

PREFATORY AND DEDICATORY NOTICE.

It is not vanity, which impels me to relate the story of my sad bereavement; nay, I would rather not parade before the public the indifferent details of a very common misfortune. But an idea has taken possession of my mind, an idea originating in sore affliction and taking strong root in the already prepared soil of my brain. I have proposed to myself the arduous task of preaching to the Hindu community the necessity of marriage reform; the views I wish to preach have been floating in my mind for many months, nay, some years; but the determination to appear before the public and to explain and defend those views and, above all, to act up to them to the best of my power is given me by the memory of the goodness of that noble woman from whom I have been so early separated for ever by the dire hand of death.

We were married in the month of May 1879, and during the three years which elapsed before we were united, we grew to understand the peculiarities of each other's temperaments and to love each other intensely. Each state of society has its pleasures and pains and I may exclaim with the immortal poet

जीवन्तु तातपादिषु नवे दारपरिमहे
भानुभिः पाल्यमानानां ते हि नो दिवसा गताः ।

Hereafter my wife and myself lived as a separate individual family earning its own livelihood and doing all that we could to please each other within our scanty

means. But it was not till I was fortunate enough to get a comfortable situation that the peculiar felicitous traits in my wife's character began to develop themselves. She was distinguished by a peculiar humility and goodness of temper (which distinguishes her family also) and retained them even in those days of prosperity.

Days steeped in bliss thus seemed to pass on concealing behind their pleasant appearance that dreadful storm which was gathering and soon to burst upon the innocent little family. My wife began to suffer from slow fever and although medicines were administered to her now and then, the treatment was entirely inadequate and fitful. She subsequently contracted cough which could not be cured. I feel at this time as if impending calamity had blinded me, made me stupid and unthinking, and the frightful disease grew upon her with rapid strides unobserved and unattended to. Whenever I saw her at home, she was however cheerful; even though she had fever on, she would attend to my wants morning and evening and thus that very disposition of hers which was my blessing proved a lull and a misfortune. She was advanced in pregnancy and I took her to Bombay from where I was, to her family. It is notorious (though not then known to me) that the climate of Bombay is peculiarly antagonistic to diseases of the nature of consumption; and before long I was called down to Bombay again to see her on her death-bed. How glad was she to see me by her side! Infinite goodness and love! and above all, infinite resignation! In a moment of utter grief I begged her pardon, when alas, it was of no use. But with that indescribable feeling which I believe only a Hindu wife bears towards her husband, she was shocked at the idea of my soliciting her to forgive me and she attributed the crisis at which circumstances had arrived to the indispensable will of God. With a serenity never to be forgotten by those who looked upon her in her dying moments, she calmly and lovingly took leave of her relatives, her mother

and brothers, and left this world of mingled happiness and misery, for that of eternal goodness and peace and blessing.

She was a typical Hindu wife, loving, obedient and respectful. Her image is even now before me moving in the house engaged in the usual round of daily work. In this world divided between fate and will there would seem to be a canon of life which might be gathered from the conduct of that exemplary lady. Love your neighbour and kindred and try to do good to them as best lies in your power. Be not overjoyed and puffed up with prosperity which He in His kindness has bestowed upon you. Be ready and willing to resign into His hands whatever He wishes for reasons best known to Himself to take back. Thus did she live and act and die. A noble lesson she has taught me, I have determined in the name of Sagunabai, (she richly deserves this name) to preach to my Hindu countrymen that they ought to improve and reform their marriage customs; that they ought to try to devote the moral and physical well-being of their womankind—verily a heavenly blessing upon earth, for in their happiness and prosperity lies not only the happiness of individuals but the advancement of the nation as a whole.

Before concluding I may remark that in detailing this short history of my married life, I have not only unburdened my oppressed heart and paid a deserved tribute to the memory of the excellent virtues of my wife which I will endeavour to perpetuate in such ways as my humble means and the pleasure of God will make it possible; but I have also described a typical instance in which may be seen at a glance the evils and the beauties which are to be found in the ordinary married life of a middle class Hindu, the former of which in any scheme advocated by a social reformer, he should try to lessen and remove and the latter to preserve and strengthen.
