



ZENANA OF A PALACE IN INDIA.

ply and plainly clad. The rooms are bare and cheerless, for the Indian women usually sit on the floor, and little furniture is therefore needed; the place, in many instances, is suggestive of a prison rather than a home, and what we should call comfort is conspicuous by its absence.

Here are secluded the women of the house, and it is estimated that of the 120 millions of women in India, forty millions are shut up in Zenanas. But it becomes at once apparent that many of the circumstances which make home so precious a possession to us, are wanting in the Zenana. There is, for instance, *no family life*. It is true there is the wife, the mother, the sons, the daughters and the daughters-in-law; but they never gather with husband and children in the family circle, which unites heart to heart in our English homes: the intercourse of the women with the male portion of the household is virtually excluded. Child life with all its happy associations is wanting; it cannot be said of an Indian home that there the children

"Grow in beauty side by side,
And fill one home with glee;"

the seclusion of the girls makes this impossible. A daughter is frequently looked upon as a curse, and as a consequence the woman is more or less degraded in the eyes of the man. Doomed to an enforced inferiority, her life is without an inspiring purpose, and as a consequence it sinks to a drudgery worse than the treadmill.

There is, as we understand it, *no social life*. Society, there is none, except that which exists within the limited area of the Zenana. Women are not allowed to see, much less to speak to, a man, unless he be a near relation. If ever they venture in public, they are wrapped up so completely in clothes that all they are permitted to see of the world is through an eye-hole in the veil, or they are shut up in a dhoolie so closely as to resemble nothing so much as a bale of goods.

There is *no intellectual life*. The women scarce-

ly ever read, although they are sometimes read to. Books are almost unknown. "Education is good," says the Hindu, "just as milk is good; but milk, given to a snake, becomes venom; so education to a woman becomes poison." The cultivation of any talent, such as music, is never attempted. The life of an Indian woman, unless she becomes a wife and the mother of a son, is too often only a dark, sad pilgrimage, from the cradle to the grave.

But sad as all this is, there remains the still sadder thought that there is *no religious life*. The women of India sit in darkness and in the shadow of death. It is true they have a religion, but it is a religion of terror, and therefore without hope.

The character of the idols they worship only serves to deepen the gloom and despair of their spiritual lives. As children they are taught to worship the goddess Kali. "See," said a sick child, "her bloody tongue, wicked face, cruel hands, necklace of skulls; our gods are terrible; I cannot help screaming when I see them." To such a deity are the children in India taught to pray. Only let a Christian mother picture to herself what her feelings would be if the life and sentiments of her child were dominated by such a religious influence as this, and then contrast the happy time of evening prayer, when, her little one kneeling by her side, or on her lap, she directs its voice in worship to "Our Father in Heaven."

But if the condition of women in India is sad, the condition of Hindu widows is deplorable. In India, widows are subject to treatment akin to criminal. They seem singled out for special cruelties. They are looked upon as cursed of God, and they are scorned by man. If their wrongs and sufferings were only fully known, this country would ring with a cry of righteous indignation. What would be thought, for instance if in England *one thousand women*, the faithful wives of respected husbands, were shut up in one of our prisons, their kindred and friends permitted to heap upon them every kind of abuse and indignity, making their lives a drudgery, and their very existence a burden too heavy to bear; and all this, not because they had committed any crime, but because of a misfortune which she could not possibly avert: they are widows? The thing would not meet with a moment's toleration, and yet in India millions of women are so treated; and it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that many of our criminals at home receive at our hands greater consideration. At what age may they become subject to such cruelties? From childhood: the child wife of an aged man is no uncommon case: widows at ten, widows at seventeen. "I never can remember," said a mere girl, "the time when I was not a widow."

In the census of 1881 there were no less than 54,000 child widows under ten years of age.

Such is the field which lies open for missionary zeal and work.