

The Woman's Missionary Society.

[This Department is in the interests of the W. M. Society. All communications for it should be addressed to Mrs. Ios. McLeod, Fredericton.]

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THE WOMEN OF INDIA.

Intellectual, Social and Religious Conditions.

The current number of the *Missionary Review of the World* has an article from the pen of Mrs. J. T. Gracey, secretary of the W. F. M. Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, on the above topic, which is one of the most instructive, interesting and stimulating articles on the subject we have read for some time. It is too long to reproduce in the INTELLIGENCER at one time but we quote part of it now, and will publish more later, and probably the whole of it:

India is aglow with abundant potentialities for the future, said Dr. Curzon in his elegant address at the late Durbar in the city of Delhi. The entire country is stirred as never before with awakened ideals, and into the dry bones and dead formalities of centuries is coming the breath of a new and vigorous life. A Christian government and Christian missionaries for years have been sowing the seeds of great reforms in social, religious and intellectual life, and India is slowly but surely breaking away from the dead past. These reforms are permeating society at every point, resulting in a great internal conflict which, with resistless force, is undermining old false faiths and modifying many social customs.

Much of the agitation in the past twenty-five years has been in connection with the conditions and elevation of India's women, for these conditions have been the great plague-spot of the country; they have called for prompt and decisive action on the part of the British government, which has sought to abolish certain of these abuses.

During the period of which we speak there has set in a current of native opinion which is vigorous and influential; many leading men are advocating some very radical changes. It is a step far in advance when a prominent Hindu on the platform has the courage to say: "Every social evil to which India is subject has its root in the low position assigned woman;" or when another says, "The doom of God is resting on Hindu society for its cruelty to child widows."

The women of India are the victims of a most complicated and oppressive social system, a false religion, and debasing idolatry. Macaulay said, "In no part of the world has a religion existed more unfavorable to the moral and intellectual health of our race than in India." The awful facts of woman's degradation in connection with her so-called religion is difficult to make known. Their superstitious fear keeps them in a constant round of propitiatory rites, and the evils they forecast must be averted by works of merit. In the early history of the country, women were not kept either in ignorance or

seclusion. Some were so highly cultured as to compose Vedic hymns. The pernicious system of early marriages did not prevail, nor was woman condemned to suttee, nor to suffer the miseries of perpetual widowhood. But there came a change. Priestly authority became more fully established, and rules concerning woman's position and relation to religious rites were multiplied. Then followed the Mohammedan conquest, which completed her degradation. The loose marriage laws by these conquerors, as well as their habit of enriching their harems with women obtained by force, necessitated their seclusion, and hence dense ignorance followed. Caste, the great formidable obstacle, influences every phase of a woman's life. It destroys all tender, sympathetic feeling, and is a barrier to the highest development. Differing castes may not eat or drink together, intermarry or intermingle. For a high caste woman to accept Christianity is to doom her to social ostracism. The low caste woman is free to go out, and has some opportunities to hear the gospel. The high caste woman, if she hears it, must hear it in her own home. She welcomes the zenana teacher often, but not because of the message she carries, but because it is the breath of another atmosphere, a touch veritably from another world. The long, long weary day is pent in the round of household duties, comparing jewels, discussing trifles, with little to do, nothing to see, nothing to learn, nothing to hope for, nowhere to go, no one to expect; without books, papers, or magazines, no music, no pictures—conditions surely neither helpful nor ennobling. These women, as a general thing, are intensely superstitious, and staunch supporters of all idolatrous customs. Occasionally they go to festivals, but always protected from the gaze of the public. They are permitted to bathe and wash away their accumulated sins. These festivals often present fine opportunities for missionary work. The missionary women are usually in attendance at these gatherings, and invite the women to call at their tents, which are pitched in a grove near by. From curiosity they will flock to the place, and stay to hear the Message. "We are only cattle, how can we understand?" say they; but light penetrates the darkness, interest deepens, and they return to their homes often with new hopes, new thoughts, and the beginnings of a new life.

Every agency is being utilized to win the women over from the false to the true. Every little village school held under a tree or on a veranda, every city school, every normal school, every boarding school, every school for higher education, is a power which is undermining the great structure of heathenism and transforming character. A missionary of my acquaintance tells of attending a meeting in a little chapel, which was crowded to its utmost capacity. The girls from one of the schools attended. After the opening exercises the pastor called on one of the girls to lead in prayer. And such a prayer! The language was almost entirely Scriptural, yet so simple and practical as she poured out her heart in thankfulness for all blessings. Every one was impressed. My friend asked the history of the girl, and was told that she had been left a mere skeleton, starving, at the mission gate. She had come almost ready to die, and in the densest ignorance of heathen darkness. "She is now," said the pastor, "one of the brightest students in our school, and the leader of spiritual life among the pupils."

The medical missionary is doing a

great work in India, and the record of this branch of Christian work in the past twenty-five years is simply marvellous. No more important agency was established in the past century.

The Lady Dufferin movement, which has extended all over India; the establishment in 1894 of the North India School of Medicine for Christian Women, where the students are taught entirely by women; the admission of women to the medical colleges; the training of hospital assistants, nurses, etc., many of whom are working alone in different places, treating thousands of patients; the Lady Curzon effort to provide a fund for the training of nurses as a memorial to the late queen—all these are movements fraught with great possibilities for the future of India's women. A medical missionary recently writing from India says: "I was called a few months since to see one of the wives of a prince, and had the opportunity of seeing a harem in which between one and two thousand women live, and to which the prince is the only man having admittance. It was an interesting but sad experience."

Every hospital and dispensary, every visit of a physician, and every prescription given is an object-lesson of the power and influence of Christian love. An India paper commenting on a successful operation performed by a lady physician, said, "The age of miracles is not passed, for Jesus Christ is still working miracles through the women physicians."



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TEXAS.

The great State of Texas has been almost captured by the prohibitionists. Three-fourths of the State is said to be under local-option law, excluding all liquor. The counties that are either wholly or largely "dry" represent a total population of 2,218,039, while the "wet" counties represent only 725,825.



Deaths.

NASON.—At Fredericton Junction, on the 15th ult., of heart failure, Wesley Nason, in the 59th year of his age. Mr. Nason was one of the prominent citizens of the place. While not a member of the church, he was its warm friend. We shall miss him in his wise counsel and financial support. To the family—a wife and several children—we offer our deepest sympathy. J. B. D.

WILBER.—At Berry's Mill's, Westmorland Co., April 23, of old age, Mrs. Rubie Wilbur, relict of the late John Wilbur, aged 83 years. One son, John Johnson, and one daughter, Mrs. William Johnson, survive her. Deceased was a member of the Free Baptist church, and died trusting in Jesus. Funeral services by the writer. W. H. FERRY.

BRANSCOMBE.—At Pollet River Platform, at the residence of Mr. James Branscombe, on April 13, Sarah, relict of the late Stephen Branscombe, aged 95 years. Funeral services by the writer. W. H. FERRY.



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