

# Queer Marriage Custom of Hindustan, Where Aged Men Wed Babes



Husband and Wife



Father and Children. These girls are married and will go to their husbands at twelve.



Temple Dancers

(Copyright, 1910, by Frank G. Carpenter.)  
**A** Special Correspondence of the Bee.—I saw a wedding procession today. It was headed by camels with trappings of gold, ridden by bare-legged men in red and gold turbans. Behind came an elephant, followed by twelve boys above their fore-knees and silver bells around their necks. The brides were of cloth of silver and the trappings of the brides were of gold. Behind these animals came the wedding chair, and farther back a band of music and a crowd of men singing and dancing. The wedding chair was a litter covered with the red and gold canopy. Upon the mattress inside sat the bride and groom, face to face, leaning back upon pillows. I looked in through the curtains and saw them. They were children. The groom was a ten-year-old boy of a gingerbread color, and the bride a little brown baby of two. The boy wore a gold cap and suit embroidered in gold. He had heavy gold rings on his ankles and wrists. Around the girl's neck was a gold chain, and she had gold bracelets and anklets. As I looked in the groom smiled and waved his hand at me, but the baby bride did not open her eyes, and I am told she had been drugged to keep her quiet during the ceremony. Since I have been in India I have seen a score of wedding processions, and in every case the brides have been children, although the grooms may have been full-grown men. Some of the brides were six and eight years of age, and I have seen one who was only five. This is my first sight of a bride who is really a baby.

Indeed, the condition of women in India is such that no parent wants to bring a daughter into the world. He knows she will be a slave as a wife and an outcast as a widow. For this reason infanticide was common a few years ago, and for the same reason it is still practiced here and there away from the eyes of the police. I hear it whispered that girl babies are strangled or their mother's breast so that when they suck they eat no more. The poisoning of them with opium was common in the past, and it is mentioned by old writers. About twenty or thirty years ago the government passed an infanticide act, and at that time investigated conditions. It was found that in certain localities hundreds of children were annually carried off by wolves and, strange to say, the wolves took only girls. In the year 1870 three hundred girl babies were stolen by wolves from the city of Amritsar. Before that the wells of some parts of India were polluted by the drowning of infants and typhoid was common thereby. One of the worst things that can happen to these baby brides is to be married to old men. This is not uncommon, a family often being glad to make a union with a higher caste, even if the husband be gray. In such cases widowhood is almost sure to come early, and in India to be widowed is hell.

happiness of her husband in heaven. She must not allow her shadow to fall upon the food or drink of the rest of the family, and all told she is worse than a leper. She will bring bad luck to any one who meets her, and no man will continue a journey if he passes a widow on starting. Such is her condition at home and she cannot get away. She is ostracised everywhere. She cannot hire out as a servant, for no one will take her. If she is good looking she may be employed at the temples, but as a rule her life is the most horrid slavery. This is added to by the belief of her husband's mother and sisters that in persecuting her they are helping the dead. They do not dare to pity her, for the superstition is that those who pity a widow are likely soon to be widows themselves. At the same time she is dependent upon the rest of the family. Women cannot inherit property among the Hindus, and all that is left by the husband goes to the children.

What a fate is this for the woman full grown or the old woman who as a widow has but a few years to live. It is more terrible still for the babies and children who become widows before they know what marriage means. Their whole lives are continuous torture, and, unfeeling, they are punished until death.

**Child Wives by the Millions.**  
 You have all heard of the child marriages of India. They take place every day, and number millions a year. They are chiefly among the Hindus, who form two-thirds of the population of Hindustan. I have before me the figures of the last census taken by the British. They show that India has now more than two million wives under ten, and two hundred and fifty thousand of five years and under. There are 6,000,000 married women from ten to fifteen, and 8,000,000 who are between fifteen and twenty. There are altogether 65,000,000 wives in the country, and one-fourth of them are under the average age at which our girls marry.

**India's Baby Widows.**  
 Of all the women on earth there is none whose misery is so great as that of the widow of India. The moment her husband dies she becomes an outcast, her touch is pollution, and she is the slave of the family. She must take off her good clothing and dress in coarse cottons. Her head must be shaved and she cannot bathe as the rest of the family do. She must not sleep on a bed, but on the bare floor with nothing but a piece of matting between her and the bricks. She cannot eat with the family and must have but one meal a day and that of the coarsest food. She must fast every two weeks with special fasts now and then, the idea being that the more she is tormented the happier will be the

**Twenty-Six Million Slaves.**  
 And how many human beings do you think are now undergoing such torments? I can give you the figures from the census of British India, as they were gathered last year. They put the number of widows at 25,000,000, a number equal to almost one-half of our whole female population. India has one widow for her every six women and girls, and millions

of these widows have many years yet to live. As to the baby widows, there are 19,000 of five years and under, and more than 100,000 of between five and ten years. There are 25,000 young girls, who range between ten and fifteen years of age, undergoing the slavery of widowhood, a degrading slavery that has never been imposed upon any nation, white or black, in any other part of the world.

You have heard how in the past the widows threw themselves on the funeral pyres of their husbands and burned themselves to death. In 1884 the British government kept count, and its records showed that 200 women had so immolated themselves within thirty miles of Calcutta in the space of six months. In the next twenty-

five years more than 30,000 were so burned, and it was not until long thereafter that the custom was stopped. This burning was called "suttee," and it is questionable whether it was not preferable to continued widowhood, which is now known as cold suttee. The widow is condemned to a living death. She burns daily with want, disgrace and shame; her predecessor was happy in that she died but once.

The natives have begun to object. Three years ago a number of Hindus asked the Bombay government to suppress the custom in that state, and there was an attempt to do so. It failed because the masses of the people looked upon the institution as having been sanctified by religion, and because the British make it a principle to do nothing that affects the faith of their subjects. Just now a similar action has been taken by Mysore, one of the native states, and it may be that it will succeed.

**The Temple Brides.**  
 I attended a wedding the other night at which about 500 Hindus were present. The groom was about six years old. He was a bright little fellow in a red velvet coat, light velvet trousers and a cap of cloth of gold. The bride was not present, and whether she was a baby or not I do not know. The chief feature of the ceremony was the dancing of some Nautch girls to the music of two drums and an Indian fiddle. The girls went through the most surprising contortions. They twisted themselves this way and that; they bent back and forth as though they were India rubber, the most of their dancing being without lifting their feet from the ground. Some of their motions were beyond description indecent. I am told that the Nautch girls are professional dancers, and that their profession is about the only one open to the young women of India. They are by no means as good as they should be, but being bad is a part of their business, and the people respect them as a class of girls who are had for religion's sake. They are the temple brides who are bred to dance at the shrines, to pander to the priests and sing obscene songs to the gods. They are obtained while yet children by the temples through purchase or as gifts from the parents, and are educated for the purpose. Sometimes a man who has recovered from illness buys a girl and presents her thus as a gift to the gods, or if one has a stroke of good luck he may make the priests such a present. If the temple brides have daughters they are brought up as dancing girls, being taught to read and sing and instructed in all the arts of seduction. These girls are licensed by law, but of late years their excesses have become such that even

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**Education for Women.**  
 The awakening of India, now going on, cannot but better these conditions. The women could not possibly be worse off than they are, and any change must be an improvement. I am told that the native leaders realize this, and that even the Mohammedans are holding conventions in the interest of female education. India has about sixty million Mohammedans, and this means that there are half that number of women and girls. As it is now only four thousand such girls are in school. The Mohammedans feel that the educational standard of the followers of the prophet must be raised, and that this can be best done by educating the girls. It is much the same with the Hindus, some of whose leaders have established girls' schools. There is a man named Roychand, a Jain, who has founded a school for women at Bombay, and that city has other seminaries of a similar kind.

You have all heard of Pundit Ramabai, who lectured in the United States not long ago and collected some money there for her girls' school at Poona. She is a Brahmin, and belongs to one of the highest castes of the Hindoo. She was educated in England and for a time she was professor of Sanscrit in one of the colleges there. Her school at Poona has been running for years, and it is doing great good. All of the pupils are child widows, and some of the little ones are only five or six years of age. Many are young girls, and others are full grown women. In that school they are taught reading, writing and arithmetic, and also such arts as will fit the pupils to make their own living outside. They learn to sew and embroider, and also kindergarten and trained nursing, as well. A farm is connected with the school, and some of the women learn dairying and sheep raising. Many of the graduates are already earning for themselves, and some are teachers, matrons of institutions, and not a few have married again. Some have become missionaries.

## Ancient and Modern Samples Culled from the Story Teller's Pack

**Antique in New Setting.**  
**B**ORNE leaving New York William Jennings Bryan, who, as a rule, is somewhat somber, confided to a democratic lawyer who is well known on Broadway a legal anecdote. It is here repeated in Mr. Bryan's own words: "Once out in Nebraska I went to protest against my real estate assessment, and one of the things of which I particularly complained was assessing a goat at \$2. I claimed that a goat was not 'real' property in the legal sense of the word, and should not be assessed. One of the assessors, a very pleasant faced old man, very obligingly said that I could go upstairs with him and together we would look over the rules and regulations and see what could be done."

and followed up the argument with a brass cuspidor, falling in the subsequent clench on top. "Who wrote the piece?" he shouted, as he pummed his opponent steadily. "Shakespeare," the Bostonian answered in smothered tones from beneath. "Are you sure?" asked the professor. "Dead sure," was the reply. "I seen him do it."—New York Tribune.

**Henry James on Race Suicide.**  
 Henry James does not agree with Colonel Roosevelt on the question of large families. Small families, such as prevail in France, indicate, to Mr. James' mind, intelligence and progress, while large families indicate the reverse. "Large families are so embarrassing, too," said Mr. James, on his last American visit. "I once knew a man named Thompson who had fourteen children. Thompson agreed one spring holiday to take his children to the seashore for the week-end. They set off, reached the station, got their tickets and were about to board the train when Thompson was roughly collared by a policeman. "Here, wot 'a' you bin a-doin' off the policeman growled fiercely. "Me? Nothing. Why?" stammered Thompson. "The policeman waved his truncheon toward the Thompson family. "Then wot the bloody blazes," he hissed, "is this here crowd a-follerin' ye fur?"—Minneapolis Journal.

**Resumed Where He Left Off.**  
 A Chicago traveling man, a guest at the Hollenden a day or two ago, was telling Clerk McCarthy a story illustrative of how accustomed to long separations a traveling man and his wife may become. This man's work takes him from coast to coast, and not infrequently he is gone from home for five and six months at a stretch. "The last time he went away, according to the man's story, he was obliged to leave home right in the midst of a meal in order to make the train he wanted to. "You ought to wait another day and have your suit pressed," remarked his wife. "I hate to have you go looking so ill groomed." "I'll have it done within a day or two—or at the first chance," promised the husband. "Wish I could stay, though, for a piece of that apple pie you were making. Save me a piece, won't you?" he added with a grin. "Well, she went to the train with him and bade him a fond good-by. Just five months and ten days later he returned. His wife was again at the train, dutifully. "I see you kept your promise and had your suit pressed," were her first words as she threw her arms around his neck. "Yes," he said, "but, by the way, did you save me that piece of apple pie?"—Cleveland Plain Dealer.

**Brewer's Tale on Tolerance.**  
 The late Justice Brewer was noted for his tolerant and broad minded views. A Washington diplomat recalled the other day a story told by Justice Brewer in illustration of the need for tolerance. "We should respect the views of others"—so, the story ran—"for morality itself is only a matter of environment. "A missionary in the South seas was distressed because his dusky parishioners were nude. He decided to try delicately to get them to wear at least a little clothing,

and to this end he left a great many pieces of scarlet and green and yellow calico lying about his hid. "An elderly dame called one afternoon for spiritual advice. The missionary noted how enviously her eyes rested on the calico and he took up a two-yard piece of the yellow, saying: "I'll give you this if you'll wear it." "The female draped the calico about her like a skirt and departed in great glee. "But the next day, nude, as before, she returned with the fabric under her arm. Handling it sadly to the missionary, she said: "Me no can wear it, missy. Me too shy."—Washington Post.

**Why He Will Not Marry.**  
 Because of the dimpled charm of Miss Billy Burke, Mr. Frohman's sweetest star, there are rumors every now and then that this, that, or the other fortunate man is to lead her to the altar. Still Miss Billy Burke goes on her way unaided, and the gentlemen of the second part, after a brief period of fond pursuit, have faded into the remote landscape. Last winter gossip was especially sure that a certain man, whose name may be given for the purpose of this narrative as Aloysius Jones, seemed to be up in the running. He waited upon Miss Burke with flowers; he served her with chocolates; he fairly drooled whenever he beheld her dainty personality on stage or street. But, he, too, fell away. "We thought you were going to marry Miss Billy Burke," said a friend, the other day. Aloysius Jones looked sad. "I wanted to," said he. "I still want to. But I won't." "Why? Won't she marry you?" "No," said Aloysius Jones. "I haven't asked her, and I have no reason to assume that she would say 'yes' if I did ask her. But I'm a moral coward. I can't face the prospect of going through life as Mr. William Burke."—Cincinnati Times-Star.

**Mustard Plaster Cure.**  
 "Mustard as a promoter of morals was a new role," said the woman. "Yesterday I heard my Bohemian neighbor say to her five-year-old daughter: "If you do that again I'll put a mustard plaster on you." "The child didn't do it again. When I asked why, the mother told me that in her country disobedient children are punished by applying a mustard plaster. It is more efficacious than whipping, scolding or moral suasion. The plaster isn't left on long enough to blister badly, but even without a blister a mustard plaster is a corrective measure that all little Bohemians try to avoid, even at the expense of good behavior."—New York Press.

**Those Gargoyles.**  
 A college freshman was showing some friends the sights of the campus last week. He was very proud of the new buildings and attempted to describe the architecture. "See those things sticking out from the roofs, don't you?" asked the freshman, pointing to a number of weird figures of stone. "Well, last year a fellow called 'em gargoyles." He laughed, but his friends waited. "The funny thing about that was," said the freshman, "that the name has stuck to 'em ever since. Now everybody calls 'em gargoyles."—New York Sun.

**Champ Clark's Hopes.**  
 Since the repeated victories in the by-elections to fill congressional vacancies Champ Clark has been the recipient of a flood of congratulatory letters and telegrams. The other night, just after the news of the election of James S. Havens was received Champ got the following:

**Christian Work Among the Women.**  
 Our missionaries are accomplishing much for the women of India, and are also those of Great Britain. The work can be only done by the women, as men are not allowed to go into the women's quarters or to speak to them. There are about fifteen hundred females among the missionary population, and the most of these do more or less work. There are 120,000 boys' schools with about 5,000,000 pupils, and only 12,000 girls' schools, with 600,000 in attendance. The percentage of illiteracy among the women is far greater than among the men. In all India there are less than 1,000,000 women who can read, and this means about one in every ten can read, and a large percentage can both read and write. The officials tell me that only about 23 per cent of the boys of school age go to school and less than 2 per cent of the girls. One of the crying needs of this country is medical attendance, and especially doctors for women. Lady Dufferin started a movement of this kind and Lady Curzon aided in carrying it on. The customs and caste distinctions of India are such that only women doctors can treat the native women, and the great need is lady missionaries who have good medical education. The first female doctor came in 1870, and there are now many. There are, however, a half million villages and towns which have no resident physicians, and the women as a rule have practically no efficient medical attendance.

**One of India's Baby Brides.**  
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