

OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

HOME LIFE IN INDIA.—VII.

BY M. FAIRWEATHER.

The house of an ordinary well-to-do farmer, who works, say, from thirty to forty English acres of land, differs little in its appearance and furnishings from that of any town dwelling, except that it may be more commodious. Imagine two squares of mud wall, one placed within the other, angle to angle, a distance of six or eight feet being left between them on every side. The inner wall is slightly the lowest, so as to afford drainage when the roofing of tiles, thatch, or bamboo and mud is laid upon them. The space enclosed by the inner wall is a perfectly open courtyard. But one entrance only leads from the street and communicates, not ordinarily with a room, but with this inner courtyard. It is secured at night by heavy folding doors, swung on strong wooden hinges, and fastened at the bottom by ring, chain and padlock of iron. The roofed portion is divided into rooms of larger or smaller dimensions, with a small door from each opening on this inner verandah. There are no windows in the house, properly so called, but sometimes a square opening of about a foot and a half is made in one of the larger rooms, into which a frame is set, but instead of glass it has simply bars of wood or iron sufficiently close together to prevent a thief from getting a hand too far in.

A wide verandah runs entirely around the courtyard supported upon slender bamboo pillars, and from the outer edge of it are suspended screens, or rather curtains, of fine bamboo cane laced loosely but evenly together with hempen cord. These screens are usually nine feet square, and are dyed either green or red and yellow. They are rolled up or let down as convenience or a desire for greater privacy dictates. In one corner of this inner courtyard is the cess-pool where the whole filth of the house is thrown, and from which is no drainage, so that in the hot weather the stench which arises is both sickening and deadly, and still worse during the cold season because the evaporation is less rapid. The women wash the floors and walls within and without with a mixture of cows' manure and water which produces a yellowish colour not unpleasant to look upon, and the odour from which soon evaporates. It is far more restful to the eyes in the intense glare than whitewash could possibly be. Such is, I think, an *average* picture of a common well-to-do home, the Indian "woman's kingdom." Here it is the zenana teacher is received and gives her lessons, her pupils meanwhile seated upon grass mattings or lounging upon calico cushions stuffed with cotton, in all possible attitudes, sometimes graceful, sometimes not so much so.

The furnishings of an Indian home are not extensive. Rude bedsteads of light wood, unpainted mostly, are laced with fine cord until a sort of rough cloth, in diamond patterns, is obtained, and which is both cool and elastic. They serve as lounges during the day and seats if it is so preferred, when not in use they are very commonly stood up on end against a wall. They have no *made up* beds as with us, nor do they disrobe at night, but in the cold weather each person wraps around himself a thick cotton-wadded quilt, and so lies down to rest *as well as may be*, because when stillness and dreams begin their reign, then issue forth from every crack and corner legions of hungry bed-bugs, whose custom it is to carry their cannibal revelry through the entire night, secured from vengeance by the superstitions of their victims, who, for fear of bad-luck should they destroy the body into which may have crept some very fractious mortal, never attempt to kill them. I have often wondered whether by any mystic subtlety they were conscious of their advantages in this respect. It so often seemed they were so. Many, therefore, prefer the ground, rather risking centipedes, scorpions and red ants, than endure the torments of monotonous *nips* and more dignified quarters.

Ladies of almost all ranks and in all parts of the country spin cotton, so that the *wheel* is quite an institution in the home. It is quite a small machine, and very like that used for spinning flax in many parts of Scotland. Although rude in its construction, yet in the delicate and dexterous fingers of our Indian ladies it is sufficient to prepare from the rough cotton the fine thread of which is woven the famous muslins of Dacca, Shantipoor and Vicrampoor, as

well as the coarser and commoner fabrics from which the family are clothed. Everywhere, and for ages, have these manufactures been noted. Mr. Mill, in his report to the House of Lords in 1830, says: "Whatever may have been the attainments in this art of other nations of antiquity, the Egyptians, for example, whose fine linen was so eminently prized, the manufacture of no modern nation can, in delicacy and fineness, vie with the textures of Hindustan." When asked whether he deemed this superiority due to the cotton or the soil from which it is grown, he replied, attributing the whole secret to the *spinning* by hand, which from its moisture lent greater tension than could be possible with machinery. He says, "A fine yarn can be produced by hand-spinning from short-staple cotton which frame-spinning will not touch at all." Milburn says, "India maintains her superiority in the finer kinds of muslins, some of which are of most exquisite beauty and fineness. The common kinds are also preferred, on the score of enduring greater hardships, and retaining their whiteness better; and in respect to the coloured or prohibited goods for the foreign markets, they will always retain their superiority."

Every house has its chest or strong box. The profits of the farmer are usually divided into three parts, one is secreted somewhere in the ground, no one but the farmer himself being cognizant of its whereabouts, except, perhaps, *the wife*. If sudden death from natural causes or accident should overtake a man who had no confidant, his treasure hidden in the field would be lost until perhaps some day an accident should reveal it. The second portion of his wealth is invested in ornaments of gold and silver jewellery for his wife and children, of pure metal almost unalloyed. The remainder is deposited in the box for present use: they are no believers in banks. A farmer must be well-off indeed before he can have much money to store away after he pays the Government one-fourth his crops in taxes, another fifth of the whole being demanded by the native priesthood for their maintenance. This does not include the expense incurred in feasting the Brahmins on the occasion of births, deaths or marriages in the family.

The dishes are made either of brass or copper, and are purchased by weight at so much per seer—nearly two pounds English. To keep these bright and shining is the delight of a thrifty Hindu housekeeper. The cooking is done in the verandah or courtyard upon a chula or small portable fireplace of mud in the shape of a horse-shoe, upon which the brass cooking vessel is set. The fuel is cows' manure baked into flat round cakes with a little straw and clay, and dried in the sun; it burns with a dull red light, giving out a dense smoke and distressing odour. This is the work of the *women*, the *aged and infirm men* and the *children* of the house. They gather the manure, bake it and dry it for use, if there is more than supplies the need of the family, the pieces are stacked and tied with rope into bundles of fifty or one hundred, and the women mount them upon the head and sell them in the streets of the town or village nearest at hand.

A large brass candlestick is also a household furnishing peculiar in its way. It stands upon the ground. The pillar is not unlike that of our own only it is much larger, and upon the top is a shallow spreading basin perhaps six inches in diameter, into the edges of which are cut six or eight notches. This basin is filled with cocoanut oil, and wicks of cotton thread twisted into cord are protruded over the edge of the notches. When these are all lighted a very good illumination indeed is secured in an ordinary sized room.

Last, but not least, is the hand mill for grinding the grain into flour, which is especially the work of the women. Two flat stones turning one upon another with a pleasant sound, and usually accompanied by the singing of a ballad, a baby's lullaby or a hymn in praise of some favourite deity, to tunes *strangely half-familiar* to any one who has listened to the songs of peasant women in secluded districts of the north of Scotland.

AGED AND INFIRM MINISTERS' FUND.

MR. EDITOR,—In your last PRESBYTERIAN I notice several articles on the subject of the "Aged and Infirm Ministers' Fund." As I feel interested in it myself, perhaps you will insert a very short article on the subject.

If each and every minister of the Presbyterian Church in Canada would pay his rate in accordance

with the rules of the Fund, and on or before the first of October in each year, and if each and every minister would explain the meaning of the annual collection for said Fund to his people a fortnight before the collection, I am pretty confident the Fund would soon be in a flourishing condition. It is one of the most important schemes of our Church, and has been one of the worst supported from the very beginning. Reference is made in one article to ministers in towns getting only five hundred dollars per annum. Many years ago at a large meeting of elders of the Presbyterian Church of Canada, it was unanimously recommended by them to the Synod, then in session, to place or induct no minister with a smaller stipend than six hundred dollars per annum; and, if I remember rightly, either a manse or allowance for house rent. But the brethren in the ministry, although approving of the recommendation, did not act upon it. As to the hints to rich men, etc., rich men very naturally say, if the ministers neglect their own duties they can't expect other people to be very zealous in their cause. The Convener of the Committee is an excellent convener, but except at the meeting generally held at the opening of the session at Knox College in October, the attendance of the other members of Committee may average two or say three members. I trust that, under the good hand of God, the Fund may prosper this year and be more generously supported than hitherto.

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THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND BURIAL SERVICE.

A short time ago a young woman named Hamilton was buried in St. James's Cemetery, Toronto, who, according to the "Globe," was in her lifetime "notorious among the worst classes in the community." Of course the burial service of the Church of England was read over her corpse. It would not have been had she died unbaptized or excommunicated, or taken away her own life. Yet her being unbaptized might have been no fault of hers. She might have been wrongfully excommunicated. She might have taken away her own life while she was not an accountable agent. But she was a notoriously vile woman. The Bible repeatedly says of the class of which she was one of the worst, that not one shall enter into heaven. We have no evidence whatever that she went to Him who—as Whitefield once said—is willing to take in even the devil's castaways. The burial service referred to was, however, read over her, and so she was sent to heaven. She was buried "in the sure and certain hope of a glorious immortality." "God took our dear sister to Himself." It may be said that perhaps she did truly repent before she left the world. As far as the reading of the service was concerned, it would have been the same if she had died as she lived. It is used at the burial of the most depraved as well as of the most devout, provided only that neither one or other of the three things mentioned at the beginning of this article be true of them. No wonder that a poor ignorant man once said when he heard it read at the burial of his sister, "I was so pleased to hear it, for she was such a bad liver."

Metis, Que.

HIS EXCELLENCY AND THE NINTH COMMANDMENT.

"What!" the reader will no doubt exclaim when he sees the heading of this article, "His Excellency has already been charged with breaking the fourth commandment. Is he now charged with breaking the ninth also?" If he did not break the former he is breaking the latter. Some say that we must not criticise his late Sabbath trip over the Intercolonial Railway till we hear what he has to say for himself. Well, as yet, he has kept perfectly silent on the subject. If he can defend that act, it is high time that he did. It is absurd to suppose that he is quite ignorant of the unfavourable view of it which many take, for according to that theory he has not looked into a Canadian newspaper since the Sabbath referred to. A Christian friend of mine, a member of another denomination, wrote to him on the subject, but received no answer. No doubt this was not the only letter of the kind which he received. Now, according to the Shorter Catechism of the Church of which the Marquis of Lorne is a member, one thing which the ninth commandment requires is "the