

Youth's Department.

A MARRIAGE IN INDIA.

MY DEAR YOUNG FRIENDS:

It is a long time since I wrote you. I may have had several excuses: one, that our work during the past year has been very various and taxing, and another, that we have not had anything that we thought would be specially interesting. But yesterday while on tour we happened at a wealthy Temindar's Mansion just while a wedding was going on. We thought from the commotion that something was going on, for when we went in word for the dignified lady of the house, a Brahmin widow, to receive us, it was some time before we had an answer, and many well-dressed women and girls were passing in and out. At last a chair was given us in the porch and we could watch proceedings. A small stool and two chairs were placed in the inside court. On the stool was placed a blue damask cover, and in this a quantity of betel nut with areca leaves, bunches of flowers and a silver wine cup. The place was then swept out and servants and some others were ordered out. People were moving to and fro continually and we had no idea what it was all about till music began, when all eyes were turned towards the door on the other side of the court. We looked that way and there was a little girl, a sweet, pretty child, but with such a sad face, led by the hand by a boy of about eighteen, and we knew at once they were bride and bridegroom, followed by a motley crowd of men, women and children, but the children predominated. You at home would have thought that this was a big children's party and that these two were to take part in some special game or play. You would never have thought of it as being a wedding party, a real one, not a play one. The two came and sat in these chairs opposite each other. The boy's face was away from me so I couldn't see his expression, but although all the other little girls were gay and flitting about like butterflies in their gay colored robes, the grave look of this tiny bride never changed, and she was so beautiful. Presently our Brahmin hostess appeared and explained to us, that as this wedding was going on she would not be able to hear our teaching. These were near relatives of hers and she was giving them the wedding. This was the third day, she said, and it would last five days altogether. Some of her other relatives were being married at the same time in another town and so many were not there, she said.

I rose to go, but she begged me to stay and hear the music and watch the ball-play and so on. I didn't know what she ment by ball-play, but I watched and soon the bride and bridegroom began throwing flowers at each other tied up in bunches. They kept this up ever so long, throwing them back and forth, and in the meantime the players tried to play the vinas, but the children were making such a noise they could scarcely be heard. The mother of the bride was going about with a little silver rouge case and dotting the forehead of each woman and girl with a dot of bright red paint. Another woman with some saffron in a brass plate was rubbing this over the feet of each guest and on the arms of some of them. This was yellow, banded over with red. There was a little lull in the noise and confusion while one of the guests, a little Brahmin girl, sang some hymns of praise to their different gods, Saraswati and Rama and so on. Sandal-wood powder made into paste was given to the bride and she was told to rub it on the groom, which she did very meekly, then sprinkled him with some other fragrant powders and anointed him with rose-water. Then some of the guests were anointed with the Sandal-wood and the betel-nut was handed around to all. Presently the bride's chair was brought near her husband and he anointed her as she had done him, the only difference being that he sat down while anointing her and she had stood up for him.

Presently some sort of incense was burned in a brass plate and the fumes wafted on the face of the groom and the plate laid on the stool and left burning for some time.

All the time, tapers of frank-incense had been burning and filling the room with fragrance. Hurrying about in this gay flutter of bright girls and jeweled women were several sombre widows with their shaved heads and single, course, cotten clothes, but though among them they were not of them, for not for them were the decorations, the sprinkling of rose-water on the gifts. Even the benevolent hostess herself could partake of none of these. There was another lull and the bride and groom rose and were conducted to a room near by to worship at the feet of their elders, so we then took leave. We could have enjoyed it all so much if it had been only a children's party, but it was a marriage, and the sober face of the little girl victim haunted us. Her way has been chosen for her, and in that way she must walk, no matter how she may revolt against it. She will not complain, she will only say, "It has been written so."

S. I. HATCH.