the husband to call the "Choti Miss" and this time he did so and the Choti Miss was shortly ushered in.

She was dressed in a sari with a gold edge and wore gold ear-rings and gold bangles. Her nose was turned up, she had prominent eyes and an eye glass, and a servant came with her carrying a bag and an umbrella. She entered the room and then started crying, "hai, hai, what an atmosphere! how shall I bear it?" She went to the bed and said "oh what a dirty bed! how can you people endure such dirt?" She called for the dai and said "have you examined her? did you wash your hands in soap and water? did you soak them in antiseptic lotion?" "No, hai, hai, hai!" She then set to work to make her own examination and soon found out the presence of poor Gulabi's remedies, and more "Hai, Hai, Hai, Hais" proclaimed her discovery. "See here," she called shrilly, "what that wicked dai has done! She has placed here a gola neither boiled nor soaked in antiseptic lotion. Now the patient is likely to get puerperal fever and die!"

Poor Isar Kor screamed aloud. The women groaned and wept, disapproving glances were cast at Gulabi who, pushed off the bed, sat down in a corner outwardly impassive, while inwardly her pulses were throbbing and her body quivering with emotion and a mixture of anger, fear and misery. She felt what right had this woman to speak to her so, belittling her in the eyes of all present because she had done her duty according to the light she had? But what power might this person have, sent it was said by the Sirkar, able perhaps to call up all kinds of unknown penalties? And even if she had not such powers

would any of those who heard the accusations call Gulabi again and if not how would she live without husband or child to support her, and old age coming on? But with it all there was grief for the poor young girl whose life she had somehow placed in danger, who had trusted her so fully and whose trust had apparently been misplaced. And all the time she felt things were wrong, this Choti Miss was wrong, it could not be right, whatever the case, to frighten the patient and make her lose confidence and hope.

The Choti Miss called for a chair and with a pillow at her back and a footstool at her feet sat waiting events. She told the assembled women many stories of her cases which were all alarming in their nature and only saved from catastrophe by her skill. In each case the fault was the blundering of a dai "just like that one" she would say pointing to Gulabi, and at last the old woman cut to the quick got up intending to slip away, but the Choti Miss divined her intention and called out "no, no, you don't go till we see if the child is alive or dead, and if dead you answer for it." So Gulabi sat down silently.

One of the women stepped out and said to the husband "the Choti Miss says the child is dead and it is the dai's fault, go and get the Bari Miss"—and thoroughly alarmed the man went.

So after an interval there was another bustle outside and the Bari Miss entered. She wore a simple white sari and no bangles or ear-rings and her voice was low, but somehow she commanded attention from everyone. "Why, Miss Das," said the Choti Miss jumping up, "why ever are you here." "Because I was called," said Miss Das, "I didn't know you were here, Miss Singh. What's the case?" "Quite ordinary," said Miss Singh; "delay because it's the first child." Miss Das went up to Isar Kor, touched her face and hands, and said gently: "Don't be afraid, my child." She then said: "Where is the dai?" Miss Singh pointed to Gulabi. "Look at her sitting there in her dirty clothes and her arms covered with bangles. She has been examining all night with unwashed hand and—" "Enough," said Miss Das, holding up her hand. She looked keenly at the old dai. Perhaps she saw something of the shame and misery in the averted face, for she said gravely "Is not that Gulabi dai?" "Yes ji," replied the women. "Then I have heard her spoken of as a very trustworthy and efficient woman." The women took up the word and echoed it. "The Bari Miss says she is a trustworthy and efficient woman." "It is true, it is a true saying." By these four words Gulabi's self-respect was restored, and she was reinstated in her position in the eyes of her little world.

She lifted her head and felt as if a dark cloud had disappeared and the sun was shining and hope alive.

The Bari Miss now turned to the women and told them all was well but they must expect some delay. She advised them to go home, since the room was too small for so many people. She then asked Gulabi to help her open the window and to fold away the clothes hanging from the roof. She put the charcoal brazier into the outer room, asked for a clean sheet to spread on the bed with a mackintosh which, she had herself brought. She sent Gulabi for

some milk and fed poor Isar Kor who had been fasting for 24 hours. Then she sent Gulabi to get some food in a neighbour's house while she sat and talked kindly to Isar Kor. Gulabi came back rested and refreshed. Before she had been ready to drop with fatigue. Miss Das now took her aside and asked her if she would be willing to remove her rings and bangles and wash her hands as she directed. Gulabi agreed readily. In fact she would have agreed to anything, she felt so grateful for Miss Das' consideration. Having done this Miss Das asked her to conduct the labour as she usually did, and in a short time a fine little boy was born and there was great rejoicing in the house.

The two Health Visitors now made ready to go, and Miss Das said some kind words to Isar Kor and promised to see her again "and you must come to see us and I will show you how to make clothes for your baby," she said. "If you don't get puerperal fever first, thanks to Gulabi's doings," put in Miss Singh. "No fear," said Miss Das, and then she said in English, "Miss Singh, how often have I told you not to abuse the dais before their patients?" "Why, however are we to teach the people then?" said Miss Singh. "We shall teach the people better *through* the dais than *in spite* of them," said Miss Das, "if you destroy the confidence of the people in Gulabi and others like her, what have you got to put in their place? Will you go down yourself and attend all these simple cases for the few annas they can give?" "No," said Miss Singh, "but I am not a midwife, I am a *Midwife Supervisor*." Miss Das smiled. "My dear," she said, "I don't think your teachers would recognise the species, but what would you do then for these poor people? How arrange for their confinements?" Miss Singh looked in every direction before she could think of a reply and then said that the Municipality should provide trained and stipended midwives for the poor. "Perhaps," said Miss Das, "if they could get them, but are you remembering that you would have to pay their stipends by increase in the rates and taxes? Moreover it would certainly be necessary to provide pensions for poor old women like Gulabi, who have spent their lives in the public service, if you suddenly take their livelihood away." Miss Singh looked chastened and said no more.

As the ladies left the house the husband salaamed deeply and offered some shining rupees. Miss Das refused them but said "give them to Gulabi, she has earned them well." The man looked a little blank for he had meant to give Gulabi 8 annas but Miss Das called her forward and he could not refuse. Gulabi's face beamed as she tied the unexpected riches in the corner of her chadar and she followed the ladies to their gari profuse in her thanks and gladly promising to come to their class room. It was with a happy heart that she went home. Not only was her immediate difficulty over, but she felt she had made a friend who would never fail her in future difficulties and that these terrible nights of anxiety and indecision when two lives hung upon her action and there was no one to advise or consult need never recur. A great weight of responsibility rolled off and Gulabi only wished one thing, in which we all echo her, that there were more Miss Dases in the world and fewer Miss Singhs.