



MARY FRANCES BILLINGTON.

# WOMAN IN INDIA



BY

MARY FRANCES BILLINGTON.

4

*WITH INTRODUCTION*

BY THE

MARCHIONESS OF DUFFERIN AND AVA, C.I.

FRONTISPIECE BY REGINALD CLEAVER:

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TO  
HER ROYAL HIGHNESS  
THE DUCHESS OF CONNAUGHT,  
WHOSE SISTERLY SYMPATHY WITH THE WOMEN OF INDIA,  
AND DEEP INTEREST IN EVERY EFFORT FOR THEIR WELFARE,  
HAVE WON FOR HER  
THE SWEET RECOMPENSE OF THEIR LASTING GRATITUDE AND AFFECTION,  
THIS BOOK  
IS, WITH GRACIOUS PERMISSION,  
DEDICATED  
BY  
HER ROYAL HIGHNESS'S  
MOST OBEYANT, HUMBLE SERVANT,  
MARY FRANCES BILLINGTON.



“Respect, kind treatment, and everything that is agreeable, should all be given to the maiden whose hand is taken in marriage. Her sire and brothers and father-in-law and husband’s brothers should show her every respect, and adorn her with ornaments, if they be desirous of reaping benefits, for such conduct on their part always leads to considerable happiness and advantage. Women, O King, should always be worshipped and treated with affection. There, where women are treated with respect, the very deities are said to be filled with joy. There, where women are not worshipped, all acts become fruitless. . . . Women deserve to be honoured. Do ye men show them honour! The righteousness of men depends upon women. All pleasures and enjoyments also completely depend upon them. Do ye serve and worship them. Do ye bend your wills before them. The begetting of offspring, the nursing of children already born, and the accomplishment of all acts necessary for the needs of society, behold all these have women for their cause. By honouring women ye are sure to attain to the fruition of all objects!”—*Mahabharata—Anucasanika Parva*. Prose rendering by PRETAPA CHANDRA RÂY, C.I.E.



## INTRODUCTION.



INFORMATION upon the subject of this book is very often sought for, and it is very difficult to find.

Missionary magazines give glimpses here and there of the thoughts and feelings and homes of the "Women of India;" persons interested in their education tell us of the schools that exist or do not exist for them; those devoted to the hospital question dilate upon the errors of native medicine, and the want of proper attendance and accommodation for women in sickness; while people of taste, and with a love of art, tell us of the beautiful dresses, the Oriental colouring, and, alas! of the corruption of native taste by European models.

Some books give us lives of distinguished Indian women, and show us how talent will make its way through every obstacle; others appeal to our sympathy with tales of woe; we weep with the writers over the unhappy child-widow, or grieve at the strict rules of the purdah; but it requires time and patience to find and to look through all the tracts, magazines, and publications that deal with these subjects separately, and it is a satisfaction to find one volume in which an attempt is made to trace the career of Indian women from the cradle to the grave, and to give some



account of their customs, their occupations, their pleasures, their religion, and their dress.

Specialists and academical students of Indian lore will not expect to find in so small a compass all the data they require; they must naturally dig deeper, and make more profound researches into dictionaries and encyclopædias for the knowledge which they seek. A work of this kind does not pretend to exhaust the subject with which it deals, or to settle the many questions referred to in its pages, and the writer of this one would probably be the first to admit that there are nooks and crannies in the vast continent of India which she has been unable to explore, curious customs which she has not discovered, mines of information which she has not reached. Even so, the labour of collecting the material for this book must have been immense, and it is bewildering even to think of a stranger setting foot in India for the first time, with such a task before her; new languages, different populations, varied religions, multifarious customs, meeting her at every turn; information, true and false, offered her with equal readiness; partisans, fanatics, faddists, and legitimate enthusiasts all airing their pet theories for her benefit. What courage, what industry, what quick perception and calmness of judgment, must have been needed to carry her over so many obstacles! That she has surmounted them is proved by this charmingly written book, full of carefully sifted facts and of fresh observation. Every chapter of it shows what pains have been taken to obtain trustworthy information, to investigate every question, and to approach each one of them with an open mind and in an impartial spirit. Indeed, the judicial character of the author's remarks may cause the advocates of particular views, and especially those who interest themselves in religious or

philanthropic questions in India, to be conscious of a certain want of enthusiasm in her appreciation of their work; nor can they be expected to endorse all her opinions, or to accept, without demur, her rapidly drawn conclusions upon matters which are to them of vital import. It is not, however, entirely without advantage that the cold judgment of a strange inquirer should occasionally be brought to bear upon such efforts. Criticism is a great stimulus to improvement, and if, in this case, a momentary feeling of discouragement be engendered in the hearts of some ardent workers by the severely candid observations of the author, it will surely be succeeded by a reaction in favour of renewed hopefulness and more determined effort.

The facilities of travel, and the quick transmission of news, have brought India very near to us, and every day greater and more intelligent interest is taken in her affairs and in her people; while the social condition and the "rights" of women all over the world occupy the attention of many thoughtful minds. This book will therefore be welcome to a large number of readers, who will not demand from it either finality or infallibility, but who will be grateful to the author for providing them with so much varied and useful information in so succinct and agreeable a form, and who will rise from its perusal with stimulated interest in the great Empire of India, with increased sympathy for its people, and some of them, perhaps, with a new-born desire and a real intention to aid, to the best of their ability, those many efforts which are being made to promote the moral and physical welfare of the women of India.

HARIOT DUFFERIN AND AVA.



## AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

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IT has been my privilege to have been a member of the staff of the *Daily Graphic* since its foundation, and in that capacity I have frequently been permitted to offer suggestions for editorial consideration upon matters of feminine interest. Early in 1893 it occurred to me that very little effort had been made to show in succinet form to English newspaper readers what had been accomplished and was being attempted by the various religious, educational, medical, and social agencies at work among the women of India; and when I laid the idea, in all diffidence, I admit, before the Editor of the *Graphic* and *Daily Graphic*, he quite concurred in my own view that a wide field of indisputable importance had been practically untouched. I, however, had but a bare skeleton to submit to him. This he elaborated and worked out in detail; and while planning on my behalf a thoroughly comprehensive tour, which should enable me to see as many representative phases of the country as possible, allowed me at the same time a pleasant freedom as to the range of my travels, and complete liberty as to the choice of subjects for my letters. Of these, I contributed some twenty-eight, which dealt with many divers aspects and conditions of female life in India, to the columns of the *Daily Graphic*.

India in many respects has been written upon exhaustively; yet, on the other hand, it is so vast an area, its problems are of such supreme Imperial moment, and its population presents such wide racial variations, that it seems well-nigh impossible for the final word to be said concerning it. Of its women especially, in their inner life and thought, only the most superficial knowledge exists. Few, very few, of the thousands of English women who go to the East have cared or tried to penetrate the mysteries which lie beyond the *purdah*. Few of the very few who have done so have seen it without prejudice. In this, perhaps, my newspaper training stood me in good stead, as it enabled me to grasp facts first and draw conclusions afterwards.

I do not profess to offer a sensational book, nor have I a record of cruelty, misery, oppression, or intrigue, with which to fill my pages. In spite of countless speeches, agitations, and missionary reports, woman in the social economy of the East by no means—

“ . . . fades from view,  
A cypher of man's changeless sum  
Of lust past, present, and to come ; ”

and life as I saw it in the zenanas was simply rather dull, rather prosaic, with few distinctive features of romance, hardship, or heroism about it. Yet it would be unfair to classify it as wholly colourless, as absolutely unspiritualized. Family affection enters strongly into it, and even as with ourselves blood brotherhood is a binding tie among Hindus and Mahommedans, Non-Aryans and Parsees. After all, the primal elements of human nature do not greatly vary the world over. And so I have merely tried to tell the truth, and to describe the life as it really is, with its domestic interests, its social customs, and perhaps sometimes unreasoning prejudices. The longer I was away from

home the more fully did I appreciate the spirit of that line :—

“What should they know of England who only England know?”

And if I can only convince some of those who vote away blithely, in a confidence profound as their ignorance, upon matters which are grave as issues of life and death to our Eastern fellow-subjects of the Crown, that Indian women are not altogether in such pitiful plight as some of their so-called friends come and tell us, my inquiries will not have been made in vain.

I would here take the opportunity of expressing my sincere thanks to the Proprietors and Editor of the *Graphic* and *Daily Graphic*, who have not only waived all copyright claims alike upon my literary contributions and illustrations, but concerning the latter have lent every possible assistance towards their reproduction here. To the Editor of the *Gentlewoman* also I am much indebted for the use of a number of pictures from my own photographs, which appeared to illustrate some articles on my travels for girls' reading which I contributed by permission to his pages. Mr. Syed A. M. Shah, barrister-at-law, Lincoln's Inn, claims, too, a word of recognition for the trouble he took to transcribe on my behalf certain Muslim statutes concerning the legal rights of Mahommedan women. To Sir George Birdwood, K.C.I.E., and other gentlemen at the India Office my warm gratitude for many acts of more than official courtesy is due; and, finally, I would like to testify how deep are my obligations to the Marchioness of Dufferin and Ava, C.I., for her wise advice before starting, and subsequent gracious approval.

M. F. B.

MILFORD HOUSE, STRAND,  
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