

mind that the Mahomedan royalty and court brought with themselves from Arabia, the institution of *harem*. You know what a harem is. I will not call it a prison in which women are jailed, because the term is inadequate to express the force of the term. India never had a harem until the Mahomedan invaders pounced upon Hindostan. As already stated, it was adopted at first as a necessity and later retained as a good form or fashion.

Here it may be stated, that some overzealous but misguided persons and unscrupulous priests in order to pander to the perverted tastes of the people, interpolated religious books of inferior brands, in order to give these good forms the sanction of religion. For instance, to marry early began to be considered not only a good form but a religious duty.

In later times there came in other vices. Ignorance and superstition breed vices. Ignorant and superstitious men are hateful and mischievous. But, if I had my way in the world, I would not have one ignorant woman. An ignorant and superstitious woman is a centre of powerful infection. I have always preached that if a nation educated the women alone—the men will get educated by coming in contact with the women. The converse sounds plausible enough but is not true. But, to keep to the point, ignorance and superstition in women brought in their train infanticide of female children, and the burning of women on the funeral pyre of their deceased husbands. Women began to be treated as the inferior of men and meekly accepted that position. Early marriages degenerated. India began to have its child widows. I am very often asked to indicate the age at which the women marry in India. My reply may appear humorous to you, but it is nevertheless true. The East India women marry anywhere between eight months before birth to eight days before death.

I have discussed at length the causes and development of the institutions of early marriages, enforced widowhood and the confinement of women in their houses. But there are one or two things in this connection that should always be borne in mind. I have had the opportunity of talking with hundreds of Canadian women. The impression left on my mind is that the Canadian women feel that the women of India are pretty much in the same position as a Canadian woman would be if suddenly thrust into the penitentiary. They have also impressed me that in their minds the Canadian women feel that the widows of India are in the same excruciating pain as a Canadian widow would be in, if she were preemptorily forbidden to remarry. If any one in this audience entertains any such notions, I should like them to disabuse themselves of those erroneous ideas. Custom, it must always be remembered, acts like the lubricant. It deadens pain, soothes anguish, makes unbearable disabilities bearable. Women of this country—at any rate some of them—consider that they do not possess all their birthrights. Yet they bear their disabilities meekly and patiently. A hundred years ago the women of this continent did not have the same quantity and quality of rights which those of to-day have. Yet the general run of the women of the last century bore their burdens with fortitude.

Do not misunderstand me. I do not advocate child marriage, enforced widowhood or the enslaving of women. No; personally, I would have death if deprived of liberty. And, with Herbert Spencer, I heartily believe that every person is entitled to the fullest measure of liberty and freedom provided regard being paid so that the other people's liberty may not be encroached upon.

With regard to the status of Indian women, it should be kept in mind that the women of India are wakening up. They are learning to know their rights and acquiring the spirit to stand up and make a stout fight for them. In many parts of India at the present time the confinement of women in houses exists but in name only. Accounts that reach Canada are grossly exaggerated. Of late years, early marriage is getting to be considered repugnant and suicidal to the best interests of the nation. The ancient Hindu religions did not enforce widowhood. The present generation is showing marvellous spirit in marrying the widows.