

a beautiful garland of flowers, which the courteous master of affairs places with much ceremony around my neck. The wreath is closely woven of lovely tropical bloom, heavy with scent, and falling below the waist. I express what thanks are possible amid the din of bagpipe music. We step into the carriage and are swiftly bowled away, leaving the tamasha creeping down the streets amid the flare of torch-light, and prodigal showers of scent.

It is in progress from the bride's house to the bridegroom's, and will arrive, in due course, at the pleasant residence, where in a few moments we alight and mount the steps.

Oh, she is such a little bride! You stand hushed in her presence, scarcely able to believe that this is really she.

In the central room of a house she sits on a cushion by the bridegroom, both of them cross-legged on the floor. The women of the household, in gay gowns and solemn silence, are seated on the floor behind. Hindu musicians in front are performing soft, weird music. Delicate refreshments are laid in a side room. The little bride is eight years old, a tiny shy slip of a child; the husband a tall, vigorous, young man of about twenty. He speaks English well, and talks freely to me, but does not move from his throne upon the floor. Her uncle picks up the little bride in his arms, as you might a child of two, and carries her off out of the crowd into the refreshment room, to try and get her to say a few words, but she is too shy to utter anything but her name, which comes out at last after much persuasion. Someone carries a small boy past dressed in the brightest scarlet. The wee bride stretches out her hand to him. They are evidently playmates.

"She is much more fit for that little five year old than for the bridegroom you are giving her," I remarked pitifully.

"Ah, mam Sahib, no! Such age is not our custom."

The age that is the custom is painfully evident. Everything around you is pretty, shining, costly, gay with music, and lit by a glare of light; but oh, it is so sad! As you realise what this wedding represents you feel that you have scarcely ever seen anything sadder than this wee bride in her green silk dress and costly ornaments—a mite encrusted in a load of jewels. In about two years she will be actually married to this full grown, vigorous, man.

We are shown round the galleries of the decorated house, and come to the women's quarters, where the ladies rise to meet us: the happy wife and mother, brilliantly dressed and bejewelled, shows us her ornaments, and smiles most pleasantly. She cannot speak a word of English. Someone is standing behind in the shadow, a young and well formed woman.

"Who is this?" you ask, turning to her after the rest were introduced.

'Ah, she is a widow!' comes the grave and sad response.

Widowhood in India is not only a life long sorrow, but a life-long curse. It is believed to be the effect of some horrible crime committed by the woman in a previous life, a crime for which her husband has been punished. He has died, but she must suffer. Of course, it is her fault.

The widow must wear a single coarse garment, white, red, or brown. She must eat only one meal during the twenty-four hours of a day. She must never take part in family feasts and jubilees with others. She must not show herself to people on auspicious occasions. A man or woman thinks it unlucky to behold a widow's face before seeing any other object in the morning. A man will postpone his journey if his path happens to be crossed by a widow at the time of his departure.

A Hindu woman thinks it worse than death to lose her beautiful hair. Look at this little lassie, only fourteen years old, her eyes swollen with bitter tears, sitting with a sad face out of everybody's way. She hardly knows the reason why her beautiful hair has been cut off, or why she is so cruelly deprived of all she likes. She will grow up in this sadness—grow up perhaps to write one day what a Hindu woman once wrote:—

"O Lord, hear my prayer! No one has turned an eye on the oppression that we poor women suffer, though with weeping, and crying, and desire, we have turned to all sides, hoping that some one would save us. No one has lifted up his eyelids to look upon us, nor inquire into our case. We have searched above and below, but Thou art the only One who wilt hear our complaint, Thou knowest our impotence, our degradation, our dishonor.

"O great Lord, our name is written with drunkards, with lunatics, with imbeciles, with the very animals; as they are not responsible, we are not. Criminals, confined in the jails for life, are happier than we, for they know something of Thy world. They were not born in prison, but we have not for one day, no, not even in our dreams, seen Thy world; to us it is nothing but a name, and not having seen the world, we cannot know Thee, its maker. Those who have seen Thy works may learn to understand Thee, able to learn to know Thee. We see only the four walls of the house. Shall we call them the world, or India? We have been born in this jail, we have died here, and are dying."

The Indian woman, as a bride, goes inside her husband's house, and never, or scarcely ever, goes out again till her remains are carried out to be buried. For the rest of her life she is hidden there in a living tomb. And if she be a widow, that tomb becomes a prison house of pain, from which such cries as that above go up to God.—"Presbyterian Monthly."