

Canadian Missionary Link.

CANADA.

In the Interests of the Baptist Foreign Mission Societies of Canada.

INDIA.

VOL. V., NO. 10.] "The Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising."—Is. lx. 2.] JUNE, 1883.

If we could know!

For the LINK.

If we could know how dear the heart of Christ
Has ever held the lost of ev'ry clime,
How lovingly He wept and sacrificed,
And waits their homeward comi'g thro' all time—

How cold would seem our bosom's warmest thrill:
How low the aim to which our being strives!
How faint the sacred promptings—almost still!
How weak the strongest effort of our lives!

If we could hear, across dividing seas,
One wail of longing from a darkened soul,
O what a weight of fruitful sympathies
The waves would carry as they backward roll!

If we could know how many souls to-night—
Are near the dark unfathomed depths of woe,
We would not loiter round our sweetest light,
Our hands so listless and our feet so slow.

If we could know how short our mortal day,
How soon to midnight shadow turns the light,
Each moment we would work and watch and pray,
And so be ready for the rest of night.

IDA BAKER.

The Twenty-one Million Widows in India.

According to the late census returns taken by the Government of India, the astounding fact has been discovered that there are in this country no less than *twenty-one million widows*. And it would be well for us at home to know something of the miserable and degraded state in which so many poor women drag out a wretched existence in India.

It is true, that the strong social influence of the Christian religion, brought to bear by missions in India on the British Government in the land, has done away with at least all *open* scenes of *Sutteeism*, or widow-burning; but that has not put an end to the misery of the poor widows, whose condition of life is even worse than death itself; in truth, it is a kind of living death.

When a wife is deprived of a living husband in a Christian family, there are sympathizing friends at hand to do all they can to soothe her sorrow, and to comfort her bleeding heart; and all that human tenderness can do is done to alleviate as much as possible the terrible affliction. But how different the case with the poor afflicted widow in India! As the last embers of life are about to die out, and the sick Hindoo is expected to depart this world, the poor afflicted wife feels as if her own death-knell is about to sound, and that her future life will be to her something worse than death. Instead of having dear friends by her to cheer her sorrowful heart, she is not to be approached by relative or friend, but, instead of this,

can be seen waiting not far off (as we often, in this land, see a flock of vultures waiting to see the last move of a dying animal), a number of women—called in for the purpose—to pounce upon the poor widow, and strip her clean of all her ornaments as soon as the husband's last breath is gone. These wives of barbers (a class kept for this special work) make a perfect rush at the poor widow as soon as the word "*He Ram!*" is uttered in the dying chamber—by which exclamation it is known that death has come. The poor broken-hearted widow sits in a corner far off from all friends, and, if of rich family, she is covered by a silk shawl, which is at once snatched away from her, as well as all her other fineries, and this cruel act is done in the most heartless and ruthless manner. The rings in the ears and the nose are often wrenched off with such haste that the blood flows freely from the broken cartilage. The neck ornament, which is generally a solid band of gold, or silver, or brass, as the case may be, is snatched away with such force as to half choke the poor victim for the time being. Ornaments plaited in the hair are in like manner torn off in haste, and the gold and silver bracelets and anklets are all stripped off one by one. These heartless despoilers often put the widow's arms on the ground, and, if the bracelets will not slip off over the hand, they hammer away on them with stones until the cast metal of which they are made is broken; the barbers' vixens caring but little whether the poor widow's flesh is torn or not, as she is *now* looked upon as a *wretch*, to be insulted and treated with contempt and scorn. And now, mark, this may be the case—and often is—with a poor *young child* of eight or ten years old, who, as yet, does not know what a married life means—though she lives with her husband's mother. When the body is carried away to the *funeral pile*, the widow is to follow *last of all*, led on by the barbers' wives, who speak insultingly to her all the way as they go. She is to be kept at such a distance from the funeral *cortege* that her shadow is not to fall on any of the women present, lest that should cause them to become widows too. But from this curse it is said that her tormentors, who are the barbers' wives, are exempted on account of the *religious duty* in which they are then engaged! One of these is to march on in front of the widow to warn all passers-by to keep out of the way of the "accursed thing," lest her ill-fated shadow should happen to fall on them—and the other women drag her along after the funeral procession until they arrive at the river or the pool by the side of which the body is to be consumed. After the body is set on fire the widow is pushed into the water, in which she has to lie until the body of her husband is burnt, and all the party have bathed and washed their clothes and dried them. When all is ready to start for home, the widow is taken out of the water, and led back in her wet clothes, which she is not allowed to change, but they are to dry upon her, and in them she is to work and sleep.