

[FOR THE CRITIC.]

SUMMER'S DEPARTURE.

Whither away, Oh Summer,
Whither away so soon?
It seems to us but yesterday
Since we did welcome June.

Why show such haste, Oh Summer?
Canst thou not stay awhile,
To sing your sweet songs to us,
To cheer us with your smile?

When thou, Oh Queen of Seasons,
Didst fold us in thine arms,
Our senses were bewildered
By thy transporting charms.

We would our joy, Oh Summer,
For evermore might last,
We dread stern visaged Winter,
His beauty blighting blast.

In vain all our imploring,
Dead leaves around us fall;
Oh Summer, thou hast vanished,
Yea; gone beyond recall.

But of thy glad returning,
We have a pledge to ween,
No cruel blast of Winter
Destroys the evergreen.

Windsor, N. S., Oct. 1860.

AVONIAN.

THE HINDU WIDOW.

It is certain that the prohibition of the marriage of Hindu widows has from a very ancient time been prevalent in India. The great Hindu law-giver Manu, who flourished about five centuries B. C., enjoins the following duty on widows:—"Let her emaciate her body by living voluntarily on pure flowers, roots, and fruits, but let her not, when her lord is deceased, even pronounce the name of another man. Let her continue till death forgiving all injuries, performing harsh duties, avoiding every sensual pleasure, and cheerfully practising the incomparable rules of virtue which have been followed by such women as were devoted to only one husband. A virtuous wife ascends to heaven, if, after the decease of her lord, she devotes herself to pious austerity; but a widow who slights her deceased husband by marrying again, brings disgrace on herself here below, and shall be excluded from the seat of her lord." Whether the Vedas (the Hindu scriptures) and the Vedic commentaries expressly lay down, that a widow after the death of her husband must not marry again, has been disputed by many a modern Pandit; but it is clear from the above quotation that the cruel custom has reigned supreme in India since the time of Manu, whose injunctions have been literally obeyed by all Hindus. And as time passed on the merciless law of Manu has not only been rigorously carried out, but its evil effects have been immensely aggravated by many additional and not less cruel customs imposed upon the widows by the priestly class in India, which is, *par excellence*, the land of customs and ceremonies. The evils of widowhood in India are manifold, and the system of early marriages makes them tenfold intense. Among the Hindus, a boy who is hardly out of his teens is married to a girl who has barely passed twelve summers; and it often happens that a wife loses her husband soon after her marriage, and then she is initiated in the horrors of a widow's life ere she has passed her very girlhood. Even if the would-be-husband, after the formal engagement has been made, dies before the ceremony of marriage, the girl is condemned to widowhood all her life. A Hindu woman's period of temporal happiness ceases, irrespective of her rank or wealth, directly she becomes a widow. When a young man dies, his parents and friends are in deep mourning for him, expressing the greatest grief for his untimely loss; but few people understand or care to comprehend the utter wretchedness in which he leaves his young wife, who is yet too tender and inexperienced to bear even the commonest hardship of this world. No sooner has the husband breathed his last than the young wife is made to give up all tokens of the married state, and to forego all pleasures and luxuries as utterly unsuitable for her present condition. The iron bangle round her wrist, and the red powder on the parting of her hair, which she so proudly wore but a few days ago, she must now give up for ever. The ornaments which were never off her person during her husband's lifetime, she herself removes one by one from her limbs and puts them away, unless somebody else, without taking any heed of her grief-stricken heart, snatches them off her body. Fine or attractive clothes she must not wear, she has to be contented with a plain, simple white *sari*. The very appearance which her bereaved and helpless condition presents would make you stand aghast. It is hardly possible even to recognise her now, who, only a few days ago, was radiant with her youthful bloom, and glittering with her picturesque costume and brilliant ornaments. The most outrageous customs are imposed upon her, and she must observe them or lose her caste, which, among the Hindus, virtually amounts to losing her life. Alas! the custom of man is more cruel than the decree of Providence. The formal period of mourning for a widow in Bengal lasts for one month with the *Kayasths*, the most numerous and influential class in that part of India—the Brahmins keeping only ten days. During this time she has to prepare her own food, confining herself to a single meal a day, which consists of boiled coarse rice, simplest vegetables, *ghi* or clarified butter, and milk; she can on no account touch meat, fish, eggs, or any delicacy at all. She is forbidden to do her hair and to put any scent or oil on her body. She must put on the same cotton *sari* day and night even when it is wet, and must eschew the pleasure of a bed and lie down on bare ground, or perhaps on a coarse blanket spread on it; in some

cases she cannot even have her hair dried in the sun after her daily morning ablution, which she must go through before she can put a particle of food in her mouth. The old women say that the soul of a man after his death ascends to heaven quickly and pleasantly in proportion to the bodily inflictions which his wife can undergo in the month after the death of her husband. Consequently the new-made widow, if not for any other reason, at least for the benefit of the soul of her departed husband, must submit to continuous abstinence and excruciating self-inflictions. The real misery of the widow, however, begins after the first month. It is not enough that she is quite heart-broken for her deceased husband, and that she undergoes all the above-mentioned bodily privations, she must also continually bear the most galling indignities and the most humiliating self-sacrifices. She cannot take an active part in any religious or social ceremony. If there be a wedding in the house, the widow must not touch or in any way interfere with the articles that are used to keep the curious marriage customs. During the *ponjaha*, or religious festivals, she is but grudgingly allowed to approach near the object of veneration, and in some bigoted families the contact of a widow is supposed to pollute the materials requisite for the performance of marriage ceremonies. The widow is, in fact, looked upon as the "evil one" of the house. If she has no son or daughter to comfort her, or if she has to pass her whole life, as is often the case, with her husband's family, her condition truly becomes a helpless one. During any ceremony or grand occasion she has silently to look on, others around her enjoying and disporting themselves; and if some kind relation does not come to relieve her tedium, she has hardly anything else to do but to ruminate on her present sad, wretched condition. Every female member of the family, whether married or unmarried, can go to parties, but a widow cannot; and if she expresses any wish to join the family on such occasions it is instantly repressed by the curt rebuke of her mother-in-law, or some other relation, that "she is a widow, and she must not have such wishes." The most severely felt injunction of custom upon the widows is that of fasting for two days every month during the whole period of her widowhood, that is, till the last month of her life. This observance is called *ekadasai*, which is a Sanskrit word meaning "the eleventh," so called from the fact that the widow abstains from all food on the eleventh day of each of the two fortnights into which the Hindu lunar month is divided. In many houses you will see an aged, invalid widow, lying down prostrate on her fasting day, haggard and emaciated, her daughters sitting around her. It is the middle of Indian summer, everything is blazing with torpid heat. The poor widow can hardly get up through age and illness, and there on so scorching a day she goes through her fast without touching a particle of food or a drop of water. The daughters are trying their best to soothe and comfort her, but she lies almost in an insensible state. All at once her eyes open, she looks hard at one of her daughters and most beseechingly asks for a little water. They look at her helplessly and tell her—"Dear mother, to-day is *ekadasai*, water is forbidden." The wretched widow is in a state of delirium, she has lost her memory. Again and again she implores her daughters for a drop of water, saying, "I am dying, pray give me water." They cannot bear this sight any more, they burst into tears—but they dare not grant their mother's prayer; they only try to comfort her saying that directly the night passes away she shall have water. But, alas! the night may not pass away for the widow; perhaps she succumbs to her mortal thirst in a few hours, and thus dies a victim to the custom of man. To a Hindu widow death is a thousand times more welcome than her miserable existence. It is no doubt this feeling that drove, in former times, many widows to immolate themselves on the funeral pyres of their dead husbands. Thanks to the generosity of the British Government this inhuman practice of *sati*, or the self-immolation of widows, has now been completely abolished in India. There is only one thing to be said on this point, and that is that the British Government lopped off the outward and more flagrant part of the pernicious system, but did not strike at the hidden root of it. The English have done many good things, they can do more. They need not, by passing laws or issuing public proclamations, directly interfere with the domestic customs of the Hindus; but they can make their influence bear indirectly upon the enlightened heads among the natives of India, and, by the steady infusion of the spirit of European culture and refinement, bring about the elevation of Hindu women and further the progress of the country at large. The English, by the peculiar position they enjoy in India, possess a distinct vantage-ground from which they can exert great influence on everything appertaining to the Hindus. Besides, the natives themselves are under the benign influence of English education, awakening to the horrors of their vicious system. They have already begun the forward movement; all that they want is a sympathetic and effective impulse from outside to push them on in their course of improvement.—*Nineteenth Century*.

OUR COSY CORNER.

The war in favor of birds does not seem to protect their wings, for poised on either side of the front of new hats they are already finding favor. There is little use in banishing the birds from millinery, if they are to be deprived of their wings for ornamentation.

The novelty in black stuffs is the Priestly silk-warp camel's-hair, which is developed in light and heavy weights. The latter is especially adapted to wraps, and is very wide, while the lighter quality is used for costumes. The very heavy variety has a thick twill which in itself suggests an outside garment, and it obtains for this purpose among women of taste whether they are in mourning or not.

Petroleum is said to be the best thing to brighten copper; it will also clean either tin, brass or copper tea-kettles and coffee-pots.