THE WEB OF INDIAN LIFE

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BY THE SISTER NIVEDITA
(MARGARET E. NOBLE) OF
RAMAKRISHNA-VIVE
KANANDA

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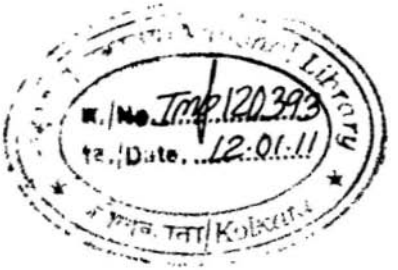

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NIVEDITA,
Of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda.

CHAPTER I

THE SETTING OF THE WARP

A HOUSE of my own, in which to eat, sleep, and conduct a girls' school, and full welcome accorded at any hour of day or night that I might choose to invade the privacy of a group of women friends hard by: these were the conditions under which I made my entrance into Hindu life in the city of Calcutta. I came when the great autumn feast of the Mother was past; I was there at the ending of the winter, when plague broke out in our midst, and the streets at night were thronged with seething multitudes who sang strange litanies and went half mad with religious excitement; I remained through the terrific heat, when activity became a burden, and only one's Hindu friends understood how to live; I left my home for a time when the tropical rains had begun, and in the adjoining roads the cab-horses were up to their girths in water hour after hour.

What a beautiful old world it was in which I spent those months! It moved slowly, to a different rhythm from anything that one had known. It was a world in which a great thought or intense emotion was held as the true achievement, distinguishing the day as no deed could. It was a world in which men in loin-cloths, seated on door-sills in dusty lanes, said things about Shakespeare and Shelley that some of us would go

far to hear. It was full of gravity, simplicity, and the solid and enduring reality of great character and will.

From all round the neighbourhood at sunset would come the sound of gongs and bells in the family-chapel of each house, announcing Evensong. At that same hour might the carpenter be seen censing his tools, or the schoolboy, perhaps, his inkstand and pen, as if thanking these humble creatures of the day's service; and women on their way to worship would stop wherever a glimpse of the Ganges was possible, or before a bo-tree or tulsi-plant, to salute it, joining their hands and bowing the head. More and more, as the spirit of Hindu culture became the music of life, did this hour and that of sunrise grow to be the events of my day. One learns in India to believe in what Maeterlinck calls "the great active silence," and in such moments consciousness, descending like a plummet into the deeps of personality, and leaving even thought behind, seems to come upon the unmeasured and immeasurable. The centre of gravity is shifted. The seen reveals itself as what India declares it, merely the wreckage of the Unseen, cast up on the shores of Time and Space. Nothing that happens within the activity of daylight can offer a counter-attraction to this experience. But then, as we must not forget, the Indian day is pitched in its key. Tasks are few, and are to be performed with dignity and earnestness. Everything has its aureole of associations. Eating and bathing—with us chiefly selfish operations—are here great sacramental acts, guarded at all points by social honour and the passion of purity. From sunrise to sunset the life of the nation moves on, and the hum of labour and the clink of tools rise up, as in some vast

monastery, accompanied by the chanting of prayers and the atmosphere of recollectedness. The change itself from daylight to darkness is incredibly swift. A few fleecy clouds gather on the horizon and pass from white, maybe, to orange and even crimson. Then the sun descends, and at once we are alone with the deep purple and the tremulous stars of the Indian night. Far away in the North, hour after hour, outlines go on cutting themselves clearer against the green and opal sky, and long low cliffs grow slowly dim with shadows on the sea. The North has Evening: the South, Night.

Tropical thunderstorms are common through April and May at the day's end, and the terrible convulsion of Nature that then rages for an hour or two gives a simple parallel to many instances of violent contrast and the logical extreme in Indian art and history. This is a land where men will naturally spend the utmost that is in them. And yet, side by side with the scarlet and gold of the loom, how inimitably delicate is the blending of tints in the tapestry! It is so with Indian life. The most delicate *nuance* and remorseless heroism exist side by side, and are equally recognised and welcomed, as in the case of a child I knew—a child whose great grandmother had perhaps committed suttee—who ran to his mother with the cry, "Mother! Mother! save me from Auntie! She is beating me with her eyes!"

The foundation-stone of our knowledge of a people must be an understanding of their region. For social structure depends primarily on labour, and labour is

necessarily determined by place. Thus we reach the secret of thought and ideals. As an example of this we have only to see how the Northman, with his eyes upon the sun, carries into Christianity the great cycle of fixed feasts that belongs to Midsummer's Day and Yule, approximately steady in the solar year; while the child of the South, to whom the lunar sequence is everything, contributes Easter and Whitsuntide. The same distinction holds in the history of Science, where savants are agreed that in early astronomy the sun elements were first worked out in Chaldea and the moon in India. To this day the boys and girls at school in Calcutta know vastly more about the moon and her phases than their English teachers, whose energies in this kind have been chiefly spent in noting the changes of shadow-length about an upright stick during the course of day. Evidently Education—that process which is not merely the activity of the reading and writing mill, but all the preparedness that life brings us for all the functions that life demands of us —Education is vitally determined by circumstances of place.

The woman pausing in the dying light to salute the river brings us to another such instance. There is nothing occult in the passion of Hindus for the Ganges. Sheer delight in physical coolness, the joy of the eyes, and the gratitude of the husbandman made independent of rain, are sufficient basis. But when we add to this the power of personification common to *naives* peoples, and the peculiarly Hindu genius of idealism, the whole gamut of associations is accounted for. Indeed, it would be difficult to live long beside the Ganges and

not fall under the spell of her personality. Yellow, leonine, imperious, there is in her something of the caprice, of the almost treachery, of beautiful women who have swayed the wills of the world. Semiramis, Cleopatra, Mary Stuart, are far from being the Hindu ideal, but the power of them all is in that great mother whom India worships. For to the simple, the Ganges is completely mother. Does she not give life and food? To the pious she is the bestower of purity, and as each bather steps into her flood, he stoops tenderly to place a little of the water on his head, craving pardon with words of salutation for the touch of his foot. To the philosopher she is the current of his single life, sweeping irresistibly onward to the universal. To the travelled she tells of Benares and the mountain snows, and legends of Siva the Great God, and Uma Himavutee, mother of all womanhood. Or she brings memories of the Indian Christ and His youth among the shepherds in the forests of Brindaban on her tributary Jumna. And to the student of history she is the continuity of Aryan thought and civilisation through the ages, giving unity and meaning to the lives of races and centuries as she passes through them, carrying the message of the past ever into the future, a word of immense promise, an assurance of unassailable certainty. But with all this and beyond it all, the Ganges, to her lovers, is a person. To us, who have fallen so far away from the Greek mode of seeing, this is difficult perhaps to understand. But living in a Calcutta lane the powers of the imagination revive; the moon-setting becomes again Selene riding on the horse with the veiled feet; Phœbus Apollo rising out of one angle of a pediment

is a convincing picture of the morning sky; and the day comes when one surprises oneself in the act of talking with earth and water as conscious living beings. One is ready now to understand the Hindu expression of love for river and home. It is a love with which the day's life throbs. "Without praying no eating! Without bathing, no praying!" is the short strict rule to which every woman at least conforms; hence the morning bath in the river is the first great event of the day. It is still dark when little companies of women of rank begin to leave their houses on foot for the bathing-stairs. These are the proud and high-bred on whom "the sun has never looked." Too sensitive to tolerate the glance of passers by, and too faithful to forego the sanctifying immersion, they cut the knot of both difficulties at once in this way. Every moment of the ablution has its own invocation, and the return journey is made, carrying a brass vessel full of the sacred water which will be used all day to sprinkle the place in which any eats or prays.

Their arrival at home finds already waiting those baskets of fruits and flowers which are to be used in worship; for one of the chief acts of Hindu devotion consists in burying the feet of the adored in flowers. The feet, from their contact with all the dusty and painful ways of the world, have come to be lowliest and most despised of all parts of the body, while the head is so sacred that only a superior may touch it. To take the dust of the feet of the saints or of an image, therefore, and put it upon one's head, is emblematic of all reverence and sense of unworthiness, and eager love will often address itself to the "lotus-feet" of the beloved. Amongst my own friends, health

forbade the bathing before dawn, and poverty did not allow of the visit to the river in closed palkee every day. But half-past nine or ten always found the younger women busy bringing incense and flowers and Ganges water for the mother's "puja," as it is called: and then, while she performed the daily ceremonies, they proceeded to make ready the fruits and sweets which were afterwards to be blessed and distributed.

It is interesting to see the difference between a temple and a church. The former may seem absurdly small, for theoretically it is simply a covered shrine which contains one or other of certain images or symbols, before which appropriate offerings are made and prescribed rituals performed by duly appointed priests. The table is only properly called an altar in temples of the Mother; in other cases it would be more correct perhaps to speak of the throne, since fruit and flowers are the only sacrifices permitted. So it is clear that the Eastern temple corresponds to that part of the Christian church which is known technically as the sanctuary. The worshipper is merely incidental here; he sits or kneels on the steps, and pays the priest to perform for him some special office; or he reads and contemplates the image in a spirit of devotion. The church, on the other hand, includes shrine and congregation, and has more affinity to the Mohammedan mosque, which is simply a church with the nave unroofed.

Temples are not very popular in Bengal, every house being supposed to have its chapel or oratory, for which the ladies care, unless the family be rich enough to maintain a chaplain. Even the services of a

Brahmin in the house or neighbourhood, however, will not dispense them from the offering of elaborate personal puja before the morning meal can be thought of. I can never forget a reproach levelled at myself on this point.

It was my first morning in a Hindu home. I had arrived at dawn, tired and dusty after days of railway travel, and had lain down on a mat spread on the floor, to sleep. Towards eight o'clock, the thought of my tea-basket brightened my despair, and I turned eagerly to open and secure its refreshment. Suddenly a little boy stood before me like a young avenging angel. His great brown eyes were full of pain and surprise such as only a child's face ever adequately shows. He did not know much English and spoke deliberately, laying terrible emphasis on each word, "Have—you—said—your—prayers?" he said.

It is a little strange, during the rains, to have to take an umbrella to go upstairs, but without my two courtyards in the middle of the house the hot weather would have been insupportable in Calcutta. These make the Eastern home, by day, a cave of all winds that blow, and at night a tent roofed in by the starry universe itself. No one who has not experienced it can know quite what it means to return in the evening and open the door upon the sky and stars that one is leaving without. The Indian night is in itself something never to be forgotten. Vast and deep and black it seems, lighted by large soft stars that throb and gleam with an unknown brilliance, while the stillness is broken only by some night-beggar who chants the name of God in the distant streets, or by the long-

drawn howl of the jackals crying the quarters of the night across the open plain. Even the moonlight itself, with the palm-trees whispering and throwing ink-black shadows, is not more beautiful than these solemn "dark nights," when the blindness and hush of things brood over the soul with their mighty motherhood.

Just as the housewives of some European university town in the Middle Ages would feel responsible for the welfare of the "poor scholar," so to the whole of Hindu society, which has assimilated in its own way the functions of the university, the religious student is a common burden. Where he is, there is the university, and he must be supported by the nearest householders. For this reason, I being regarded as a student of their religion, my good neighbours were unfailing of kindness in the matter of household supplies. Perhaps the most striking instance of this lay in the fact that when I was to have a guest I had only to say so, and friends in the vicinity would send in a meal ready-cooked, or the necessary bedding, without my even knowing the names of those to whom I owed the bounty. And with all this, there was no question as to the course of my study or the conclusions I was reaching—no criticism, either, of its form. They simply accorded to a European woman the care they were accustomed to bestow on the ashen-clad ascetic, because they understood that some kind of disinterested research was her object also, and they knew so well that the management of affairs was no part of the function of the scholar. What do we not read of the depth of a culture that is translated and re-applied with such ease as

this? And what do we not learn of the intellectual freedom and development of the people?

Few things, even in Indian life, are so interesting as this matter of the social significance of the beggar. That distaste for property which we see in such lives as Kant's and Spinoza's resolves itself readily in the Indian climate into actual destitution. Shelter and clothing are hardly necessities there: a handful of rice and a few herbs such as can be obtained at any door are alone indispensable. But everything conspires to throw upon such as beg the duty of high thinking and the exchange of ideas with their supporters. Hence the beggar makes himself known by standing in the courtyard and singing some hymn or prayer. He comes always, that is to say, in the Name of God. There is a whole literature of these beggars' songs, quaint and simple, full of what we in Europe call the Celtic spirit. In his lowest aspect, therefore, the Indian beggar is the conserver of the folk-poetry of his country. Where his individuality is strong, however, he is much more. To the woman who serves him he is then the religious teacher, talking with her of subjects on which she can rarely converse, and in this way carrying the highest culture far and wide.

It is said that the deep familiarity of Punjabi women with Hindu philosophy is the result of the strong recrudescence of the characteristic national charity under Runjeet Singh. When we think of the memories that would linger behind such a visitor—the man whose whole face spoke knowledge, standing at the door one noon and asking alms—we come upon a trace of the feeling that paints the Great God as a beggar.

It is droll to find that the whole city is parcelled out into wards, each of which is visited regularly on a given day. My days were Wednesday and Sunday, and going out one of these mornings about nine, I was fortunate enough to catch the whole procession coming up the lane. Men and women they were, elderly for the most part, but hale and well, with their long staffs in the right hand, and metal or wooden bowls in the left—amongst the most cheerful human beings I ever saw. The fact of this regular division of the city puts the affair at once on the basis of a poor-rate (of which we have none in India), and shows that in ways appropriate to themselves the Hindu people are as able organisers as any. It may be that in Western cities the workhouse is a necessary solution, but certainly this Indian distribution of want over the wealthier community, with its joining of the act of giving to the natural sentiment, seems a good deal less mechanical and more humane than ours. It is very amusing sometimes to see how tenacious people are of their own superstitions. I have seen an English woman made really unhappy because an Indian beggar would not accept a loaf she bought and handed to him, while he would have been very thankful for the money that it cost. The donor and her friends were in despair at what they regarded as utterly impracticable. Yet to the onlooker it seemed that the obstinacy was on their own side. In England we are warned that alcohol is a constant temptation to the poor and ill-fed; it is better, therefore, to give food than money. In India, on the other hand, there is no risk whatever on this score; for not one man in a hundred ever tasted liquor, and at the same time a Hindu beggar at least

may not eat bread made with yeast, or baked by any but Hindus of his own or better caste. Now the offering made in this case was of yeast-made bread, baked by a Mohammedan, and handled by a Christian! To the poor man it was evident that the lady was willing to give; why should she load her gift with impossible conditions? And for my own part I could but echo, why?

Among the quaintest customs are those of the night-beggars. These are Mohammedans, but all fields are their pasture. They carry a bowl and a lamp as their insignia of office. It is common amongst these gentlemen to fix on a sum at sunset that they deem sufficient for their modest wants, and to vow that they shall know no rest till this is gathered. As the hours go on, therefore, they call aloud the balance that remains; and persons coming late home or watching by the sick are often glad to pay the trifle and gain quiet. Yet there is something weird and solemn in waking from sleep to hear the name of Allah cried beneath the stars in a kind of Perpetual Adoration.

Like a strong tide beating through the months, rise and fall the twelve or thirteen great religious festivals, or Pujas. Chief of them all, in Bengal, is the autumn Durga-Puja, or Festival of the Cosmic Energy. A later month is devoted to the thought of all that is gentle and tender in the Motherhood of Nature. Again it is the Indian Minerva, Saraswati, who claims undivided attention. Those who have lived in Lancashire will remember how the aspect of streets and cottages is changed towards Simnel Sunday. Every window is decorated with cakes, and every cake bears

a spirited picture in comhts of some coaching or other local scehe. And everywhere, with us at Christmas-time, the shops are gay with holly and mistletoe, so that there is no mistaking the time of year. Similarly, in Calcutta, as each puja comes round, characteristic articles appear in the bazaars. At one time it is hand screens made of beetles' wings and peacocks' feathers, and every shop and every pedlar seems to carry these beautiful fans. Through September and October, as the Durga-Puja approaches, the streets resound with carols to the Mother. But the most charming of all is the Farewell Procession with the Image.

For no image may be kept more than the prescribed number of days, usually three. Up to the evening before the feast it is not sacred at all, and any one may touch it. Then, however, a Brahmin, who has fasted all day, meditates before the figure, and, as it is said, "magnetises" it. The texts he chants are claimed to be aids to the concentration of his own mind, and to have no other function. When the image has been consecrated it becomes a sacred object, but even then it is not actually worshipped. Its position is that of a stained-glass window, or an altar-piece, in an Anglican church. It is a suggestion offered to devout thought and feeling. On the step before it stands a brass pitcher full of water, and the mental effort of the worshipper is directed upon this water; for even so, it is said, does the formless Divine fill the Universe. It would seem that the Hindu mind is very conscious of the possibility that the image may thwart its own intention and become an idol; for not only is this precaution taken in the act of adoration, but it is directed that at the end of the puja it shall be conveyed

away and thrown bodily into the river! On the third evening, therefore, towards sunset, the procession forms itself, little contingents joining it from every house in the village as it passes the door, each headed by one or two men bearing the figure of the god or goddess, and followed by the children of the family and others. It is a long and winding march to the Ganges' side. Arrived there, the crown is carefully removed, to be kept a year for good luck; and then, stepping down into the stream, the bearers heave up their load and throw it as far as they can. We watch the black hair bobbing up and down in the current for awhile, and then, often amid the tears of the children, turn back to the house from which a radiant guest has departed. There is quietness now where for three days have been worship and feasting. But the tired women are glad to rest from the constant cooking, and even the babies are quickly cheered, for it will be but a month or two till some new festival shall bring to them fresh stores of memory.

The great decorum of Oriental life is evident when one has to come or go through a Hindu city in the evening. Doorways and windows are flanked with broad stone benches, and here, after the evening meal, sit numbers of men in earnest conversation. But any woman is safe in such a street. Not even the freedom of a word or look will be offered. As Lakshman, in the great Epic, recognised among the jewels of Sita only her anklets, so honour demands of every man that he look no higher than the feet of the passing woman; and the behest is so faithfully observed that on the rare occasions when an Indian woman may

need to undergo the ordeal I have known her own brother to let her go unrecognised. For one need not say that women do now and then slip out on foot at nightfall, accompanied by a maid bearing a lamp, to enjoy an hour's gossip in some neighbour's house. We are all familiar with the powers of criticism of quiet women who never strayed into the great world, or saw more than the view from their own thresholds would reveal. What is true in this respect of the Western cottage is true also of the Eastern zenana. Woman's penetration is everywhere the same. Her good breeding makes everywhere the same demands. On one occasion I had the misfortune to introduce into my Indian home a European whose behaviour caused me the deepest mortification. But the ladies sat on the case when she had gone, and gravely discussed it in all its bearings. Finally it was gently dismissed with the remark, "she was not well-born." On another occasion I came in one evening at the moment of some distinguished friend's arrival. Such was the *empressement* of her reception, the warmth of the inquiries after her health and so on, that I felt myself to be certainly an intrusion. But a quiet hand detained me when I would have slipped away. "Wait," said the Mother, "till I have finished, for I haven't the least idea who she is!"

There were, however, certain practical difficulties in the life. It had taken some time, in the first place, to discover a house that could be let to an Englishwoman; and when this was done it was still a few weeks before a Hindu caste-woman could be found who would be my servant. She turned up at last, however, in the person

of an old, old woman, who called me "Mother," and whom I, at half her age, had to address as "Daughter" or "Jhee." This aged servitor was capable enough of the wholesale floodings of the rooms which constituted house-cleaning, as well of producing boiling water at stated times for the table and the bath. For some reason or other she had determined in my case to perform these acts on condition that I never entered her kitchen or touched her fire or water-supply. Yet hot water was not immediately procurable. And the reason? We possessed no cooking-stove. I asked the price of this necessary article, and was told six farthings. Armed with this sum, sure enough, my trusty retainer brought home a tile, a lump of clay, and a few thin iron bars, and constructed from these, with the greatest skill, the stove we needed.

It took some days to set and harden, but at last the work was complete. Afternoon tea, prepared under my own roof, was set triumphantly before me, and my ancient "daughter" squatted on the verandah facing me, with the hot kettle on the stone floor beside her, to see what strange thing might come to pass. I poured out a cup of tea and held out the pot to Jhee for more hot water. To my amazement she only gave a sort of grunt and disappeared into the inner courtyard. When she came back, a second later, she was dripping with cold water from head to foot. Before touching what I was about to drink she had considered a complete immersion necessary!

How happy were those days in the little lane! how unlike the terrible pictures of the Hindu routine which, together with that of the Pharisees in the New Testa-

ment, had embittered my English childhood! Constant ablutions, endless prostrations, unmeaning caste-restrictions, what a torture the dreary tale had been! And the reality was so different! My little study, with its modern pictures and few books, looked out on the cheeriest of neighbours. Here, a brown baby, with black lines under his eyes, and a gold chain round his waist, carried in triumph by his mother or nurse; there, some dignified woman, full of sweetness, as a glance would show, on her way to the bathing-ghat; again, a quiet man, with intellectual face and Oriental leisure; and, above it all, the tall palm-trees, with little brown villages and fresh-water tanks nestling at their feet, while all kinds of birds flew about fearlessly just outside my window, and threw their shadows across my paper as I wrote. The golden glow of one's first sensation suffuses it still. It was all like a birth into a new world.

One evening, as I prepared for supper, a sound of wailing broke the after-darkness quiet of the lane, and making my way in the direction of the cry, I entered the court-yard of some servants' huts, just opposite. On the floor of the yard a girl lay dying, and as we sat and watched her, she breathed her last. Hours went by, and while the men were away at the burning-ghat, making arrangements for the funeral-fire that would be over before dawn, I sat with the weeping women, longing to comfort them, yet knowing not what to say. At last the violence of their grief had exhausted them, and even the mother of the dead girl lay back in my arms in a kind of stupor, dazed into forgetfulness for awhile. Then, as is the way of sorrow, it all swept

over her again, in a flood of despair. "Oh!" she cried, turning to me, "what shall I do? Where is my child now?"

I have always regarded that as the moment in which I found the key. Filled with a sudden pity, not so much for the bereaved woman as for those to whom the use of some particular language of the Infinite is a question of morality, I leaned forward. "Hush, mother!" I said, "your child is with the Great Mother. She is with Kali!" And then, for a moment, with memory stilled, we were enfolded together, Eastern and Western, in the unfathomed depths of consolation of the World-Heart.

CHAPTER II

THE EASTERN MOTHER

THESE eighteen centuries has Europe been dreaming of the idyll of the Oriental woman. For Asia is one, and the wondrous Maiden of all Christian art, from the Byzantines down to yesterday—who is she, of what is she aware, save that she is a simple Eastern mother? Of what fasts and vigils are we told in her case, that she should have known herself, or been known, as Queen of Saints? A rapt humility, as of one whose robe was always, indeed, her veil; a touch of deep silence, and that gracious richness of maternity which we can infer from the full and rounded sweetness of the Child who grew within her shadow—what more do we know of the Blessed Virgin than these things?

What more we may desire to know we can learn in the East itself—in India as well as anywhere. For in the period before Islam had defined itself, overflowing Chaldea with the impulse, perhaps, of the pastoral life become aggressive, to re-make the desert—in the days when Palestine and Lebanon were cultivated lands, inhabited by peasants of the early type, not as yet made a burnt-offering on the altar of crusading fury, in the closing centuries of the pre-Christian era—the common life of Syria had a still wider identity with that of Hindus than it has to-day. The ceremonial

washings of Pharisees and Sadducees, the constant purifying of the cup and platter, the habitual repetition of a single name or prayer, which some later phase of the Christianising consciousness has stigmatised as "vain"—these things were not *like*, they *were*, what we know to-day as Hinduism, being merely those threads of the one great web of Asiatic life that happened to touch the Mediterranean coast.

And in matters so fundamental as the relation of mother and child, religious teachers come only to enforce the message of the race. Is it not said by the prophet himself that the man who kisses the feet of his mother finds himself in Paradise?

Yet how frail and slight and young is often the mother so tenderly adored! No Madonna of the Sistine Chapel can give that lofty purity of brow or delicate untouched virginity of look of any one of these Hindu mother-maidens, whose veil half covers, half reveals, as he rests on her left arm, her son!

The picture is too central to Indian life to have demanded literary idealising. Poetic and mythological presentments of the perfect wife there are in plenty: of motherhood, none. Only God is worshipped as such by men and children and by mothers themselves as the Holy Child! Here the half pathos of Western maternity, with its perpetual suggestion of the brood-hen whose fledglings are about to escape her, is gone, and an overwhelming sense of tenderness and union takes its place. To one's mother one always remains a baby. It would be unmanly to disguise the fact. And yet for her sake most of all it is needful to play the man, that she may have a support on which to lean in the hour of darkness and need. Even a wife has

no power to bring division between a mother and her son, for the wife belongs almost more to her husband's mother than to himself. There can, therefore, be no jealousy at the entry of another woman into his life. Instead of this, it is she who urges the marriage; every offering is sent out in her name; and the procession that wends from the bridegroom's house to the bride's some few days before the wedding, bearing unguents and fragrant oils for the ceremonial bath, carries her loving invitation and good will to the new and longed-for daughter.

Even in Indian home life, then, full as this is of intensity of sweetness, there is no other tie to be compared in depth to that which binds together the mother and her child. With the coming of her first-born, be it boy or girl, the young wife has been advanced, as it were, out of the novitiate. She has become a member of the authoritative circle. It is as if the whole world recognises that henceforth there will be one soul at least to whom her every act is holy, before whom she is entirely without fault, and enters into the conspiracy of maintaining her child's reverence.

For there are no circumstances sufficient in Eastern eyes to justify criticism of a mother by her child. Their horror of the fault of Gertrude is almost exaggerated, yet Hamlet's spell is invariably broken when he speaks of the fact. To him, her sin should be sacred, beyond reproach; he ought not to be able to think of it as other than his own.

The freedom and pleasantries of filial sentiment in the West are thus largely wanting in that of the East. A determined stampede of babies of from three to six may, indeed, take place day after day through the

room where their mother is at prayer. There may even be an attempt at such an hour to take the city by assault, the children leaping vociferously on the back of that good mother, whose quiet of conscience depends, as they well know, on her perfect silence, so that she can punish them only by turning towards them the sweetest of smiles. "Why, mother," said her family priest to one who appealed to him regarding devotions interrupted thus, "the Lord knows that you are a mother, and He makes allowance for these things!" But though, in the Oriental home, the wickedness of five years old may find such vent as this, the off-hand *camaraderie* that learns later to dub its parents "mater" and "governor" suggests a state little short of savagery, and the daughter who permits herself to precede her father is held guilty of sacrilege. The tenderness of parents corresponds to this veneration of children, and we only learn the secret of feelings so deep-rooted when we find that every child is a nursling for its first two years of life. Consciousness and even thought are thus awakened long before the closest intimacy is broken, and a dependence that to us of the West is but a vague imagination, to the Eastern man or woman is a living memory.

How completely this may become an ingrained motive we see in the case of that Mogul Emperor who is remembered simply as "the Great." For Akbar had a foster-brother in the Rajput household whither his father Humayum had fled before his birth and where his first six years of life were passed. Akbar's mother dying, the Rajput Queen took the babe to nurse with her own son, and brought up the boys in this respect as brothers, though the guest

was a Mussulman of Tamerlane's descent, and her own the proudest Hindu blood on earth. Events swept the children apart in boyhood, and, destiny fulfilling itself, he who came of a race of conquerors ascended the throne of Delhi, after many years, as Emperor of India. Then he found his Rajput subjects difficult indeed to subjugate. In them, the national idea renewed itself again and again, and insurrection followed insurrection. There was one name, moreover, in every list of rebels, and men wondered at the indulgence with which the august ruler passed it by so often. At last some one ventured to point it out, protesting that justice must surely be done now. "Justice, my friend!" said the lofty Akbar, turning on his counsellor, "there is an ocean of milk between him and me, and that justice cannot cross!"

This long babyhood creates a tie that nothing can break. The thoughts and feelings of womanhood never become ridiculous in the eyes of the Indian man. It is no shame to him that his mother could not bear a separation; it is right and natural that he should be guided by this wish of hers. None but the hopelessly degraded ever reacts against woman's weakness in active cruelty. If one asks some hard worker in his old age to what he owes his habit of industry or his determined perseverance over detail, it is more than likely that his reply will take us back to his infancy, and the wishes that a young mother, long dead, may have expressed for him. Or the man, in perplexity as to the course he should pursue, will go as naturally as a child, to test his question in the light of her feminine intuition. In all probability, she is utterly unlearned, but he knows well the directness

of her mind, and judges rightly that wisdom lies in love and experience, having but little to do with letters.

Surely one of the sweetest happenings was that of a little boy of six who became in later life extremely distinguished. His mother, too shy to express the wish for instruction to her learned husband, confided in her son, and day after day he would toddle home from the village school, slate and pencil in hand, to go once more through his morning's lesson with her, and so, with mutual secrecy, she was taught to read by her own child! With almost all great men in India the love of their mothers has been a passion. It is told of a famous Bengali judge who died some twenty-five years ago—one whose judicial decisions were recorded and quoted, even by the Englishmen who heard them, as precedents in English law, it is told of this man, when on his deathbed, that his mother stumbled and hurt her foot on the threshold of his room one morning, as she came after bathing to visit him. Another moment, and, weak as he was, he had crept across the floor, and lay before her, kissing the wounded foot again and again, and bathing it in hot tears of self-reproach for the pain it suffered. Such stories are remembered and repeated in Indian society, not because they occasion surprise, but because they make the man's own name holy. The death scene with Aase would redeem Peer Gynt himself. None who is sound in this basic relationship of life can be altogether corrupt in the rest, nor can his decisions, however adverse, be completely repugnant to us. How curious are the disputes that agitate Christendom as to the sentiment one may fittingly indulge towards the

mother of a beloved Son! Is her supreme position in His life not self-evident? What, then, could be more convincing of union with Him than sweetness of feeling and words of endearment addressed to her? And so, with its wonderful simplicity, the great heart of the East sweeps aside our flimsy arguments and holds up to us the fact itself.

But it is not the great alone who worship motherhood in India. Never can I forget the long hours of one hot March day, when I sat by the bedside of a boy who was dying of plague. His home was of the humblest, a mud hut with a thatched roof. His family were Sudras, or working-folk. Even his father, it appeared, could not read or write. The boy was eleven or twelve years of age, an only child, and he was doomed. The visitor's sole real usefulness lay in taking precautions against the spread of the disease.

Amongst the veiled and silent women who came and went at the other side of the little court where the boy lay, was one who slipped noiselessly to his bedside whenever she could, and exposed herself to the infection with a recklessness born of ignorance. At last I attempted to reason with her, urging her, as gently as I could, to remain at some distance from the lad, and thus avoid the danger for herself and others.

She turned to obey without a word, but as she went the tears poured down her poor thin cheeks, and lifting the corner of her sari to wipe them away, she tried to stifle the sobs she could not altogether repress. At that moment the words reached me from the doorway, "She is his mother." What I did can be imagined. Suddenly I discovered that the boy must

be fanned and that there was a place behind his pillow, out of the line of the air current. Here, with his head almost resting on her feet, his mother sat henceforth, crouched up, attending to her child through happy hours.

Often he would grow delirious, and forget her presence. Then he would toss his head from side to side, and his fever-lighted eyes stared blankly at me, while he uttered his one cry, "Ma! Ma Mataji!—Mother! mother! *honoured* Mother!" To my Western ears it seemed a strange cry for a child of the slums! Sometimes, as memory returned, he would smile at me, mistaking me for her, and once he snatched at my hand and then carried his own to his lips. Sweet, unknown mother, forgive me these thefts of love, that rent the veil from a graciousness so perfect, an adoration so deep!

That day, alas, was their last together. All through the hours, the child had struggled to repeat the name of God. Late in the afternoon he stumbled on a hymn that was much sung at the time about the streets; but he could not say it, and it was my part to take up the words and stand repeating them beside him. A smile of relief passed over his face; he lay quiet for a moment. Then his breath came shorter and shorter, and as the sun set, with his mother's eyes upon his face, he died.

Of such stuff as this are the teeming millions of the Hindu people made. In moments of mortal agony, when Western lips would frame a prayer, perhaps half an oath, the groan that they utter is ever the cry of the child in its deepest need, "Oh, Mother!

But it is easy to multiply instances. What we

want is that epic of motherhood, of which each separate mother and her child are but a single line or stanza, that all-compelling imagination of the race, which must for ever be working itself out through the individual.

We talk glibly of Dante's "Vision of Hell." How many of us have looked into hell, or even seen it from afar off, that we should appreciate what it means to descend there? When the gloom of insanity falls upon the soul so that it turns to rend and destroy its dearest and best, when the blight of some dread imagination covers us with its shadow, is it lover, or child, or servant, who will still find in our maimed and maleficent presence his chiefest good? There is One indeed whom we cannot imagine as forsaking us. One whose will for us has been the law of righteousness, and yet for whose help we shall cry out instinctively in the moment of the commission of a crime. And like the love of God in this respect is, to Hindu thinking, that of a mother. Transcending the wife's, which may fluctuate with the sweetness bestowed upon it, the mother's affection, by its very nature, grows deeper with deep need, and follows the beloved even into hell. A yearning love that can never refuse us; a benediction that for ever abides with us; a presence from which we cannot grow away; a heart in which we are always safe; sweetness unfathomed, bond unbreakable, holiness without a shadow—all these indeed, and more, is motherhood. Small wonder that the innermost longing of every Hindu is to find himself at home in the Universe, with all that comes thereby of joy or sorrow, even as a baby lying against its mother's heart! This is the dream that is called Nirvana,

Freedom. It is the ceasing from those preferences that withhold us that is called Renunciation.

The very word "mother" is held to be sacred, and good men offer it to good women for their protection. There is no timely service that may not be rendered to one, however young or beautiful, by the passing stranger, if only he first address her thus. Even a father, looking at some small daughter, and struggling to express the mystery of futurity that he beholds in her, may address her as "little mother." And the mother of the nation, Uma Himavutee, is portrayed always as a child, thought of always as a daughter of the house. In motherhood alone does marriage become holy; without it, the mere indulgence of affection has no right to be. This is the true secret of the longing for children. And to reach that height of worship in which the husband feels his wife to be his mother, is at once to crown and end all lower ties.

Who that has ever watched it can forget a Hindu woman's worship of the Holy Child? A small brass image of the Baby Krishna lies, or kneels at play, in a tiny cot, and through the hours of morning, after her bath and before her cooking, the woman, who may or may not herself be wife and mother, sits offering to this image flowers and the water of the bath, fruits, sweets, and other things—her oblations interspersed with constant acts of meditation and silent prayer. She is striving to worship God as the Child Saviour, struggling to think of herself as the Mother of God. She is ready enough to give her reason, if we ask her. "Does my feeling for my children change according to what they do for me?" she questions in return: "Even so should one love God. Mothers love most those who

need most. Even so should one love God." The simple answer is worth a world of theology. Nor is it forgotten presently that the other children, made of flesh and blood, and answering to her call, are likewise His images. In every moment of feeding, or training, or play, of serving or using or enjoying, she may make her dealing with these an act of devotion. It was her object, during the hours of worship, to come face to face with the Universal Self. Has she done this, or has she brooded over the ideal sentiment till she has made of herself the perfect mother?

By her child, again, her intention can never be doubted. She may turn on him now a smile and then a face of sorrow, now a word of praise and again an indignant reproach. But always, equally, she remains the mother. The heart of hearts of her deed is unfailing love. She knows well, too, that nothing her babies do can mean anything else. The sunny and the petulant, the obedient and the wilful, are only seeking so many different ways to express a self-same dependence. To each she accords the welcome of his own nature. In such a reconciliation of opposites, in such a discovery of unity in variety, lies the whole effort and trend of Eastern religion.

For what thought is it that speaks supremely to India in the great word "Mother"? Is it not the vision of a love that never seeks to possess, that is content simply to *be*—a giving that could not wish return: a radiance that we do not even dream of grasping, but in which we are content to bask, letting the eternal sunshine play around and through us?

And yet, and yet, was there ever an ideal of such strength as this, that was not firm-based on some form

of discipline? What, then, is the price that is paid by Hindu women for a worship so precious? The price is the absolute inviolability of marriage. The worship is, at bottom, the worship of steadfastness and purity. If it were conceivable to the Hindu son that his mother could cease for one moment to be faithful to his father —whatever the provocation, the coldness, or even cruelty, to which she might be subjected—at that moment his idealism of her would become a living pain. A widow remarried is no better in Hindu eyes than a woman of no character, and this is the case even where the marriage was only betrothal, and the young fiancée has become what we know as a child-widow.

This inviolability of the marriage tie has nothing whatever to do with attraction and mutual love. Once a wife, always a wife, even though the bond be shared with others, or remain always only a name. That other men should be only as shadows to her, that her feet should be ready at all times to go forth on any path, even that of death, as the companion of her husband, these things constitute the purity of the wife in India. It is told of some wives with bated breath, how, on hearing of the approaching death of the beloved, they have turned, smiling, and gone to sleep, saying, "I must precede, not follow!" and from that sleep they never woke again.

But if we probe deep enough, what, after all, is purity? Where and when can we say it is, and how are we to determine that here and now it is not? What is there sacred in one man's monopoly; or if it be of the mind alone, how can any physical test be rightly imposed?

Purity in every one of its forms is the central

pursuit of Indian life. But even the passion of this search grows pale beside the remorseless truthfulness of Hindu logic. There is ultimately, admits India, no single thing called purity: there is the great life of the impersonal, surging through the individual, and each virtue in its turn is but another name for this.

And so the idea of the sanctity of motherhood, based on the inviolability of marriage, finds due and logical completion in the still greater doctrine of the sacredness of religious celibacy. It is the towering ideal of the supersocial life—"As Mount Meru to a fire-fly" compared to that of the householder—which gives sanction and relation to all social bonds. In proportion as the fact of manhood becomes priesthood, does it attain its full glory; and the mother, entering into the prison of a sweet dedication, that she may bestow upon her own child the mystery of breath, makes possible in his eyes, by the perfect stainlessness of her devotion, the thought of that other life whose head touches the stars.

CHAPTER III

OF THE HINDU WOMAN AS WIFE

Of the ideal woman of the religious orders the West to-day has very little notion. Teresa and Catherine are now but high-sounding names in history; Beatrice, a true daughter of the Church, is beloved only of the poets; and Joan of Arc, better understood, is rightly felt to be by birth the nun, but by genius the knight. Yet without some deeper sense of kindred with these it will be hard to understand a Hindu marriage, for the Indian bride comes to her husband much as the Western woman might enter a church. Their love is a devotion, to be offered in secret. They know well that they are the strongest influence, each in the other's life, but before the family there can be no assertion of the fact. Their first duty is to see that the claims of others are duly met, for the ideal is that a wife shall, if that be possible, love her husband's people as she never loved her own; that the new parents shall be more to her than the old; that she can bring no gift into their home so fair as a full and abundant daughterhood and a confirmation of their supreme place in their son's love. Both husband and wife must set their faces towards the welfare of the family. This, and not that they should love each the other before all created beings, is the primal intention of marriage. Yet for

the woman supreme love also is a duty. Only to the man his mother must stand always first. In some sense, therefore, the relation is not mutual. And this is in full accordance with the national sentiment, which stigmatises affection that asks for equal return as "shopkeeping." When her husband is present or before honoured guests the young wife may not obtrude herself on the attention of her elders. She sits silent, with veil down, plying a fan or doing some little service for the new mother. But through the work of the day she is a trusted helpmeet, and the relation is often very sweet. Nothing is so easy to distinguish as the educational impress of the good mother-in-law. Dignity, with gaiety and freedom, is its great feature. The good breeding of the Hindu woman is so perfect that it is not noticed till one comes across the exception—some spoilt child, perhaps, who as heiress or beauty has been too much indulged; and her self-assertiveness and want of restraint, though the same behaviour might seem decorous enough in an English girl of her age, will serve as some measure for the real value of the common standard.

It is not merely in her quietness and modesty, however, that the daughter-in-law betrays good training. She has what remains with her throughout life—a *savoir faire* that nothing can disturb. I have never known this broken; and I saw an extraordinary instance of it when a friend, the shyest of orthodox women, consented to have her photograph taken for one who begged it with urgency. She stipulated, naturally, that it should be done by a woman. But this was found to be impossible. "Then let it be an Englishman," she said with a sigh, evidently shrinking

painfully from the idea of a man, yet feeling that the greater the race-distance the less would be the impropriety. The morning came, and the Englishman arrived, but in the Indian gentlewoman who faced him there was no trace of self-consciousness or fear. A superb indifference carried her through the ordeal, and would have been a sufficient protection in some real difficulty.

All the sons of a Hindu household bring their wives home to their mother's care, and she, having married her own daughters into other women's families, takes these in their place. There is thus a constant bubbling of young life about the elderly woman, and her own position becomes a mixture of the mother-*suzeraine* and lady abbess. She is well aware of the gossip and laughter of the girls amongst themselves, though they become so demure at her entrance. Whispering goes on in corners and merriment waxes high even in her presence, but she ignores it discreetly, and devotes her attention to persons of her own age. In the early summer mornings she smiles indulgently to find that one and another slipped away last night from her proper sleeping-place and betook herself to the roof, half for the coolness and half for the mysterious joys of girls' midnight gossip.

The relationship, however, is as far from familiarity as that of any kind and trusted prioress with her novices. The element of banter and freedom has another outlet, in the grandmother or whatever aged woman may take that place in the community house. Just as at home the little one had coaxed and appealed against the decisions of father or mother to the ever-ready granddam, so, now that she is a bride, she finds

some old woman in her husband's home who has given up her cares into younger hands and is ready to forego all responsibility in the sweetness of becoming a *confidante*. One can imagine the rest. There must be many a difficulty, many a perplexity, in the new surroundings, but to them all old age can find some parallel. Looking back into her own memories, the grandmother tells of the questions that troubled her when she also was a bride, of the mistakes that she made, and the solutions that offered. Young and old take counsel together, and there is even the possibility that when a mother-in-law is unsympathetic, her own mother-in-law may intervene on behalf of a grandson's wife. Before the grandmother, therefore, there is none of that weight of reverence which can never be lightened in the mother's presence. Even the veil need not be dropped. The familiar "thou" takes the place of the stately "you," and there is no respect shown by frigid reserve.

Long ago, when a child's solemn betrothal often took place at seven or eight years of age, it was to gratify the old people's desire to have more children about them that the tiny maidens were brought into the house. It was on the grandmother's lap that the little ones were made acquainted; it was she and her husband who watched anxiously to see that they took to each other; and it was they again who petted and comforted the minute grand-daughter-in-law in her hours of home sickness. Marriage has grown later nowadays, in answer amongst other things to the pressure of an increasing poverty, and it does not happen so often that an old man is seen in the bazaar buying consoling gifts for the baby brides at home. But the same instinct

still obtains, of making the new home a place of choice, when between her twelfth and fourteenth year—the girl's age at her first and second marriages—the young couple visit alternately in each other's families.

The Hindu theory is that a long vista of common memory adds sweetness even to the marriage tie, and whether we think this true or not, we have all known happy marriages on such a basis. But about the mutual sentiment of old and young there can be no theory, because there is no possibility of doubt. In all countries in the world it is recognised as amongst the happiest things in life. The reminiscence of Arjnna, one of the heroes of the great War-Epic, gives us the Indian explanation of this fact. "I climbed on his knee," he says, speaking of the aged knight Bhishma, head of his house, "all hot and dusty from my play, and flinging my arms about his neck, I called him 'Father.'" "Nay, my child," he replied, as he held me to his breast, "not thy *father* but *thy father's father!*" With each generation, that is to say, the tie has deepened and intensified.

In all cases where one or two hundred persons live under the same roof, a complex etiquette grows up, by which gradations of rank and deference are rigidly defined. Under the Hindu system this fund of observation has so accumulated that it amounts now to an accomplished culture—a completed criticism of life—rich in quaint and delightful suggestions for humanity everywhere. We may not know why a mother's relatives are apt to be dearer than a father's, but the statement will be approved as soon as made. It has not occurred to us that our relations to an elder sister and a younger are not the same: in India there is a

different word for each, for whole worlds of sweetness lie a world apart in one name and the other to the Hindu mind. Yet a cousin is constantly called brother or sister, the one relation being merged entirely in the other. The mere use of a language with this degree of definiteness implies an emotional training of extraordinary kind. It is, of course, best suited to natures of great richness of feeling. In these, sentiment is developed in proportion to expression, and the same attitude that makes every one in the village "Aunt" or "Uncle" to the children, produces an ultimate sense of kinship to the world. This is perhaps the commonest characteristic of Hindu men and women: shy at first, and passive to slight stimulus, as are all great forces, when once a relationship is established, they believe in it absolutely, blindly; are ready to go to the uttermost in its name; and forget entirely all distance of birth or difference of association. The weak point in the system appears when it has to deal with the harder, more arid class of natures. In these there is less inner response to the outer claim; expressions of difference, therefore, become less sincere and more abject. This is but a poor preparation for the open air of the modern world, where seniority, sanctity, and rank have all to be more or less ignored, and man stands face to face with man, free and equal so far as the innate manhood of each can carry. But such persons—though, naturally enough, they cluster round the powerful foreigner as moths about a lamp—are the failures of Hinduism, not its types, and they are very few. In a perfected education, Western ideals of equality and struggle would present themselves to these for their choosing, while far away in Europe,

maybe, hearts born too sensitive for their more rudimentary emotional surroundings would be thankful in turn to find life made richer by Indian conceptions of human relationship.

In a community like that of the Hindu home—as in all clan-systems—the characteristic virtue of every member must be a loyal recognition of common duties and dangers. And this is so. The wife who refused to share her husband's obligation to a widowed sister and her children was never known in India. Times of stress draw all parts of the vast group together; none of the blood can cry in vain for protection and support: even a "village-connection" (*i.e.*, one who is kin by association only) finds refuge in his hour of need. This great nexus of responsibility takes the place of workhouse, hospital, orphanage, and the rest. Here the lucky and the unlucky are brought up side by side. For to the ripe and mellow genius of the East it has been always clear that the defenceless and unfortunate require a *home*, not a barrack.

Into this complex destiny the bride enters finally, about her fourteenth year. Till now she has been a happy child, running about in freedom, feet shod and head bare, eating and drinking what she would. Till now, life has been full of indulgences—for her own parents, with the shadow of this early separation hanging over them, have seen no reason for a severity that must bring in its train an undying regret. From the moment of her betrothal, however, the girl's experience gradually changes. Just as the young nun, if she runs to find her thimble, will be sent back to bring it "more religiously," so about the newly married girl there grows a subtle atmosphere of recollectedness. The

hair is parted, no longer childishly brushed back; and at the parting—showing just beyond the border of the veil with which her head now is always covered—appears a touch of vermilion, put there this morning as she dressed in token that she wished long life to her husband; much as one might, in taking up a fan, blow a kiss from its edge to some absent beloved one. The young wife's feet are unshod, and the gold wedding bracelet on the left wrist, and a few ornaments appropriate to her new dignity, supply the only hint of girlish vanity. But she has more jewels. These that she wears daily are of plain gold, more or less richly worked, but on her wedding night she wore the *siti*, or three-lined coronal, set with gems, and arms and neck were gay with flashing stones. All these were her dower, given by her father to be her personal property, and not even her husband can touch them without her consent, though he will add to them occasionally at festive moments. She will wear them all now and again, on great occasions, but meanwhile the silver anklets and the golden necklet and a few bangles are enough for daily use. The girl knows her right to her own ornaments quite well, and the world will never hear how often the wife or the mother has hastened to give up the whole of this little resource in order that son or husband might weather a storm or receive an education. The one thing from which she will never part, however, unless widowhood lays its icy hand upon her life, is that ring of iron covered with gold and worn on the left wrist, which is the sign of the indissoluble bond of her marriage—her wedding-ring in fact.

With all the shyness of the religious novice comes the girl to her new home. Its very form, with its

pillared courtyards, is that of a cloister. The constant dropping of the veil in the presence of a man, or before a senior, is the token of a real retirement, the sacrament of actual seclusion, within which all the voices of the world lose distinctness and individuality, becoming but faint echoes of that which alone can call the soul and compel the eager feet. For India has no fear of too much worship. To her, all that exists is but a mighty curtain of appearances, tremulous now and again with breaths from the unseen that it conceals. At any point, a pin-prick may pierce the great illusion, and the seeker become aware of the Infinite Reality beyond. And who so fitted to be the widow of the Eternal Presence as that husband, who is at once most adored and loved of all created beings?

For there is a deep and general understanding of the fact that only in its own illumination, or its own feeling, can the soul find its highest individuation. To learn how she can offer most becomes thus the aim of the young wife's striving. All her dreams are of the saints—women mighty in renunciation: Sita, whose love found its richest expression in the life-long farewell that made her husband the ideal king; Sati, who died rather than hear a word against Siva, even from her own father; and Uma, realising that her love was given in vain, yet pursuing the more eagerly the chosen path. "Be like Savitri," was her father's blessing, as he bade her the bridal farewell, and Savitri—the Alcestis of Indian story—was that maiden who followed even death till she won back her husband's life. Thus wifehood is thought great in proportion to its giving, not to its receiving. It would never occur to any one, in writing fiction, or

delineating actual character; to praise a woman's charms, as we praise Sarah Jennings, on the score that she retained her husband's affection during her whole life. A good man, says the Hindu, does not fail his wife, but, apart from this, coquetry and vanity, however pleasing in their form, could never dignify marriage. Lifelong intimacy, to be beautiful, must boast deeper foundations—the wife's love, daring all and asking for no return; the mother's gentleness, that never changes; the friend's unswerving generosity. To the grave Oriental there is something indecorous in the discussion of the subject on any but this highest basis. And yet Persia, the France of Asia, must have been a perpetual influence towards romanticism in Hindu life. There is said to be no love poetry in the world so impassioned as the Persian. The famous verse:

> Four eyes met. There were changes in two souls.
> And now I cannot remember whether he is a man and I a woman,
> Or he a woman and I a man. All I know is,
> There were two: Love came, and there is one. . . .

we must believe completely representative of its spirit. The Persian language, however, has only touched India through the Court of Delhi and through letters. It has been the possession of the Indo-Mohammedan, and of any man here and there who took the time and trouble to master its literature; but the world of Hindu womanhood has remained probably as remote from it as though it belonged to another planet.

This is not true to the same extent of the romantic aspect of Christianity. The letters taught in English schools result very much in novel-reading, and an indigenous school of fiction has grown up, in the form

of books and magazines, which is likely to modify popular ideas on this subject profoundly. Meanwhile, and for long to come, it remains true that according to Hindu notions, the eyes of bride and bridegroom are to be directed towards the welfare of the family and not of themselves, as the basis of society; it is the great springs of helpfulness and service, rather than those of mutual love and romantic happiness that marriage is expected to unloose selfish wives and jealous husbands. Husbands there must be, as among all peoples; but it is a fact, nevertheless, that here the absolute stainlessness of the wife is considered but preliminary to the further virtue demanded of her, the sustaining of the honour of her husband's house.

With this clue it becomes easy to understand even what the West considers to be the anomalies of Hindu custom—the laws regarding rare cases of polygamy and adoption. For it is legally provided that if a woman remain childless her husband may after seven years, *and with her permission*, take a second wife, in the hope of gaining a son, to succeed to his place. On the European basis of individualism, the permission would probably be impossible to obtain; but with the Eastern sense of family obligation, this has not always been so, and I have myself met the son of such a marriage whose story was of peculiar interest. The elder wife had insisted that the time was come for the alternative to be tried, and had herself chosen the speaker's mother, as the most beautiful girl she could find, for her husband. The marriage once over, she made every effort to make it a success, and welcomed the new wife as a younger sister. Not only this, but when the son was born, such was her tenderness that

he was twelve years old before he knew that she was not his mother. After her death, however, the younger wife became head of the house. Amongst the children to be fed, there were degrees of kindred, certain adopted orphans, two or three cousins, and himself. He was the eldest of all, and protested loudly that he came in last, and his cousins only second, for his mother's attentions. "Nay, my child," she answered, with a Hindu woman's sweetness and good sense, "if I desired to neglect thee, I could not do it. Is it not right, then, first to serve those who have no protection against me?

The family life which such a story discloses is singularly noble, and it is not necessary to suppose that polygamy entailed such generosities oftener than we find monogamy do amongst ourselves. In any case, the same tide that brings in individualism has swept away this custom; and whereas it never was common it is now practically obsolete, except for princes and great nobles, and even amongst these classes there are signs of a radical change of custom.

"Where women are honoured, there the gods are pleased: where they are dishonoured, religious acts become of no avail." "In whatever family the husband is contented with his wife, and the wife with her husband, in that house will good fortune assuredly abide." Few books offer such delight to their readers as that known as the "Laws of Manu." It is in a sense a collection of Acts of Parliament, for the one attitude throughout is that of the witness, and the hastiest perusal shows that it represents the growth of custom during ages, and is in no sense the work of a single hand. This is indeed its first and most striking

beauty. As must be, of course, it often happens that the superstition of a habit is stated as gravely as its original intent, but rarely so as to obscure that first significance, or leave it difficult of restoration, and from cover to cover the book throbs with the passion for justice, and the appreciation of fine shades of courtesy and taste, clothed in calm and judicial form. Especially of this type are those dicta on the rights of women, which are household words in Indian homes. We all know the reaction of the written word on life. Fact once formulated as scripture acquires new emphasis, a certain occult significance seems to attach to it, and the words "it is written" become terrible enough to affright the devil himself. In this way the fear of a feminine curse has become a superstition in India, and I have seen even a low-class mob fall back at the command of a single woman who opposed them. For is it not written in the book of the law that "the house which is cursed by woman perishes utterly, *as if destroyed by a sacrifice for the death of an enemy*"?—strange and graphic old phrase, pregnant of woe!

It is evident then that the laws of Manu are rather the unconscious expression of the spirit of the people than a declaration of the ideals towards which they strive. And for this reason they would afford the most reliable foundation for a healthy criticism of Indian custom. The conception of domestic happiness which they reveal is very complete, and no one who has seen the light on an Indian woman's face when it turns to her husband—as I have seen it in all parts of the country—can doubt that that conception is often realised in life. For if the characteristic emotion of the wife may be described as passionate reverence,

that of the Hindu husband is certainly a measureless protection. If we may presume to analyse things so sacred as the great mutual trusts of life, it would seem that tenderness is the ruling note of the man's relation. Turning as he does to the memory of his own mother for the ideal perfection, there is again something of motherhood in what he brings to his wife. As a child might do, she cooks for him, and serves him, sitting before him as he eats to fan away the flies. As a disciple might, she prostrates herself before him, touching his feet with her head before receiving his blessing. It is not equality. No. But who talks of a vulgar equality, asks the Hindu wife, when she may have instead the unspeakable blessedness of offering worship?

And on the man's side, how is this received? Entirely without personal vanity. The idea that adoration is the soul's opportunity has sunk deep into the life of the people. And the husband can recognise his wife's right to realise her highest through him without ever forgetting that it is her power to love, not his worthiness of love, that is being displayed. Indeed, is not life everywhere of one tint in this regard? Does anything stir our reverence like an affection that we feel beyond our merit?

It is often glibly said that this habit of being served spoils the Indian man and renders him careless of the comfort of others. I have never found this to be so. It is true that Indian men do not rise when a woman enters, and remain standing till she is seated. Nor do they hasten to open the door through which she is about to pass. But then it is not according to the etiquette of their country to do these things. With

regard to the last point, indeed, their idea is that man should precede woman, maintaining the tradition of the path-breaker in the jungle; and one of the most touching incidents in the national epic of heroic love is Sita's request to go first along the forest paths, in order to sweep the thorns from her husband's path with the end of her veil. Needless to say, such a paradox is not permitted.

Thus, honour for the weaker is expressed in one way in England and quite otherwise in Hindostan, but the heart of conduct is the same in both countries. The courtesy of husbands to their wives is quite unfailing amongst Hindus. "Thou shalt not strike a woman, even with a flower," is the proverb. His wife's desire for companionship on a journey is the first claim on a man. And it is very touching to notice how, as years go on, he leans more and more to the habit of addressing her as "O thou, mother of our son!" and presenting her to new comers as "my children's mother," thus reflecting upon her his worship of motherhood. In early manhood he trusts to her advice to moderate the folly of his own rasher inclinations; in old age he becomes, as everywhere in the world, more entirely the eldest of her bairns, and she more and more the real head and centre of the home. But always she remains as she was at the beginning, Lakshmi, her husband's Goddess of Fortune. In those first days he ate from no hand but his mother's or hers; and one of her devotions was the fast, not broken till he had eaten and their talk was over, though her evening meal might in this way be delayed till long past midnight. Now, with the responsibilities of her household upon her, she feeds a

whole multitude before she takes her own turn, and still the mutual pact of soul and soul has not been broken by the strife of "rights." These two have all these years been each other's refuge against the world. And not once have they felt so separated as to offer thanks, or speak, either of the other, by name, as if head and hand could be different individuals!

On that first bridal evening, the little bride was borne before her young husband, and they were told that the moment was auspicious for their first shy look. Then the old Vedic fire was called to witness their rites of union; the girl flung the garland of flowers about the neck of her bridegroom, in exquisite symbolism of the bond that was to hold them; and finally they took seven steps together, hand in hand, while the priest chanted appropriate texts for each stage of life. Such was their wedding. Since then, the rights of one have been the rights of the other; joys, griefs, and duties have been held in common. Till now, if the bride of that distant night be entirely fortunate, that prayer of her childhood is fulfilled to her in the end of her days, that prayer that said:

> From the arms of husband and sons,
> When the Ganges is full of water,
> May I pass to the feet of the Lord.

It has seemed to me in watching Hindu couples that they were singular in the frequent attainment of a perfect intimacy. To what is this due? Is it the early association, or the fact that courtship comes after marriage, not before? Or is it the intense discipline of absolute reserve in the presence of others? The people themselves, where their attention is called to it, attribute the fact to child-marriage. I remember

asking a friend of my own, a man of wealth and cultivation, orthodox and childless, "If you could put away personal considerations, and speak only from the outside, which do you think better in the abstract, our marriage-system or yours?"

He paused, and answered slowly, "I *think*—ours; for I cannot conceive that two people could grow into each other, as my wife and I have done, under any other."

Amongst the luxuries of the West I have sometimes thought that the deepening of the human tie was proportionate to simplicity of surroundings. A people to whom all complexity of externals is impossible must live by thought and feeling, or perish in the wilderness.

But whatever be the truth on this point, I have seen clearly and constantly that the master-note by which the Hindu woman's life can be understood in the West is that of the religious life. This is so, even with the wife. Cloistered and veiled, she devotes herself to one name, one thought, yet is never known to betray the fact, even as the nun steals away in secret to kneel before the Blessed Sacrament. The ideal that she, like the nun, pursues, is that of a vision which merges the finite in the infinite, making strong to mock at separation, or even at change. And the point to be reached in practice is that where the whole world is made beautiful by the presence in it of the beloved, where the hungry are fed, and the needy relieved, out of a joyful recognition that they wear a common humanity with his; and where, above all, the sense of unrest and dissatisfaction is gone for ever, in the overflowing fulness of a love that asks no return except the power of more abundant loving.

CHAPTER IV

LOVE STRONG AS DEATH

As to the skies their centre in the Polar Star, so to the Eastern home the immovable honour of its womanhood. Here is the secret of that worship of the mother in which all union of the family and all loyalty to its chief are rooted. Woman in the West may thirst for the glory of love or the power of wealth: in Asia, her characteristic dreams are of perfectness and purity and faith. Woman in the West is a queen, exposed to the fierce light that beats upon a throne, putting to good or evil use the opportunities of sovereigns. Even queens in the East are too sacred to be looked upon by common eyes. They grow, like the tall white lilies of annunciation, set in the dimness beside some altar, screened from the very glances of the faithful at their prayers. The long silken tent through which such ladies move from palace-door to carriage-step is no vulgar prison, but a shrine. Bereft of its concealment, they would feel dishonoured, unprotected, as does the widowed gentlewoman, compelled to fight for bread, amongst the struggling crowd.

The very possibility of this blaze of publicity shed on delicate high-bred womanhood is repugnant to the Oriental mind. Remoteness and shadow, silence and

obscurity, seem to it the true environment of holiness. And woman is held to be so much a sacred mystery that no man may even mention the name of another's wife to him. "Are they at home all well?" is the guarded form which the necessary inquiry for her health has to take. The outer courts of the house, where the men pass the day, the verandah and the stoop, where neighbours meet and chat, these are but public places. Here the intellectual life may be lived, and civic affairs transacted. But it is by the cool grey threshold of the inner, the women's rooms, that the world of *home* is entered. And what an ocean of passionate loving surges through the quiet walls! Here the wife listens for the feet of the returning husband. Here the widow sobs for him who will return no more. Here scamper home the babies to find mother or aunt, grave elder sister, or twin-souled younger comrade. Here youth lays its plans and brings its perplexities, while old age looks on, with the quiet eyes of experience and of faith. Here passes, in short, all that mingling of smiles and tears, of laughter and prayer, of charm and weariness, that goes to make up the bitter-sweet sacrament of daily life. Only the art of mediæval Holland speaks a passion for home as ardent as this of the Orient, which as yet has found no voice!

Standing without in the noonday hush and looking into the semi-darkness of the women's apartments it is as if one caught a glimpse of some convent garden, full of rare and beautiful flowers. This is the women's hour. Their natural guardians are all absent, sleeping, or at business. Only in the outer court a drowsy servant guards the entrance. An air of innocent

raillery, of delicate gaiety, pervades all. Friendly confidences and gentle fun are being exchanged. It is now that the long melancholy cry of the pedlar is heard, with his "Bracelets and bangles—who wants?" or "Good, good cloth!" or what not. And the wandering merchant may be called in, to add amusement to the moment by his baiting and bargaining.

Noonday passes, and slender widows in their long white veils fall to telling their beads, unnoticed and absorbed. Here and there a mother glides away to prepare for the children's coming home from school. The sound of laughter and talk dies gradually down, and afternoon wears on to evening, and the hour of prayer. So passes the day's drama, with all its blending of subdued tints, from dainty rose to ashen grey. Yet almost all the windows of the home look inwards, and four blank walls enclose the whole. True indeed is it that silence and shadow are the ideals of this, the life of Eastern womanhood.

But the ideal itself, that it may be fixed and perpetuated, requires its culminating types and centres, its own duly consecrated priesthood, whose main task in life shall be to light its lamp and wait upon its altar. And such persons, in the world of Indian women, are the widows. Literature consists largely of man's praise of woman in relation to himself; yet it remains eternally true that this heroine of man—Helen, Desdemona, Beatrice—is but one modification or other of her who goes unseen, unhymned, unnamed, the woman of solitude, the woman who stands alone.

Neither Europe nor the modern spirit can claim the glory of having created the idea of woman as an individual. Queen Hatasu had it, in ancient Egypt,

In still older Chaldea, Semiramis had it. In the sagas of the North, it is true, no woman goes unwed. But no sooner does Christianity—the Mission of the Asiatic Life—appear amongst us, than mediæval history blossoms into its Hildas, and Teresas, and Joans, its Saxon Margarets and its Spanish Katharines. It is the *self-protecting* woman only, who is born perhaps of the nineteenth century. Of old it was held by Frank and Saxon, by Latin and Teuton, that she who did not marry needed the protection of the Church. And in Asia to this day it is believed that she requires the sanction of the religious life itself, though that life be lived for the most part within the community-house. For the only unmarried woman in India is the widow, and especially the child-widow—that is, one whose betrothed has died before actual marriage.

A kind of faithfulness is implied in this, which is quite different from the faithfulness of the West. There, it is counted for great fidelity if amidst the growing complexities of life there run the stream of a strong and constant memory; if the bereaved wife be true to the idea for which the husband stood; if she carry his name as a banner, whose new adherents are won by the power of her own consecration. In India, no growth of complexity can be permitted. Where the life stood when its companion was smitten down, there it must remain, till a second death completes the releasing of that one being who only seemed to others to be two.

How wonderful is death! So cold, so still! The mind is withdrawn from the senses, and steadied, that enters its presence but for a moment. They who dwell there find release into a great calm. The Hindu

widow lives out her life with her soul ever present at the burning-ghat. Her white sari, unbordered, her short hair, her bareness of jewels, her scant food and long prayers, her refusal to meet guests and join in festivities,—all these things are but the symbols of its abiding lights and shadows. She has found her vocation, so to speak, and as a nun must henceforth direct her life. If she be a child-widow, this is only the more true. Then, the church in which she lingers is more apt to be the thought of the Divine itself. But if in her widowhood she can remember what it was to be a wife, her altar will be the name of the dead husband, and her austerities will carry with them the unspeakable gladness of the memory that half of all their merit goes to him. This belief in a mystic union of souls was the motive of suttee,—a sacrifice that was supposed to lift the husband's soul at once into bright places, and bring his wife to enjoy them beside him for thousands of years. Who, with such an idea deep-ingrained, could not laugh at fire?

It is clear that this scheme of the widow's life is inherent in a great simplicity. A marriage which had but one duty could alone have led to this bereavement which has but one thought. And yet we must understand that it is in this terrible blight of love that the strong woman finds her widest individual scope.

It is told of Bhashkaracharya, the mathematician, that he had but one child, the maiden Lilavati. Casting her horoscope carefully, he discovered that there was only a single moment in her life when she could be married without fear of widowhood. Preparations were made for the wedding accordingly, and the father himself constructed an instrument by which to regulate

the time of the ceremonies. Water would be admitted drop by drop through a certain hole, from one pot to another, and its reaching a given height was the signal for the sacramental act.

The marriage-rites began, but the child Lilavati grew tired, and went wandering from room to room in search of amusement. In some obscure corner she came upon an unaccustomed-looking pot, and leaned over its edge to watch how the inner section was gradually sinking in the water which it contained. As she did so a tiny pearl fell all unnoticed from her wedding-crown, and stopped the hole through which the water passed! Time went on, but the vessel sank no further. "Ah!" exclaimed Bhashkaracharya sorrowfully, when, the hour already past, he found the jewel that had frustrated all his caution, "it is useless for a man to fight against his destiny!"

Within some few weeks or months the little bride was left a widow. But now her great father resolved to make of her a woman so learned that she should never sigh for earthly happiness—a resolve in which he succeeded to such an extent that to this day it is not known whether the abstruse treatise named "Lilavati" was merely dedicated to her, or whether she asked the questions to which it contains the answers.

This story is historic. But simple instances abound in every village. The kind widowed aunt who lived in the opposite house to ours, did she not count every soul in the Calcutta lane, together with her brother's children, as her own? "Do not leave this country," she would say to some member of our household every now and then, "for you know I count you all my bairns!" When the man in the next house died of

cholera, it was not we, the European neighbours, but this Pishi-ma of ours, who was first on the scene with disinfectants. When the immediate necessity of cleansing the whole house was explained, it was still another and older widow lady who listened, and carried out the work with her own hands. Indeed, wherever one is called in time of need, one finds a group of widow-women already present. There is no act of nursing that these are not ready, and even eager, to perform; no disease so loathsome or dangerous that they will not gladly take a sick child into their arms; no injury so bitter that it will prevent their weeping sorrowful tears of sympathy with the injured in his hour of pain and loss.

It is quite natural that widows should be more free for the civic life than other women. Wives have their husbands' comforts to attend to, and mothers their thousand and one maternal cares. But the widow, and above all the childless widow, in her agony of solitude, can hear the sobs of children not her own, can stretch hands across the desert of her own mourning to those who are ill, or in poverty, and desolation. In the last generation lonely women had still more scope than they have now. I have heard of one who never sat down to the midday meal till a servant brought her word that every soul in the village had already eaten. Almost every family can remember some aged dame of its own who was famed for her skill in all sorts of remedies for man and beasts. The very cow-goddesses, who are worshipped in Himalayan villages in time of cattle pestilence, may have been actual Hindu women of this type, raised to the rank of deities. But the last half-century in India has been

rapidly accomplishing the decay of the middle classes; and with this decay, brought about by the shrinking of wealth in its old channels, the fall of woman, in social and material power, proceeds apace. Yet still the widows represent the intellectual centres amongst women. The more modern they are, the less likely is it that they can reel off Sanskrit verses, but the more probable that they read books in the vernaculars. In any case, they produce the saints; and the position of a woman-saint in India is such that no man in her neighbourhood will venture on a journey without first presenting himself before her veiled form, taking the dust of her feet, and receiving her whispered blessing.

Widows have constantly distinguished themselves, especially in Bengal, as administrators of land and wealth. Of this pattern was the great Mahratta Queen of Indore, Ahalya Bai. Her husband died, while waging war with Scindia and another, and her first act was to disband her armies, and send word to the sovereigns that she was at their mercy, a defenceless woman. The expected result followed, in the complete abandonment of all hostilities. After which, Ahalya Bai Rani lived and reigned for many a long year eating the Hindu widow's handful of rice of her own cooking, and spending her great revenues in public works on the largest scale.

For the wife becomes regent when a man dies during the minority of his son; and even if the latter be already of age, his ownership of an estate is by no means free and complete during the lifetime of his mother. The whole world would cry shame if he acted without her occasional advice, and, indeed, the Indian woman's reputation for business capacity is so like

the French that it is commonly said of encumbered property that it needs a widow's nursing.

In such a case there is, however, for the wealthy woman one temptation. Throughout her married life her relation with her father's house has remained close and intimate. At least once a year, if not oftener, she has returned to it on visits. Her eldest child was born there under her own mother's care. Her girlhood's friends have perpetually renewed her youthful memories by hastening to see her on her arrival, and talk over old times. It was many a year before the revival of familiar associations ceased to make her wholly a child again, so that she would run bare-headed down the lane to a neighbour's house, rejoicing in the unaccustomed freedom of the fact that the only men she was likely to meet were practically her own brothers, for she had played with them in babyhood.

But if the relation to her early home and to her past be thus deep and exquisite, what are we to say of the bond that knits together the Hindu sister and her brother? Here is the tie that offers to the woman of responsibilities her great temptation; for it is considered hard, and yet essential, for one who administers a dead husband's wealth not to bestow it in these channels, not to submit to management and direction, not to transfer possession gradually from the one house to the other. And the very insistence upon the dishonour of such a course is in itself testimony to the affection that tempts. The perfect wife is she who loves her husband with a love that forgets even father and brothers if need be. But how arduous is such perfection to attain! One day in the Hindu sacred year is known as "The Feast of Brothers," because

on it sisters are visited and give their benisons. And so, even about the detached life of the married woman, made independent of her father's care, early associations continue to twine and grow stronger. They never cease to be an organic part of her life; and if the stress of her existence throws her back upon them, she knows that on which she leans, that it will not fail her at her need, or prove a false staff, breaking in her hand.

And yet her natural longing, in the first days of her widowhood, is to remain, unless forbidden by his poverty, in the household of her father-in-law, for herein lies all her loyalty to the dead. Nay, it will often happen that even a child-widow is anxiously retained by her husband's parents, as a token, in some sort, left by him who is gone. All the glory of womanhood lies in such things as these. Even in her own home, too, a widow has the right to be exacting on a thousand little points regarding her dead husband. Do her father and brothers not remember the great days of obligation of the household into which she married? Do they require reminder, instead of hastening to be beforehand with her, in suggesting the gifts and offerings she would do well to send? Ah, then, is it only herself for whom they cease to weary themselves, or do they forget *his* dignity who should be as dear as their own blood? And for her own part she watches with solicitude all that passes in the family whose name she bears. Is a new bride received among them? From her own diminishing store of jewels will be sent some trifle—may be only a couple of tiny gold jasmine flowers for the ears—by the bereaved to the newly-wedded daughter-in-law. Or she

hears of sickness and arrives to nurse. She comes to wait on the aged, or will assume charge of the young while grave elders go on pilgrimage. All this implies a network of social ideals that tends to make it difficult to divert the income arising from alliance.

Over and above her alleged common sense, on the other hand, an estate that passes into the hands of a woman ruler enjoys the economic advantage of her freedom from personal extravagance; for the energy with which a widow pursues after abstinence is extraordinary. To this day she lives in an ancient India, created by her own habits. In Calcutta she drinks only Ganges water, holding that the municipal supply is contaminated by European use. She will eat only rock-salt in order to avoid the pollution of manufacturing processes. When ill she accepts treatment only from the old Indian doctors, the *vaidya* or the *kaviraj*, and pays fantastic sums for their medicines if they come from Benares or some other seat of classic learning. If well, she eats one meal of cooked food prepared with her own hands at or after mid-day, and only a slight refection of milk, fruit, and unleavened bread at nightfall. Her hair is cut short (or in some parts of India the head is shaved), perhaps originally to remove the temptation of beauty, but, as far as custom knows and questions, only that she may bathe the more frequently and easily—every bath conveying to her the notion of a baptism.

Such is her ordinary routine. Her occasional dissipations consist in a pilgrimage, an extra visit to a temple at dawn or after sunset, or attendance at some ceremony of epic recitation. Is it not well said that she knows no extravagance?

It is because her life is holier than that of others that no hand must touch her food, though she may prepare and serve the meals of any in the house. For the same reason, if questions of precedence arise, she stands higher than married women. Did she not rise before dawn to tell her beads, or to sit for an hour in meditation? Then, when her room was cleaned and ordered, did she not go to the river for the morning bath? Returning with the wet sari that she had washed, according to daily custom, with her own hands, did she not don the silken garment, and pass to that ceremonial worship, with flowers and offerings, that lasts for at least an hour or more, and only when that worship was ended could she begin to think of cooking her meal. With the waning of the afternoon she falls again to telling her beads, right hand and rosary both concealed in a little bag. At the moment of "candlelight," she passes once more into actual meditation. Then an hour's chat, the frugal evening meal, and so to bed, to begin at dawn on the morrow again the daily round.

An incomparable moment in the history of a Hindu family is that of the return to it of a young daughter freshly widowed. Unspeakable tenderness and delicacy are lavished on her. A score of reasons for the mitigation of her rule are thought out and urged. In spite of her reluctance, the parents or parents-in-law will insist. Sometimes the whole family will adopt her austere method of living for a few months, and keep pace with her self-denials step by step, till she herself discovers and breaks the spell. "Well, well!" exclaimed an old father brooding over the ruin of his child's happiness at such a crisis, "it was high time for

me to retire from the world; can we not renounce together, little mother?" And while she is supported by her father's strong arm, the mother's wings are opened wide, to fold closer than ever before, the bird that has flown home with the arrow in its heart. Indeed, this union of theirs has become proverbial, so that if some small son be uncommonly helpful and chivalrous to his mother, friendly neighbours will say, in banter: "But this is no boy! This is surely your widowed daughter, mother!" So pass the years, till, it may be, the mother, herself widowed, becomes as a child, falling back upon the garnered strength of her own daughter. Life ebbs; but discipline gathers its perfect fruit, in lives stately and grave and dignified, for all their simplicity and bareness; in characters that are the hidden strength alike of village and of nation; in an ideal of sainthood justified; an opportunity of power created.

In the long years of her mature life we picture the Madonna standing always beneath the Cross. And we are right. But patience! not for ever shall she stand thus. It shall yet come to pass that in high heaven a day shall dawn, on which, wearing the self-same meekness, clothed in self-same humility, the Mother of Sorrows shall be crowned—and that by her own Son!