

## OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

### HOME LIFE IN INDIA.—VIII.

BY M. PAIRWEATHER.

In a great mixed multitude of people inhabiting so vast an area of country as that of India, we might reasonably expect to find every grade of civilization from the most debased and brutalized to the most cultivated, thoughtful and philosophic of mankind; and such an expectation would be verified.

The characteristics of a nation may be obtained principally from three sources, viz.: from the drift of the laws, popular maxims and ordinary practice of the people. A few grand underlying principles of belief and custom doubtless are true of the masses, but they are such as might be formulated of any contrasted nationalities as well as of the different divisions of the Hindoos. No strictly true definitions either of law, maxim or custom may be referred to the whole of the Indian people or indeed even to a majority of them. In speaking, therefore, of the women of India, these facts must be carefully kept in view.

Up to the date of the Mohammedan conquest the etiquette of seclusion and veiling were unknown in India. It was the Mogul court fashion of the time for ladies so to live, and was adopted by the Hindoos as a precautionary measure. It is still deemed necessary in the neighbourhood of large military towns, crowded with a reckless foreign soldiery. Under British rule these customs have greatly declined in rigidity, and now exist only amongst the most exclusive and aristocratic of the families of Bengal and the north-west provinces, or emigrants from these localities. Beauchanan in his "Mysore" says truly that in "speaking of the seclusion of Hindoo women we must be understood to mean the higher classes only, and even of these only such as dwell in those parts of the country where the example of the Mohammedans and the fear of their lawless passions prevailed, for in general the women of India enjoy complete freedom. Among the lower and middle ranks, indeed, whose wives and daughters are required to aid in the management of domestic concerns, in business, and even in the labours of agriculture, seclusion would be impracticable. Throughout the Dehkan, where the manners of the Hindoos have been least modified by foreign influence, the women are upon much the same footing with respect to liberty as they are in Europe."

Col. Todd, than whom few knew India better, gives the following:

"The superficial observer applies his own standard to the customs of all nations, and laments with an affected philanthropy the degraded condition of the Hindoo female, in which sentiment he would find her little disposed to join. He particularly laments her want of liberty and calls her seclusion imprisonment. But from the knowledge I possess of the freedom, the respect, the happiness, which Rajpoot women enjoy, I am by no means inclined to deplore their state as one of captivity."

Bishop Heber, in writing of the peninsula proper, says:

"As there is among the cottagers no seclusion of women, both sexes sit together round their evening lamps in very cheerful conversation, and employ themselves either in weaving, spinning, or playing at a kind of dominoes." He says it is untrue that the women, in these parts at least, are ignorant of sewing, spinning or embroidery, "inasmuch as, while the trade of Dacca flourished, the sprigs, etc., which we see on its muslins, were very often the work of female hands." I do not think the majority of Hindoo women are treated cruelly as a rule, yet cases too frequently occur to startle and distress us with their ferocity, but native law sanctions no such extremities. *Menu* is scarcely more severe on women than it is considered proper to be in countries more pretentious in this nineteenth century of ours. For equal labour, equally well done in equal time, a woman receives less remuneration in India and America, the only reason assignable being the difference in sex. To educate a native woman in anything beyond her house-keeping duties was—and in some parts still is—considered inexpedient and dangerous, but things are gradually taking a better turn, and we might say they only follow at the rear of the column of European women's advance. It is not long since that higher educational seminaries even in America were closed to women, and some are still inaccessible. It is now

well known that through the influence of women in London—such women as the late Mary Carpenter, of London—that a grand educational scheme for Hindoo women was adopted by the Indian Government, only a few years ago. It is perhaps costly at the start, but it is the only method by which a solid and lasting work of this sort could be established. There has been founded at least three women's vernacular normal schools, with associated model schools on the Kindergarten plan—one at Poona, in the Deccan; one at Jabbalpoor, and another at Lahore, each under the superintendence of an English lady principal. They admit only Brahmini women and girls. Government officials knew well that the people were too poor to pay even a trivial sum for the education of these women; and the fact soon became apparent that until the pupils were remunerated for their time, regular attendance could not be secured or anything satisfactory done. Accordingly, each pupil in the primary model department is paid twenty-five cents per month, and advances proportionately through all the classes until in the highest or graduating class of the Normal each pupil receives the sum of \$4 per month. If a pupil proves unadapted to teaching—the graduating class teach as monitors under the supervision of the model teacher, who is also English—she is thrown out and another advanced to her place. The examinations are conducted by the superintendent of vernacular schools for western India. Here is a grand outlet for the talent of Brahmini child widows. Hindoo children are quite as clever to learn, quite as easily taught, and more easy to control than white children. When taught, they make very clever teachers, and there is abundant demand for their services. Several graduates from the Poona schools have obtained situations as governesses in noble Hindoo families, and receive salaries equal to that which the Presbyterian Church in Canada assigned her lady missionaries for the first five years of their life in the East. This Poona school is under the able management of Mrs. James Mitchell, widow of the late Rev. J. Mitchell, D.D., father and founder of the Free Church Missions at Poona.

Yet this must not count for too much, it is only an experiment, but so far a success and a hopeful sign of the times. There are multitudes of men in India who deny a woman's right to the power of knowledge, as we might expect. I remember an illustration of this in my own work at Indore. I had for some time been teaching the young wife of a native gentleman, clerk in the Public Works Department. One day he called upon me with the request that I should desist from giving his wife any further instruction. He said that she was making good headway, was indeed clever, while he was a clerk in office and obliged to work. At night he was too tired to study; his wife, he stated, had all day to read, and presently he remarked, "She will be more learned than I, and then how ashamed I shall be." Poor honest man; he at least was not indifferent as to the estimation in which he was held by the ladies of his house.

When, in 1878, Miss Helen Watson, of Reading, England, won the prize for the Bachelor of Science Examination at the University of London, first division, the English press everywhere commented upon the matter, praising the gentle, sweet, womanly girl who had so brilliantly acquitted herself. The Indian vernacular press took up the subject, and great was the evident alarm lest women should under such tuition become too clever altogether. Yet women once had their day even in India. *Menu*, their law-giver, in his famous "Statutes," says:

"Woman must be honoured and adorned by fathers, brethren, husbands, and husbands' brethren, if they seek abundant prosperity." "To a maiden, to a bride, to the sick, and to pregnant women, let him give food, and even before his guests, without hesitation." Yet he decides that no woman is to "act according to her mere pleasure." It is a common saying that "where females are honoured there the deities are pleased." "Where female relations are made miserable the family of him who makes them so very soon wholly perishes." I need not multiply instances further, but turn now to the common practice of to-day and see how these laws and maxims are respected in usage.

It is considered impolitic, and, above all, unlucky, to speak well of a woman. A man shrinks from mentioning his wife's name, and the wife will never speak that of her husband, although she may write it and hand it to you, but term one another as father or mo-

ther of the eldest child. A mother has always the privilege of naming her children, but the announcement is always made by the father. This indirectness of address looks strange and unnatural to us, but once on a time there was good reason for such custom. It is the scar remaining which points us back to a painful past of rapine and conquest, and the memory of which has not yet become wholly defaced. It is true that it is fashionable to speak contemptuously of the sex, yet in the "domestic republic" women have both a voice and an influence. In the higher ranks of life in Central India among the Rajpoots they certainly take their place both in government and politics, and prove themselves the most skilful, ambitious and determined of intriguers.

### THE ELDERSHIP.

MR. EDITOR,—In the Rev. Mr. Laing's sixth paper in answer to the question, "Why are you a Presbyterian," it is said: "The elders in Scripture are all of equal authority; hence the Presbyterian assertion of the parity in the eldership. This, however, is not inconsistent with the existence of two classes, (1) those who rule, and (2) those who rule and also labour in word and doctrine. The first may be able to rule efficiently while giving their time to some honest calling for a livelihood; whereas, the whole time and attention of one who labours in word and doctrine is required for the work. Hence the distinction between the ruling and teaching elder, both presbyter bishops, but called and set apart to different work in the Church of God." With these statements I have no fault to find, but have to express wonder that the writer, when acting as Presbyterian apologist, should have avoided allusion to the glaring inconsistency of the practice of Presbyterians with the Scriptural principle, which Mr. Laing succinctly states in these words: "The elders in Scripture are all of equal authority." Now, all know, who are acquainted with our Church courts, that one teaching elder is equal in authority, or voting power, to two ruling elders in any case; and where congregations, owing to largeness, have a numerous ruling eldership, one teaching elder may be equal to twenty ruling elders. The only exception to this is in the Kirk session, where the teaching and the ruling elder are equal as regards deliberative and judicial authority, though even there the ruling elder is stamped with inferiority, inasmuch as he may not act as president or moderator. It may be safely asserted that in Presbytery, Synod and Assembly, every teaching elder is equal in authority to four ruling elders, as it is certainly a low average to allow four ruling elders to each congregation. Now, this practice ought either to terminate, or we must relinquish not the least important, if not the most important, Scripture argument for Presbyterianism. The writer has never heard a defence of the staring contrariety of our practice to our profession, anent the eldership, that did not excite his pity and cause him to blush for the party attempting to defend it. It is greatly to be regretted that at the last union the united Church perpetuated the superiority of teaching elders by enjoining that neither a Presbytery, nor a Synod, nor an Assembly, can be constituted unless they form the majority, and that no session can be constituted unless a teaching elder preside. And consuetude or custom forbids any ruling elder occupying the moderator's chair in the other courts of the Church. These things sadly blur our otherwise Bible-sanctioned Presbyterianism. There is work awaiting the younger and more enlightened teaching elders in our Church. It is for them to rid her policy and practice of everything that savours of priestly domination. God's Word, the spirit of the age and their own honour, demand this.

Sept. 6th, 1881. AN AGED TEACHING ELDER.

### SUSTENTATION FUND.

BY REV. JOHN LAING, M.A.

It is matter for congratulation that the best method of doing something more than we have been able to accomplish in the past for the sustentation of the ministry, is to come before the Presbyteries for consideration. The last General Assembly appointed a committee "to draw up a detailed scheme for the adequate support of the ministry, with the overture on this subject and the scheme for a sustentation fund, to be taken into consideration for their guidance in the matter." The Assembly also resolved "to