

INDIA.

LETTER FROM REV. J. WILKIE.

Mr. Wilkie, one of our missionaries in India, writes as follows to the *Presbyterian Review*:

INDORE, INDIA, Jan. 19, 1887.

My Dear Sir:

One evening on my return home I found six or eight people waiting for me, led on by my catechist, who explained that one of them—Moses by name—wished to marry our ayah, Rebecca, a Christian. When I asked the intending bridegroom if he had spoken with Rebecca on the subject, he said he neither had nor felt the necessity for doing so—that if “the sahib” was willing, why should he trouble further. Knowing well that the ordinary native custom is to throw on the missionary all the trouble and responsibility in connection with marriage, and then to blame him if all does not turn out quite satisfactorily, I clearly told him that they must assume all responsibility, and advised him to see her before going any further. To this he agreed, and waited till she returned with the children.

She, of course, through a third party, had already heard of the intention of Moses, and of the proposed interview with me, and yet, on her return to the house, passed by the waiting ones in the most indifferent way as if she had no interest in either them or their doings. I followed her into the house and in a jocular way asked what this meant, when she in an astonished way asked “What?”

“Are you not thinking of getting married?”

She—“I will do whatever the sahib says.”

“Have you seen or spoken to Moses yet?”

She—“Why should I? If the sahib is willing I will marry him, but if not willing, I will not do so.”

I then tried to show her how foolish such a course was, as she, not the sahib, would have to live with him afterwards, and told her I would do nothing further till they were both quite satisfied with each other. She agreed then to see him, but I am quite sure I not in the slightest degree influenced them in the matter; but rather made them yet further wonder at our strange ideas as to marriage. Did he not want a wife? was she not willing

to take him, and had he not asked me who was her ma-bap (mother and father)? What more then was necessary? After we were satisfied that Moses had not a wife somewhere else, and that otherwise he was satisfactory, the day was fixed (January 1st), the bride retaining the same utterly indifferent air—even going on with her work till within a very short time of her marriage.

At last they stood before me. Moses was asked to repeat some words after me, but refused, saying, “I will give her bread and water. Is that not enough?” and in this, too, only conforming to the current idea whilst expressing the fear they so naturally have of binding themselves to do what may have a deeper meaning. The ceremony ended without any further hitch, without the bride, however, being saluted in the usual way, or at all affected, and soon after Rebecca slipped home and went on as usual with her work, though I should say she went away later on to the big dinner that had been prepared in honor of the occasion.

Sometimes the missionary is not only asked to agree to the marriage, but also asked to secure a bride or bridegroom, as may be needed—though this office I have invariably declined. You need hardly wonder if sometimes an obligation so lightly undertaken is as lightly regarded and broken; and that hence missionaries have sometimes sad hearts. It is useless to expect that ideas that have been received in their earliest years and that are still so fully believed in by the great mass around them, should not continue to exercise a very decided influence even in the Christian Church. Oh that those who talk so loudly in praise of Hinduism could see it as it is—not as it seems to be, stripped of all that is vile and impure! I have often asked the Hindus which one of their sacred books would they put into their child's hands, as its *only* guide to morality and good living, and have invariably been told there was not one. Beautiful thoughts are to be found in them it is true, but unfortunately the few nuggets of precious truths are powerless to stem the torrent of vileness that for ages has swept over Hindustan. With the sanction of their sacred books, after the example set by their gods and in the name of religion we find so often their temples simply turned into brothels—the girls being early consecrated to the god and thus to a life of