

## GIRL LIFE IN INDIA.

By A ZENANA MISSIONARY.

How varied are the surroundings amid which *THE GIRL'S OWN PAPER* is perused by its multitude of readers! While numbers are reading it around English fire-sides, others are enjoying it in the height of an Australian summer, and others again in a burning tropical clime. Let us look at some of these last on "India's coral strand," and when we have made acquaintance with our English and Eurasian,\* or Indo-British, sisters there, we will go on to visit the less-favoured native girls of the same land, millions of whom are spending lives strangely different from our own under the sway of the same sovereign.

Suppose that we land at Bombay, that vast and beautiful city. We drive from the pier for about a mile across a grassy plain called the Esplanade, intersected by broad avenues shaded by stately trees, many of which in the hot season are aglow with flowers of crimson and orange, called "May" by Bombay girls. We then turn into a densely-populated native quarter, but just as we do so we catch sight of some English texts in the windows of a corner shop; this is the depot of the Tract and Book Society, and if we step in we may find *THE GIRL'S OWN PAPER*, and the *Sunday at Home* and *Leisure Hour* on the counter, with other well-known periodicals and English books, side by side with a host of vernacular publications; and we may meet some of the young ladies of whom we are in quest purchasing books or selecting birthday and Christmas cards as in a bookseller's shop at home. Passing, on we

traverse a long and winding road with native and Chinese shops at each side, many of the houses being of several stories in height, and singularly ornamented with carved and painted woodwork. Presently the dwellings stand back from the road in gardens, and here and there are ugly temples, where of an evening a bell rings the hideous idol's lullaby. By-and-by we are altogether in a region of bungalows or villas surrounded by compounds;\* we then ascend a hill, gaining lovely views of the palmy shores of a glorious bay.

In one of the houses in this delightful situation we receive a warm welcome from an English family whose daughters have just come out from home, where they received their education. We find their home-life much like our own, excepting that they cannot in the middle of the day take a turn in the garden, or go out on some little errand, unless in a carriage. They take evening drives, or walk and ride very early in the morning. Alas! how sad it is that few of the ladies in such homes give any thought to the poor native women around, for whom they might do so much. Did it ever occur to you that there could be English girls who have never seen snow in the winter, nor primroses in the spring, and who have no idea of the autumnal glory of our woods? Yes, there are many born in India who know nothing of these things, because their parents, from not being wealthy or for other reasons, have not sent them to pass their early years in their native land. For these and for the numerous other English-

speaking girls of all classes there are schools in the large cities, and at hill-stations, while at Calcutta and elsewhere some are trained as zenana missionaries. If you were to look in upon these girls at their studies, you would find much the same lessons going on as in a schoolroom at home, only that more attention is paid to the history and geography of India, and that you would see in some of the atlases the map of Asia placed before that of Europe.

Now we must look at a darker picture—girl-life among the natives; and we will first take the case of a Hindu. At her birth great lamentations are expressed at her not being a boy. Female infanticide was formerly practised to a frightful extent, but it is now prohibited by the English Government. There are indirect ways, however, of letting girls "cease to live," without throwing them into the river as of yore; infant mortality has been noticed to be greater among girls than boys, because the latter are so much more tenderly cared for in sickness.

A poor little girl may be happy for the first few years of her life, and she can do much as she pleases, for her mother will indulge her as much as possible, reflecting what a dreary lot hers must afterwards be. She must be married, however, at the age of five or six, perhaps earlier, and never later than twelve, lest her father should be excommunicated for not having done his duty. The bridegroom may be also young in years, but very often he is a middle-aged or an old man who has lost his wife and cannot take another of a suitable age owing to the pernicious customs which oblige every Hindu girl to be married

so young, and prevent widows from re-marrying. The wedding is a succession of feasts and processions; the poor little bride is carried about in a palanquin or on a horse, and the first time she sees her future husband is during the ceremony. I have read of a doll being put into the palanquin to amuse a child-bride. Matches are always arranged as matters of business between families without consulting the couple to be wedded, and enormous sums are spent on marriages. One reason why sons are preferred to daughters is that such large dowries have to be given with the latter.

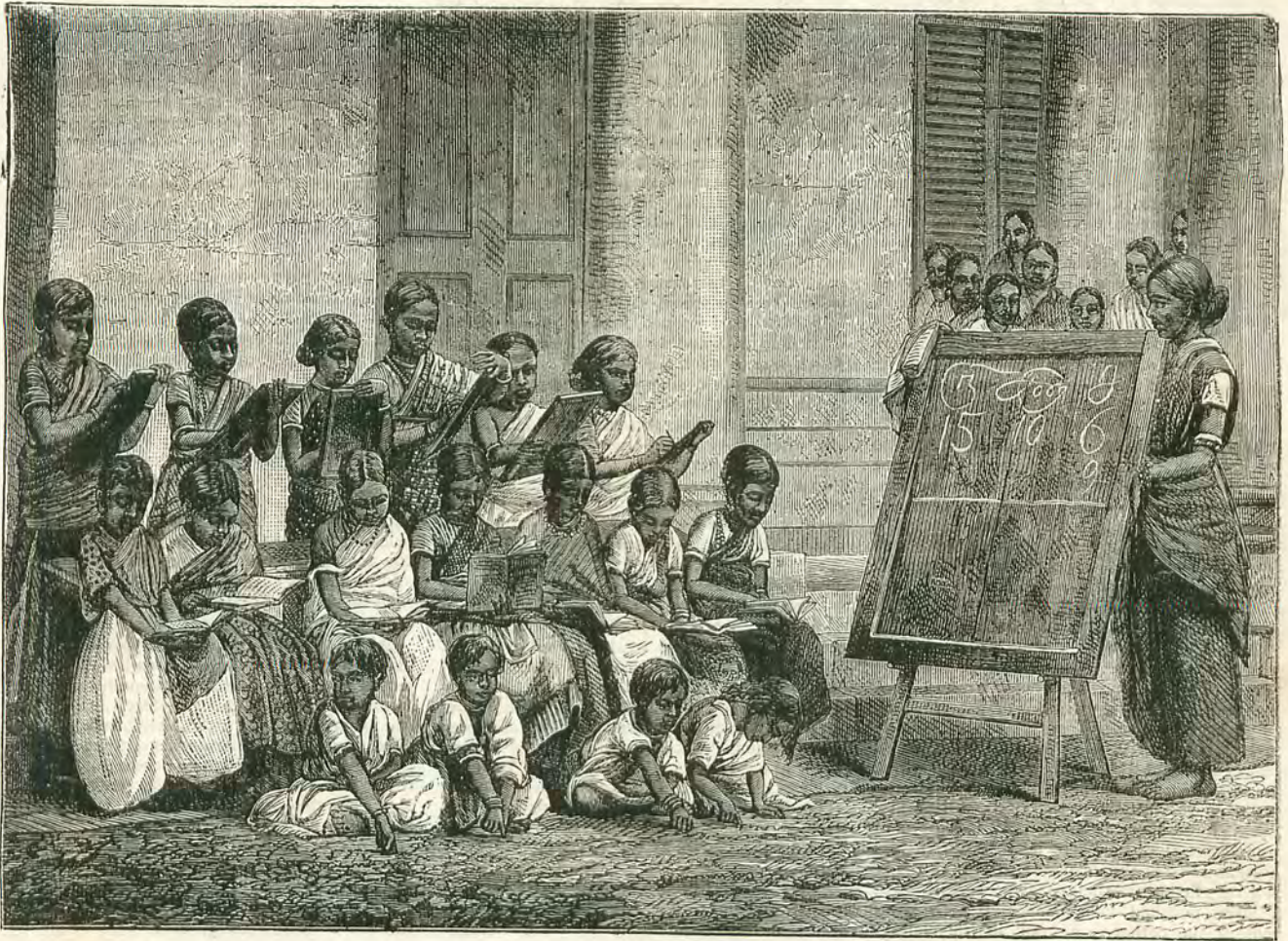
After the grand doings are over the little bride pays at intervals long visits to her mother-in-law, who is not, as a rule, very kind to her. At length comes the time when she must be under her tyranny for good. It is the custom for each son to bring his wife to his father's house, where his mother rules over the company of daughters-in-law, sometimes called bows, who live with her in the women's apartments, or zenanas. These rooms are usually most comfort-



THE FORMER METHOD OF LETTING GIRL INFANTS "CEASE TO LIVE."

\* Eurasian means of partly European and partly Asiatic descent.

\* Compound is corrupted from "campagna," and meant in the original Portuguese "a country house;" now it is used in the sense of "garden."



A GIRLS' SCHOOL.

less, even in the household of a very wealthy man, who furnishes the rest of his mansion in a sumptuous style.

These poor young bows have very little to occupy their time; they were taught neither to read nor to sew until of late years missionary ladies have found their way into zenanas. Their chief employment is cooking, and they play some few games, plait their luxuriant hair elaborately, deck themselves with jewels, perform pooja or worship, take part in weddings and idolatrous festivals, and enjoy the gossip of their solitary visitor, the barberess, and the tales she relates, which are generally of a class to poison their minds. They never sit down at a meal with their husbands, much less with the other gentlemen of the family, whom they are never allowed to see after their marriage. They are literally imprisoned in their zenanas, never going out for air or exercise, save on exceptional occasions in a carriage with the shutters so carefully closed that they can see nothing. I have heard of a Hindu girl who did not know what a tree or a butterfly was, and of another who had not visited her sister's house in the same city.

All this is bad enough, but when a girl ever so young becomes a widow, her condition is far worse. Instead of loving sympathy she has hard words of blame, for it is considered to be her sins that have incensed the gods to take away her husband. She cannot, under British rule, be burned with his body—that might have atoned for her wickedness, and the only thing she can do is to suffer a life-

long penance. Her beautiful dresses and jewels are taken away, her long hair is cut off, she is dressed and treated as a menial, allowed only one meal daily, and on certain days is obliged to fast entirely, not taking even a draught of water in that torrid heat; it is inculcated on her companions that whoever gives her a drop risks the loss of her own husband by so sinful an act!

What sad lives are these! and no hope lies beyond which might render them tolerable. No, their highest hope is that by good deeds they may obtain the supreme felicity of being transmigrated into that sacred animal the cow!

I have been describing the life of a Hindu girl of the upper or of the middle class. The poor, amid all their privations, have more liberty; but among them, too, the custom of early marriage prevails, which is a great drawback in teaching even those who can be gathered into mission schools, for they have to leave so early. I wish you could look in on such a school, and see the bright little scholars arrayed in all sorts of brilliant colours, with garlands of yellow and white jessamine encircling the glossy plaits coiled at the back of the head. How these little ones delight in singing hymns set to English tunes as well as to their own quaint melodies! One of their native airs is familiar to children at home, who often sing it to the words of "There is a happy land."

Even poor children are not allowed to walk alone to school; they have generally to be

brought. Sad to say, it is not a rare thing to hear of little ones being murdered for the sake of the jewels which they wear. The poorest women and girls (and boys too) may be seen with heavy anklets and numerous bracelets and earrings; sometimes there are six rings in one ear, and none in the other, one side of the face being covered by the *sari*, a piece of cloth several yards in length, arranged so as to form skirt, mantle, and veil in one. I have heard of a single earring as a gift, and this may explain why Eliezer presented only one to Rebekah, if our translation of the word is correct; some think it should be nose-ring, an ornament likewise worn by some of the women of India. One jewel worn in the ear is of a pattern which would be sought in vain in any jeweller's shop at home, and is of a truly barbarous description; it is a large stud inserted into a buttonhole in the ear, which is kept open by a piece of stick when the ornament is removed.

Some of the favourite names for girls are those of precious stones, such as *Heera* (diamond), *Maneck* (ruby), *Motee* (pearl), *Rutna* (emerald), and there are also *Sona* (gold) and *Rupa* (silver). Oh, that all the bearers of such names knew the Pearl of great price, and might be numbered among the Lord's jewels! Some of those who read these lines may be deliberating on the purchase of some new ornaments; could they not deny themselves in this matter and lay out their money to better account in winning Indian gems for their Saviour? I am thankful to say that

many have already been won to Him, and that there is a large and increasing class of native Christian girls, among whom are many well-educated young ladies. Scattered over the country are many missionary orphanages and normal schools, and from these many light-bearers go forth to dark homes around; but such girls can hardly be counted by hundreds, while there are millions of heathen.

Much of what has been said above applies equally well to the Mohammedan women, although those of the particular class that I am best acquainted with at Bombay enjoy greater liberty, and the word *zenana* does not properly apply to their homes, neither do they marry so very early as a rule. They lead very monotonous lives, however, only a few enjoying such a break in them as the weekly visit of an English lady; for what can some half-a-dozen *zenana* missionaries do in a population of seven or eight hundred thousand in one city alone? These *bibis* (ladies) are very particular in observing their hours of prayer, but they use only vain forms, and do not know that God is love, nor do they realise that as sinners they have need of a Saviour. The floor of a *bibi's* room is generally covered with China matting, which is much used in India instead of carpets. An extra piece, or a mat of some kind, often of carpet manufactured for the purpose, is spread in an assigned portion of the room as the prayer-mat, and a visitor may be asked not to tread on this with shoes on. The *bibis* themselves and their servants drop their shoes at the door of the room, although they often wear worked slippers within. A singular kind of pattern may often be seen among shoes at the threshold; it is formed of a wooden sole with small feet below, and it is kept on by a peg which goes between two of the toes. Around the walls of the room are ranged couches and piles of cushions covered with white, and sometimes chairs. There may be cupboards also, and two or three large chests, and a swing is a very favourite article of furniture, formed of a large polished board suspended by brass rods at the corner to a hook in the ceiling. When a *bibi* goes out to some festivity, she is gorgeously attired in a silk or satin skirt, with a jacket and a flowing veil of different brilliant hues, all spangled with gold. Underneath the veil the hair is festooned in countless plaits, among which strings of pearls may be twined. She is conveyed in a close carriage, and, as a double precaution against her being seen, she is muffled up in a large black or white veil, which covers her entirely, excepting that she can peep out through a hole left for the eyes. Some women are allowed to walk in the streets if they put on such veils. The *bibi's* hands and feet are stained red with henna, and one may sometimes see her teeth also of a bright vermilion tint, as she is fond of eating *pan-sopari*, a preparation of betel nut, which she rolls up in tiny triangular packets made of pieces of leaf, and keeps in a box like a jewel-case, with lock and key.

These *bibis* work most beautifully with gold and silver thread, or fine wire, and they are fond of learning crochet patterns for the gold lace with which they trim the round velvet or cashmere caps worn by their little girls before they put on veils. They also like to make infants' boots and jackets of fine wool, for the little ones are sensitive to cold even in such a hot country; very trying winds prevail at times. THE GIRL'S OWN PAPER has been carried by the writer into a *zenana* to teach a *bibi* the pattern of a jacket depicted in it, and I think you would have admired the tiny garment when worn by a dear little girl of olive complexion.

Favourite Mohammedan names are Zaina, Zobeida, Fatima, Latifa, Maryam, *i.e.*, Miriam, which is the same as Mary. The term "*bibi*"

is attached to each name thus, "Maryambibi," but when the Virgin Mary is spoken of the words are transposed to "*Bibi Maryam*."

I cannot tell you much of the Mohammedan ladies in other places than Bombay, but I know that they are usually very strictly secluded in *zenanas*, a Persian word properly belonging to those of this religion, and which they introduced into India.

Parsee girls are much in advance of Hindus and Mohammedans in respect of education, but they are equally ignorant of the light of the Gospel. This intelligent race, who came originally from Persia, have schools of their own for their girls, and a desire for higher education is increasing among them. Their ladies dress in silken saris of the most lovely tints, bordered with a kind of crewel-work. Their hair is bound up in a white handkerchief which comes over the forehead; they always wear this from a superstitious idea that without it evil spirits would have power over them. They believe in one supreme god, Hormuzd; but they also hold the divine nature of Ahroman as the creator of evil. They worship the elements, especially fire, as manifestations of Hormuzd. A Parsee girl likes to have a nicely-bound prayer-book, out of which she recites words which she does not in the least understand in a dead language called Zend. A pretty Parsee name is Serene, meaning "sweet" "*Bai*" is added like "*bibi*." There are Jewish girls, too, in India, some wealthy and educated, others very poor. All learn to read Hebrew, but it is not considered necessary that they should understand it. All the Bible names are common among them, and in addition, Flor, a name which, in the form of Florida, seems to have been exclusively that of Jewesses in Europe in the Middle Ages.

To one more class of Indian girls I will introduce you, and this is a very small one indeed; it consists of the few who are emulating young ladies in Great Britain by passing university examinations; they are mostly reformed Hindus. Several at Calcutta, among them some native Christians, have obtained the degree of B.A., and at Madras and elsewhere there are students of medicine. It will be a great boon to the women of India, whose lack of proper medical attendance is lamentable, when there are more lady doctors and trained nurses, both European and native. A few have already gone out from America, as well as from England. A wide door of missionary effort is open to all who will devote themselves to this work, and in entering it there can be no question of trenching on the province of medical men, for the poor ladies shut up in *pardah*, or seclusion, must have medical women to attend them, or be left without doctors, for a gentleman could not be admitted into a *zenana*. There is a story that on one occasion an English physician was called in by the husband of a rich lady; this doctor would not content himself with descriptions of her symptoms at second-hand, and insisted on seeing his patient's tongue, whereupon a slit was made in a curtain that she might put it through for him to look at!

Now, dear girls, I have not been telling you all this simply to entertain you; I want to interest you for a higher purpose, that you may do what you can for the poor Indian girls who are without your advantages.



## USEFUL HINTS.

**TO KEEP STEEL ORNAMENTS IN GOOD ORDER.**—Procure from a builder's yard a piece of quicklime, break it and roll it with a rolling-pin, put it in a box, and keep your ornaments in it; when wanted for wear, give them a shake and brush. We know of steel combs and brooches that have been in wear for 20 years; they have always been kept in lime, and are still as bright as when they were new. A good-sized piece of lime costs twopence.

**WHITE SOUP WITH PARMESAN** (Excellent).—Take three pints of white stock, made from the liquor in which a leg of mutton, a couple of chickens, or a couple of rabbits have been boiled, and be sure that the stock is free from fat; put it in an enamelled stewpan to boil. Boil separately four ounces of macaroni which has been broken into inch lengths. Mix in a basin a tablespoonful of flour with a gill of cream, and add the yolks of three eggs. Pour the boiling stock gradually upon the eggs, etc., return the whole to the saucepan, and stir it over the fire till it thickens, but do not allow it to boil. Add the macaroni, turn the soup into the tureen, add a pinch of cayenne, and, last of all, three tablespoonfuls of grated Parmesan.

A GOOD many people have a difficulty in utilising pieces of broken bread. An excellent way of using them is to employ them in thickening BROWN SOUP. Dry the crusts in the oven till they are brightly browned, then crush them to powder and pass them through a wire sieve so as to make them smooth and free. Stir them into a stewpan with as much water as they will thicken (say two quarts) and keep stirring till they are incorporated. Add five or six good sized onions and a little pepper and salt, and simmer gently for an hour and a half. Melt a little dripping in a stewpan, fry in this a carrot (cut up small), a turnip, a little celery, and some chopped parsley; sprinkle on them a pinch of savoury herbs, and add whatever agreeable flavouring ingredients there are to be had. Melt an ounce of butter, mix smoothly with it an ounce and a half of flour, and moisten with half a pint of the soup, add the fried vegetables, and boil all together till the carrots, etc., are tender. Press the whole through a sieve, make hot once more, and serve.

## ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS.

### EDUCATIONAL

**ELEANOR ROSS** (South Africa).—You may enter various hospitals as a probationer without paying for admission or training. At the Middlesex Hospital, Mortimer-street, W., probationers begin with a Salary of £12, rising to £18 the second year, and after that by £2 yearly up to £24. At St. Thomas's, Albert Embankment, S.W., pupils are trained as Nightingale probationers for one year, receiving £10, board, and uniform. During three years, after completion of training, they are required to take situations as hospital nurses, at a usual commencing salary of £20.

**A NEGLECTED ONE.**—Write a copy of a few lines daily from a good small round-hand copy-book, and look out every word in a dictionary about which you are uncertain; and continue to read our paper.

**CIGARETTE.**—You do not tell us what your age is, but you would not be received for training as a nurse at any hospital under the age of twenty-five, excepting in the Children's Hospital in Great Ormond-street, where they are received at twenty-one. Certainly no young girl, even were she trained, should be allowed to nurse men on a battle-field.

**NORTH OF IRELAND GIRL.**—You would not be received into any hospital unless your health were really good, as much strength is needed for the arduous work of nursing. 2. Try to improve your writing, and you may be able to get employment in a shop.