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No. 12

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# THE NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE

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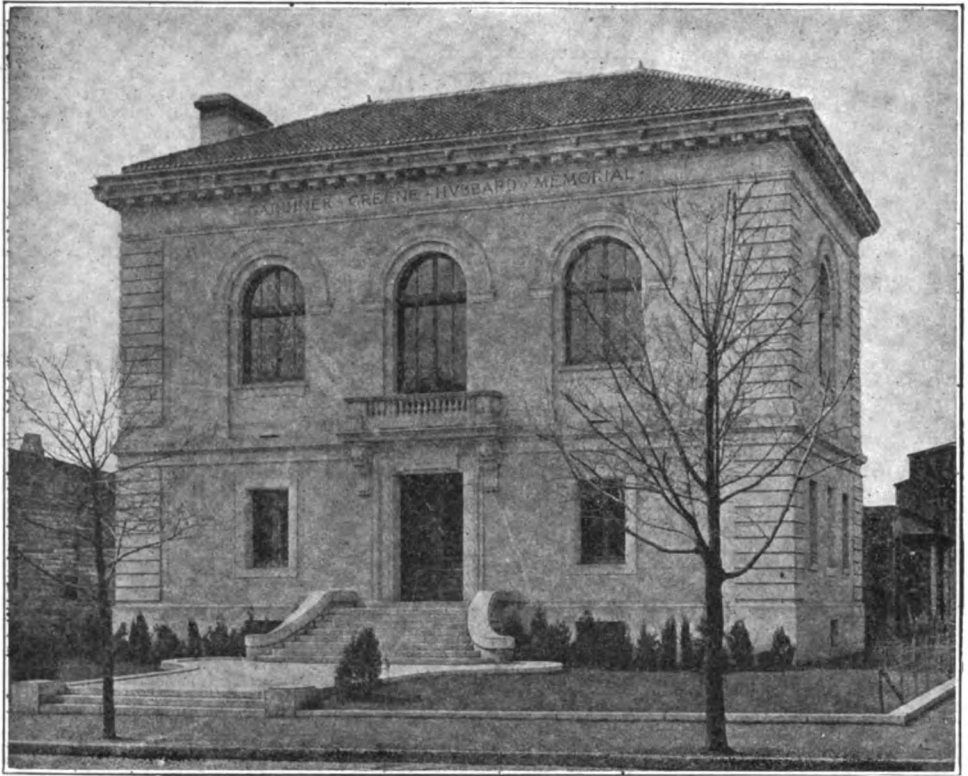
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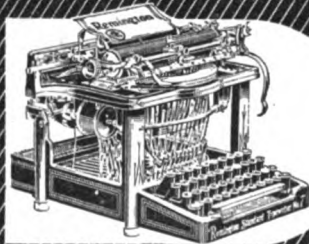
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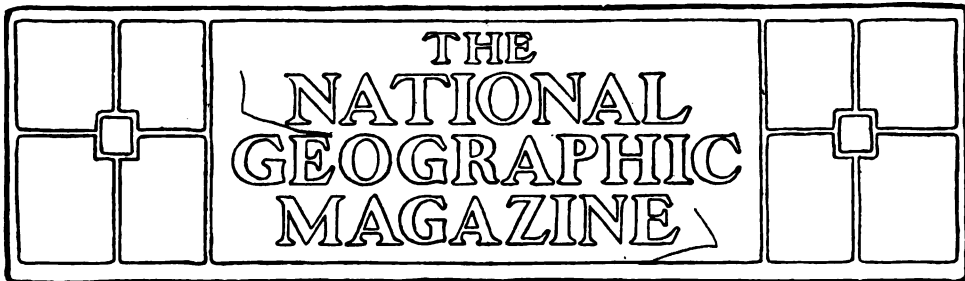
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## THE PARSEES AND THE TOWERS OF SILENCE AT BOMBAY, INDIA

BY WILLIAM THOMAS FEE, U. S. CONSUL GENERAL, BOMBAY

*The following story of the Parsee people and the description of the Towers of Silence at Bombay were written at the United States Consulate largely during hours in the night-time, at seasons when the excessive heat of India prevented Dame Nature from performing her part of the "sweet restorer."*

*It is not claimed that anything new has been told, though it is hoped that some of the old may have been stated in a new light. It is mainly descriptive and written solely for the pleasure and profit of my fellow-countrymen, who of late years have found much of interest in the traditions and customs of the people of India.*

*I am under great obligations to many Parsees for considerable data and help given me, but especially to my friend, the late Dossabhai Framjee Karaka, the historian.*

*The drawing and photographic feature is made use of to illustrate the development and individual attainments of members of this remarkable race.*

WM. THOS. FEE.

**T**HOUGH comparatively small in point of numbers, the Parsees occupy one of the foremost places among Indian nationalities. Their social position, peculiar customs, manners, and foreign designation are impressively striking to a stranger on his first visit to Bombay. Their story is a romantic tale of a people whose ancestry appeared at the very dawn of history, and who occupied Persia when Abraham was a nomadic wanderer, tending his flocks on the sandy plains beyond the Euphrates. They claim that their

ancestral race was the foremost Asiatic nation of their time, whose grandeur, magnificence, and glory were unsurpassed; that their kings were the most powerful and wisest of monarchs, whose armies were renowned for courage and military prowess; that they were valorous and energetic, bringing up their youth to "ride, draw the bow, and speak the truth;" that their heroes were as humane as they were courageous; that their women were as brave as they were fair, and as celebrated for the freedom allowed them as for their modesty.

## "RELIGION OF ZOROASTER"

The Parsees are of Persian origin, of the Iranic race, and are supposed to have had a common ancestry, somewhere in West-Central Asia, where man, as we now know him, is said to have had his birth. More than 3,000 years ago their forefathers left the uplands of that mysterious Aryan home from which our own ancestors had already gone forth, and were in all probability the first of the Indo-European family to embrace a purely monotheistic faith.

In religion they are followers of Zoroaster, who was a religious reformer and founder of this ancient Persian religion at a period probably prior to the Assyrian conquest of Bactria, his native country, which is said to have taken place 1,200 years before the Christian era. At all events, the religion of Zoroaster can certainly claim a hoary antiquity which unquestionably challenges our deep respect.

The scripture of this faith, the Parsee Bible, is called the "Zend-Avesta" or, more properly, simply "Avesta," or "Avesta and its Zend." While Zend is understood to mean the translation of the original text and commentary, in the Zend language, the oldest form of Iranic speech known, and to which Dr March gives the name of "Old Bactrian," the Zend-Avesta embraces the whole Parsee religious literature, ancient and modern.

The Avesta proper is one of the most interesting documents coming to us from the early history and religion of the Indo-European family. It is made up of several distinct parts, many of which are fragmentary and of different ages, some of which must be many centuries older than our era. This religious system is a monotheism. It recognizes the dual principle of good or light, and evil or darkness. Fire is its principal emblem, as being the purest of allelements; hence the misconception that its adherents are fire-worshippers. The com-

mon charge of worshipping fire, the sun, water, and air, brought against the Parsees, is not well founded. The Parsees emphatically deny the charge, and history gives several accounts of acts of hatred shown by the Parsees toward idolatry.

God, according to the Parsee faith, is the creator, preserver, and ruler of the universe. He is the emblem of glory and light. In view of this a Parsee while engaged in prayer is directed to stand before fire or turn his face toward the sun, because they appear to be the most proper symbols of the Almighty. Such is still the present practice among their descendants in India.

Zoroaster, the Parsee Moses, appears as a being of supernatural endowments and as receiving from the supreme divinity, by personal interviews, by questions and answers, the truths which he is to communicate to men. The idea of a future life and the immortality of the soul pervades the whole of Avesta literature. The doctrine of the resurrection of the body at the time of the last judgment is claimed as a genuine Zoroastrian dogma, without the slightest trace of its being borrowed from a foreign source.

With religion Zoroaster has combined both moral and speculative philosophy in a remarkable degree. In regard to man, he takes cognizance of two intellects—the "Asno-Kratu," the innate or born wisdom, and the "Goashosruto-Kratu," or acquired wisdom. The Zend-Avesta insists in emphatic terms that "virtue alone is happiness in this world," and its path is the path of peace.

The moral foundation of the Parsee religious works is built upon three basic injunctions, which are pithily expressed in the Avesta, viz., "Humata," "Hukhta," and "Hvarshta," which mean "good thoughts," "good words," and "good deeds."

## EMIGRATION TO INDIA

When the Persian Empire of Sassanides was destroyed by the Saracens in 651 A. D., the great mass of the nation was forced to adopt the faith of Islamism, the religion of their Mohammedan conquerors; but a small number clung to the old Zoroastrian faith and took refuge in the wilderness of the Persian province of Khorasan. After much wandering and enduring great persecution and hardship, they, in the eighth century, emigrated to India and made a settlement at Sanjan, in the neighborhood of Surat. Here they lived in the Sanjan country for some seven hundred years in tranquillity and in full enjoyment of their religious rites, under the government of the Hindoo rajahs of Sanjan, Guzerat.

They chiefly occupied themselves in agriculture and industrial pursuits. It is said that they not only turned the face of the territory they occupied from a dreary jungle into a fruitful garden and made it blossom as the rose, but they also enjoyed considerable prosperity.

About the time of the discovery of America the Hindoo rajah's government, under which they lived, was overthrown by a Mohammedan-Afghan conqueror. The Parsees, with a high character for fidelity, were loyal to the Indian kings, who had given them and their ancestors a welcome when they had been driven from their own Persian homes by the same foe. They gathered their forces to the standard of the rajahs, and proved themselves of great valor. The result of the campaign was, however, one of disaster. They were finally dispersed from the Sanjan country and compelled to seek new homes in other parts of Guzerat.

It was probably some time after this event, though there does not seem to exist any authoritative record of the exact date when the Parsees arrived in Bombay. It may, however, be safely said

that their settlement in that island was some time before Bombay was ceded to the British, in 1669, by the King of Portugal, as a dowry of Catherine, Princess of Braganza, who became the wife of Charles the Second of England.

As a sect in Persia they have disappeared under religious persecutions, and have sunk into ignorance and poverty, though still preserving a reputation for honesty, industry, and obedience to law superior to that of other Persians.

## THEY HAVE RETAINED THEIR INDIVIDUALITY FOR 1,200 YEARS

There seems to be no authoritative information as to the number composing the first exodus to India, or if the Parsee colony was ever materially increased by early additions from Persia. Some traditions have it that there was a paucity of females among them, and that they intermarried with Hindoo women on their first coming to India. This traditional intimation of racial mixture is not well received by the Parsee people of today. However it may have been, there is one thing certain, that if ever the practice did occur it surely was short-lived, as no custom of today is more religiously observed than that of intermarriage among their own people.

For some 1,200 years they have lived among the all-absorbent Hindoos, yet this mere handful of people have not been absorbed. During the last 300 years the transmissive influence of an Anglo-Saxon civilization has been reflected upon them, yet they remain Parsees still. India has in turn been conquered and reconquered by all the great nations of history, from Greek to Britain. Her conquerors have each shaped the affairs of half of the earth. The possession of the Indian Peninsula seems an indispensable requirement for sovereignty in the East. Internecine wars, racial strifes, and caste prejudices have robbed her of her own; pestilence and famine have blighted her fairest flower; yet during all these centuries, amid all the vicissitudes of oriental

life, have lived the worthy descendants of the ancient Persian people, true to their faith, and have substantially preserved and transmitted the main characteristics of their ancestral race. The Parsee stands unique in the history of mankind.

The Parsees of India have been exceedingly prosperous and have steadily increased in number, now being variously estimated at about 100,000 souls. They are most numerous in Bombay. A few have settled in China and remote places in India for the purpose of trade, but these outlying settlements do not contain more than perhaps 4,000 people. It is calculated that about 85 per cent of the Parsees in India reside in the Bombay presidency, which was found by the census taken by the government of India in 1901 to be 78,552. Of these 46,231 reside in city of Bombay.

On the spread of Mohammedanism to India they became again the subject of persecution. Since the occupation of India by the British they have fared better, and now form a peaceful, intelligent, wealthy, and influential community.

#### PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

Physically they are tall and erect, having remarkably small hands and feet, with facial features resembling the Europeans. They have a quickness of action bordering on nervousness. Their hair is jet black and their eyes are dark. In their manners they are exceedingly polite, kind, and hospitable, often putting themselves to great inconvenience to accommodate a stranger. In the habit of diet they are religiously abstemious, and are exceedingly temperate in the use of tobacco and intoxicating liquors.

Excepting, perhaps, fish, fowl, and mutton, they are not a "meat-eating people." Like most oriental nations, a principal food among them is rice, served in curries and in a hundred different ways.

Fully three-fifths of the population of the globe live on rice; the founders of the five great religions of the world were nourished by it. It might be worth while for scientists to look a little more closely into the brain-making qualities of this worthy food.

They were never known to have practiced the barbarous custom of "suttee," the burning of the widow on the funeral pyre with the corpse of her husband, or of following their Hindoo neighbors in the cruel practice of prohibiting their widows, often mere infants, from remarrying. They are also free from the caste system so rigidly practiced by the Hindoos. Since they have freed themselves from Hindoo influences and become amenable to Western civilization, the practice of infant marriage has substantially ceased among them. Their women are treated with respectful consideration and have long since been liberated from the seclusion of the zenana and the use of the purdah.

The long, flowing "saree" of many silken tints, wrapped about the body in graceful folds, gives to the female Parsee a garment of exquisite beauty and rare comfort. It would be a matter of great regret if this graceful dress should give place to modern European fashion, with the tight corset and the high-heeled shoe, that destroy the graceful carriage and health of the wearer.

The Parsee women are generally of good figure and of pleasing and intelligent countenance. Many of them have a light olive complexion and are considered very handsome. They appear to great disadvantage by being obliged to conceal their hair, of which nature has graced them in a most luxuriant manner, under the "mathabana," a custom regarded as a token of feminine modesty. A Parsee historian states that there is no injunction against keeping the head uncovered; yet the Parsees have imbibed the notion, supported by long usage and originally imported from Persia, that it is sinful and contrary to religion to leave



the head uncovered, either by day or night; hence a Parsee is never without his skull cap or a woman without her "mathabana." The latter is a thin white linen of the size of a small handkerchief.

#### CUSTOMS AND MANNERS

As a separate community the Parsees have not only their peculiar religion, but also their own moral code, and as a civil body they are not only permitted, but also aided by the state, in enforcing their own laws of marriage and divorce. Their ancient custom governing inheritance and succession has been enacted for them, on their petition, into the form of a legal statute by the empire. They enjoy full religious freedom, and their peculiar customs and manners are fully protected by the liberality of the British rule in India.

For a number of years after they came to India they adhered to the use of their native Persian language; but as time rolled on they gave it up for Gujerati, the language of the Hindoos, among whom they dwelt. Gujerati now forms their vernacular. They are taught English from earliest childhood, and they study in the schools Persian and Sanskrit as classics. They all speak Hindustani, and many of them are fluent in the Persian tongue, in which they keep up communication with their brethren in Persia.

Their worship in the course of time became tainted by many Hindoo practices, and the reverence for the fire and sun, as emblems of the glory of "Ormuzd," naturally degenerated into idolatrous practices. However, the worship in recent years has been restored to its pristine purity, and the sacred fire which Zoroaster is said to have brought down from heaven is kept burning in consecrated spots and temples are built over subterranean fires.

They have a priesthood which, strange to say, are not educators or

teachers of the people, as is usually the case in other religious systems, nor are they themselves necessarily educated, but are simply a class of men who perform the ceremonial rites of the religion at marriages and funerals, tend the fires on the temple altars, burn incense, chant hymns, and say prayers.

The Parsee is imbued with a spirit of toleration and is most respectful toward the religions of others. Besides their own sacred days, they observe many of those of the Hindoos. In Bombay they celebrate the holidays of the English and close their shops and places of business on the Christian Sabbath.

There is now a marked desire on the part of the Parsees to adapt themselves to the manners and customs of the Europeans. The Parsee mode of life may be described as an eclectic ensemble, half European and half Hindoo. As they advance every year in civilization and enlightenment, they copy more closely European manners and modes of living, adopting the bad with the good—regretfully too much of the former. A Greek historian has remarked that of all nations the ancient Persians were most distinguished by their readiness in imitating foreign manners and customs. This peculiarity their descendants have retained to the present day.

During their sojourn in Guzerat they willingly adopted the language, dress, and other social customs of that country, and they now have taken as completely to English manners and customs, so much so that when they speak of "going home" they mean to England. The educated and influential classes have already adopted in their domestic life the comforts, conveniences, elegancies, and, we may also add, the costliness of the European style.

The domestic arrangements of their houses have also undergone, of late, vast changes. Their houses are generally built in good taste, upon well-conceived

plans, and they are well ventilated. Their villas or garden houses are some of the best in Bombay. The drawing-rooms are richly furnished and decorated and the walls adorned with landscapes and historical pictures, while the particular boast of a Parsee is to have his house brilliantly lighted with many lamps and chandeliers of every description.

A great improvement has taken place among the Parsees in their mode of taking meals. Years ago they used, like the Hindoos, to eat them squatting on the ground, and the viands were served to them in a brass dish, on which they were all spread out at the same time, a practice still in vogue among the poorer classes. The better classes have for a long time past adopted the table and chair, with all the usual accompaniments of a European dinner. At large parties the table is spread out in English fashion, instead of as formerly, when hundreds sat in a line in rows upon an oblong sheet of cotton cloth laid upon the floor, each eating his food off a plantain leaf upon which it was laid out.

The public and private schools of Bombay are largely attended by their children, and every effort is made to procure translations of standard English books. As a matter of fact it may be said that the Parsees are very progressive, and that it is only necessary for them to understand the value and advantage of whatever may be offered them to induce them to accept it with eagerness.

#### PUBLIC-SPIRITED GENEROSITY

At present they seem to have lost all their military spirit. Many follow commercial and mercantile pursuits, some of them being the wealthiest merchants in India, while others have obtained high favor in government offices or have won distinction by reason of their charitable gifts. Four Parsees have been especially honored by the late Queen

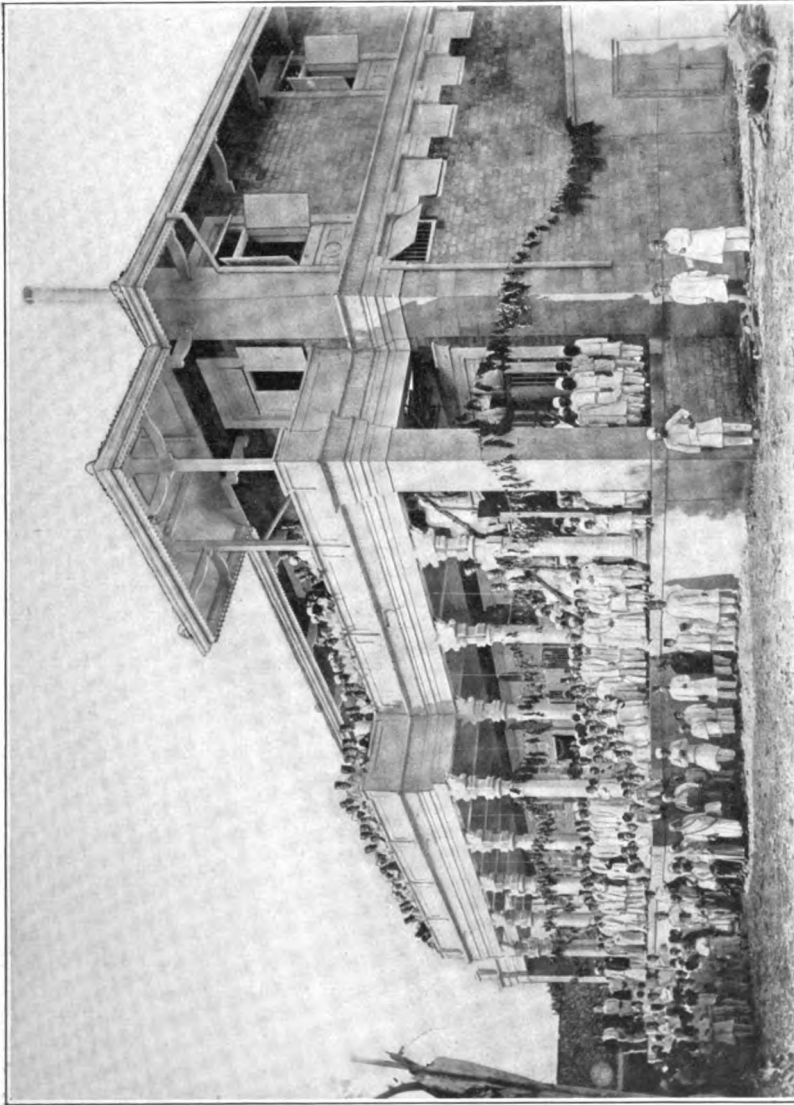
Victoria. The heads of two families have been made baronets—Jamsetjee Jeejeebhai and Dinshaw Maneckjee Petit—and knighthood has been conferred upon the late Kavasjee Jehangir Readymoney and M. M. Bhowmagree, at present representing the district of Bethnal Green in the British House of Commons.

They provide for their own poor and infirm. Strikingly strange, one never sees in Bombay a Parsee soldier, servant, or beggar.

But their faultless generosity is broader than their race, and many of the fine public buildings, colleges, and hospitals, of which Bombay is justly proud, owe their origin and maintenance to the liberality, wealth, public spirit, and genius of the Parsees. Indeed, it is a most significant fact that the one hundred thousand followers of Zoroaster who still tend the sacred flame, in spite of their numerical insignificance, play so large a part in the development of India.

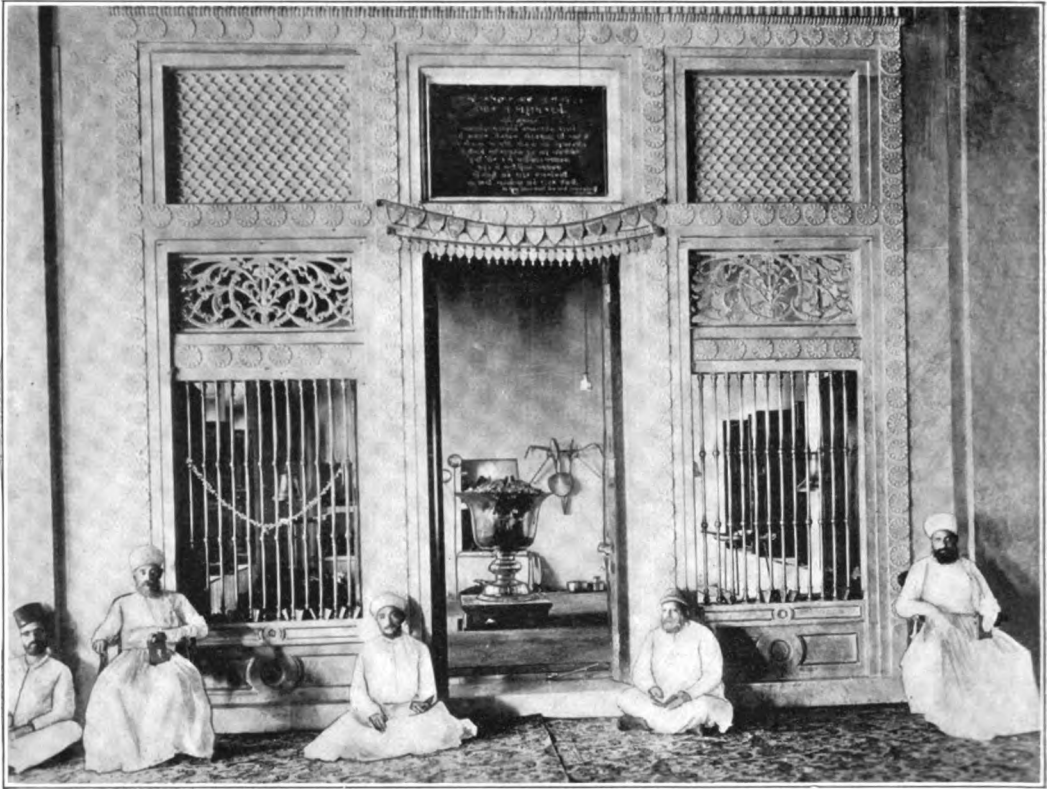
A comparison of the political standing and social surroundings of the Parsee community in Bombay with that of their sister community in Persia furnishes one of the most remarkable examples in the whole range of English history of the beneficence of British rule.

It is interesting to relate that the Parsees of Persia have been helped by their wealthy kinsmen in Bombay, especially as regards their education and the lightening of their political burdens. The rupees which the Parsee community has spent till now for the alleviation of the sufferings of their followmen, irrespective of caste or creed, are to be counted in crores, and one of the happiest and most remarkable features of it is that this spirit of catholic charity burns not only at home—that is, in the country which they have adopted as their own—but wherever they take themselves, either for the pursuit of business or pleasure.



Fire Temple at Udvada

In fulfilment of a vow made by the Parsees on their voyage to India, when they were overtaken by a severe storm, they founded a great fire temple in about the year 799 A. D., at Sanjan. This was the first fire temple founded by the Parsees in India, and is known by the name of "Iran Shah." Today there is kept burning at "Udvada" the same sacred fire that, according to the Kisseh-i-Sanjan, was lighted on the Gujerati coast 700 years before Columbus discovered America.



Interior of Fire Temple

There are some thirty fire temples in Bombay. The picture shows the sacred fire and attending priests in the Aujuman, or Community, fire temple at Dhoobie Talao, Girguam Road, Bombay.

#### HIGHLY EDUCATED AND PROGRESSIVE PEOPLE

It will be of interest to note the per cent of literacy of this people in comparison with the principal races of the Bombay presidency, as obtained by the last government census. The population of the presidency of Bombay, including the native states, is given at 25,435,000 of people. The literacy of the inhabitants of the entire presidency is given at 6.4 per cent. The literacy of the Hindoos is given as 60; the Mohammedans as 41; the Jains as 270; the Brahmins at 320; the Parsees

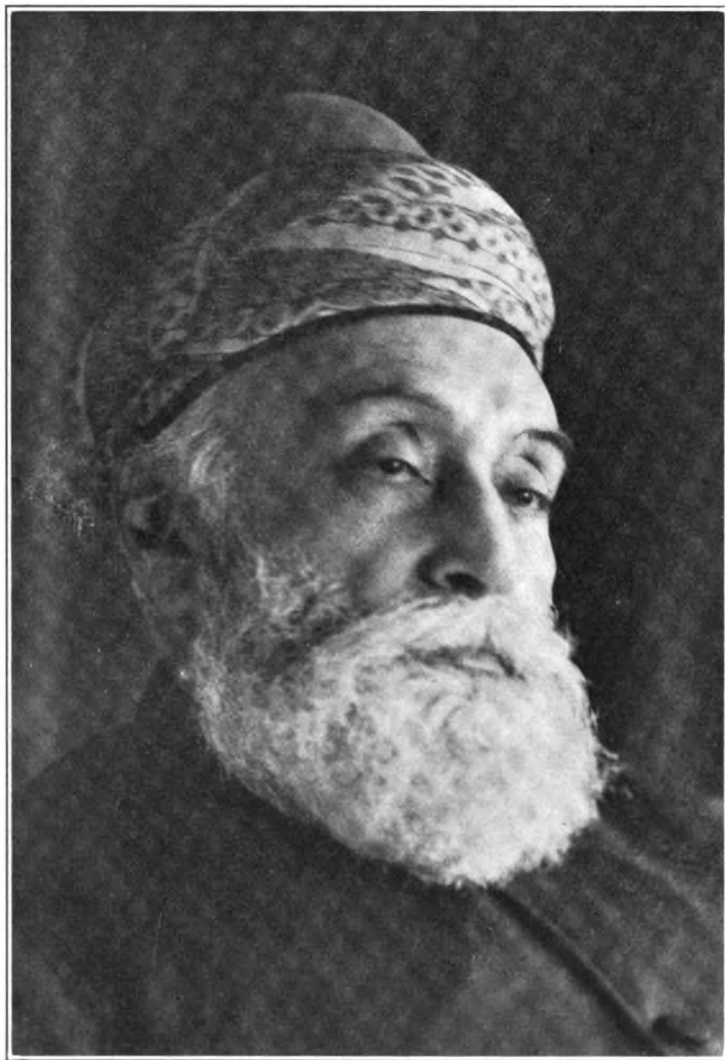
at 650 per 1,000 of their respective people. In point of intelligence, education, wealth, refinement, and public charity, the Parsee stands preëminently at the head of all the races of Western India.

There are perhaps few, if any, large cities where the death rate approaches that of Bombay, yet it speaks well for the sanitation and vitality of the Parsee community, on observing the comparative death rate of the different races in Bombay, that the Parsees are next lowest to the Europeans. It might be further stated that the European in India



A Parsee Lady in Regulation Dress





**Jamsetjee Nusserwanjee Tata, the Business Prince and Philanthropist of Bombay**

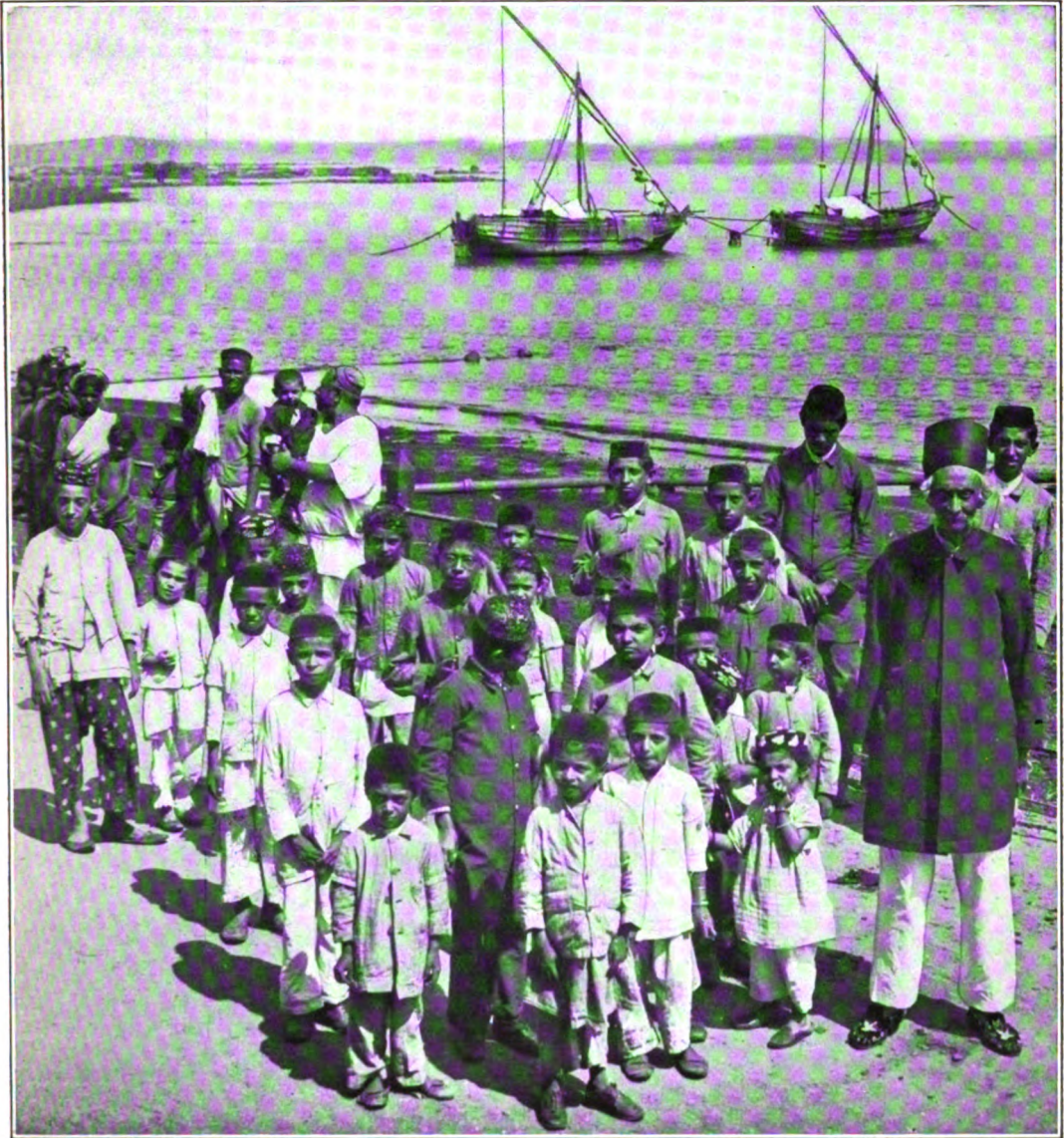
By commerce, trade with China, and cotton manufacture Mr Tata has accumulated vast wealth. His firm has branch houses and representatives in the principal cities of the world, and he has become one of the foremost business men of his race, and of India. His city residence in Bombay is palatial and his hospitality unbounded. He is the most loyal subject of the King Emperor, yet one of his present great aims is to develop some of the vast resources of India.

He has recently visited America to learn something of her manufacturing skill and methods, that he might be enabled thereby to reduce the iron ores of which India is so rich.

He has set aside thirty-two lakhs of rupees (one million dollars, gold) of his wealth for the founding of an "Indian University of Research," for the purpose of affording facilities for original scientific research and investigation in the broadest sense possible.

Mr. Tata is a leader in the building improvement of Bombay. The vast hotel which he is constructing is a monument to his public-spiritedness and will reflect great credit upon the city. It is built of basalt rock, is seven stories high, covers two squares of ground, and fronts on the Bay of Bombay, over which it has a magnificent outlook. It has been building for the past five years, and is now nearing completion, at an estimated cost of more than twenty-one lakhs of rupees (about seven hundred thousand dollars, gold).

He intends to make it "not only the finest hotel in India, but in all the East."



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A Parsee Schoolmaster and His Class of Boys



Navrozjee Maneckjee Wadia, C. I. E.

A Parsee merchant and a companion of the Most Eminent Order of the Indian Empire. He is reputed to be the richest man in Bombay. His mother, the late Bai Motlibhia Maneckjee Wadia, has endeared her memory for many generations to come by her munificent charitable gifts. Mr Wadia will leave by deed of trust his entire vast fortune to universal charity and relief of the distressed, without distinction of nationality, race, cast, color, sex, or condition. He is also the Bearer of the Cross of the Legion of Honor, conferred upon him by Napoleon III.



A Parsee Bride and Groom

A promising barrister-at-law of Bombay, with his handsome bride

invariably sends his children home. The fact is there are but very few European children in Bombay, and the European population consists mainly of the adult class; hence the death rate among them would naturally be the minimum. The Parsee has many chil-



A Parsee School Girl in Regulation Dress

dren; therefore it can be well stated that the mortality rate is decidedly in favor of the Parsee.

The reason that brought a custom into life in the East may have long since ceased to exist and is perhaps forgotten, yet the custom may be continued. On

seeking to learn why, one is met with the answer, "It is an immemorial custom" or "It is part of religion," when in fact religion has little to do with it. But religion has a broad back.

After some devastating famine in times gone by cattle became scarce, and to encourage their increase became a necessity. The cow with the high hump was selected by the Brahmin caste or some powerful rajah and pronounced sacred; hence she was permitted to propagate and roam at will; yet today it would seem difficult to give a reason why one kind of a cow more than another, or even why any, should be considered sacred.

#### SOME PECULIAR CUSTOMS

In the early days the use of soaps and disinfectants were unknown. The urine of cows was found to contain an element of ammonia. The Parsees were taught to use it for cleansing and purifying purposes and as a disinfectant. Surely the reason for the practice of this disgusting and filthy habit has long ceased; yet, strange to say, it is still continued in use today, and it is even said to have a religious sanction. A corpse, though it may have died of plague or other contagious disease, is first washed and disinfected (?) with the product of the cow before being borne on an open bier through the public streets of Bombay to the Towers of Silence.

In connection with the ceremony of the dead, the face of a deceased Parsee is exposed three or four times to the gaze of a dog during the funeral oration and the dog is finally led, following the corpse, to the Towers of Silence. One is told that the dog is supposed to guide the soul of the dead toward heaven and to ward off the bad influences of evil spirits to which it may be exposed. The exact object and meaning of this strange ceremony cannot be satisfactorily given. The better-educated Par-



sees claim that there is no reason for it, and none seems to be found. It is a striking example of a custom being continued after the reason has ceased to exist or at least has been forgotten.

Another odd custom in vogue among the Parsees is that the name of the father is given to the son as a surname. For instance, if a Parsee of the name of "Framjee Dossabhoy" had a son whose name was Maneckjee, his full name would be "Maneckjee Framjee." When again his son had a son whose name was Jehanjir, his full name would be "Jehanjir Maneckjee." The grandfather's name is dropped entirely within three generations.

Sometimes the name of a distinguished ancestor is added after the father's name, but this is not even continued for more than a few generations. This practice has a tendency to destroy the family unit and lessen its influence and magnify the caste or tribe.

While the general voice of the Parsee community seems to be unfavorable to the admission of aliens to the Zoroastrian faith, and the trustees of the principal Fire Temple in Bombay have prohibited such persons from entering its sacred precincts, nevertheless proselytism to the religion does occasionally occur. Parsee priests are to be found whose objections can be overcome and who will permit the sacred precincts of the Fire Temple, over which they preside, to be invaded by alien converts to the Parsee faith.

#### MARRIAGE CEREMONIES

The Parsees, owing to their coming in contact with the Hindoos, adopted a number of their customs, among which was unfortunately included the practice of infant marriage. Hindoos are most strictly enjoined by their "Shastras" to have their girls married before they have reached the age of nine years. Great disgrace is attached to the parents on their failure to do so. The Parsees

seemed to have participated in this idea, and consequently practiced, until within recent years, infant marriage of their daughters. This custom is now no longer followed by the Parsees in Bombay, but instances of the kind, we are informed, may still occur in some out-of-the-way place in Guzerat, where the



A Parsee School Girl in Regulation Dress

light of a higher civilization has not yet dawned. The most sensible persons among them have always disapproved of the absurd custom, and it may be stated that the practice of infant marriage among the Parsees is now a custom of the past.

Marriages are generally arranged by the parents of the contracting parties.



The Framjee Dinshaw Petit Parsee Sanitorium

A handsome structure for a noble purpose, built out of a fund set apart by the late Mr Framjee Dinshaw Petit for the benefit of his Parsee community.

The length of the building is 293 feet and the depth is 75 feet. It can accommodate thirty-six families in all—twelve on each floor. To each of such families two rooms are assigned, with a bath-room, kitchen, and other necessary arrangements.

A noticeable feature in connection with the sanitary arrangements of the building is the introduction of the "Macerating Bacteriological Tanks" for the disposal of sewage and sullage.

The cost of the building, including grounds, is nearly five lakhs of rupees.

Sometimes they may commission a match-making priest to find a suitable party for their child. The horoscope of the boy, as well as that of the girl, may be examined by the professor of astrology to determine whether the respective stars of the proposed pair are in harmony. The wealth, position, and social standing of the parents are thoroughly investigated and considered. When the heads of both families have been satisfied and approval given as to the suit-

ability of the match, the betrothal takes place, usually at a day fixed by the astrologer. There is little ceremony attending this occasion, and it is considered to be made binding by the exchange of presents.

For several days preceding the date of marriage, which is usually fixed on certain days of the year supposed to be propitious for such ceremony, a succession of dinners and "natches" are given to friends of the family. It is customary



Sir Jamsetjee Jijibhai, Third Baronet

He represented the city of Bombay at the Coronation of King Edward VII, and is by common consent the recognized head of the Parsee community of Bombay.

The vast wealth of his family has built bridges and reservoirs, founded and maintained universities, colleges, hospitals, schools, and charitable funds for the benefit of all races, without regard to cast, color, or creed.

on these occasions to make exchange of presents between the kinsmen of the bride and groom. The bride is also presented with valuable ornaments by the proposed father-in-law. Many thousands of rupees are spent upon these antenuptial festivities.

On the wedding day a large number of friends are invited by the contracting parties to witness the nuptial ceremony. Following the custom of the Hindoos, the wedding always takes place after the sun has set, in accordance with the promise given to the Rajah of Sanjan by the Parsees on their first landing in India. The wedding guests, when assembled, to the number frequently of one thousand and more—the men in full Parsee costume of snow white, the ladies arrayed in rich jewelry and dresses of variegated colors, splendidly ornamented with gold and embroidery, the evening enlivened by the music of a band—form a beautiful scene, rarely witnessed in any other part of the globe.

Bouquets of flowers, upon which rose-water is sprayed from a golden jar, in order to give them a perfume, are passed among the guests. Packets of "pan-supari," made of the nut of the arica palm, upon which a portion of chunam or lime is smeared, wrapped in the leaf of the beetle vine and pinned together with a clove, are distributed to the guests.

The procession of the bridegroom was formerly attended with great splendor and state, as is still the practice of the Hindoos. Gaily comparisoned horses, chariots, and sometimes elephants are used to convey the bridegroom to the home of the bride. On reaching the home of the bride, the bride and groom are seated opposite each other in chairs, placed on a carpet or large rug, and the guests and relatives are seated in circles about them.

For the following details the writer has abbreviated from a description of a marriage ceremony furnished him by his

good friend, the late Dossabhai Framjee Karaka :

A piece of cloth is held between the bride and groom, as a curtain, so as to screen them from each other's sight. Under this curtain they are made to hold each other's right hand in their grasp. Then another piece of cloth is placed around so as to encircle them, and the ends of the cloth are tied together in a double knot. In the same way raw twist is taken and wound round the pair seven times by the officiating priests, who during the performance repeat the short prayers of Yatha Ahu Vairyo.

On completing the seventh round the twist is tied seven times over the joined hands of the couple, as well as round the double knot of the ends of the cloth previously put about them. When this is over incense is burnt on a fire placed in a flat metallic vase, after which the curtain is suddenly dropped down and the bride and bridegroom, who have each been provided with a few grains of rice, hasten to throw them at one another. This is followed by a clapping of hands from the ladies seated around the bridal pair, and the applause is taken up by the gentlemen outside.

After throwing the rice the couple sit side by side, when the recital of "ashirwad," or blessings, by two "dasturs," or chief priests, follows; one of these stands before the bride and the other before the bridegroom.

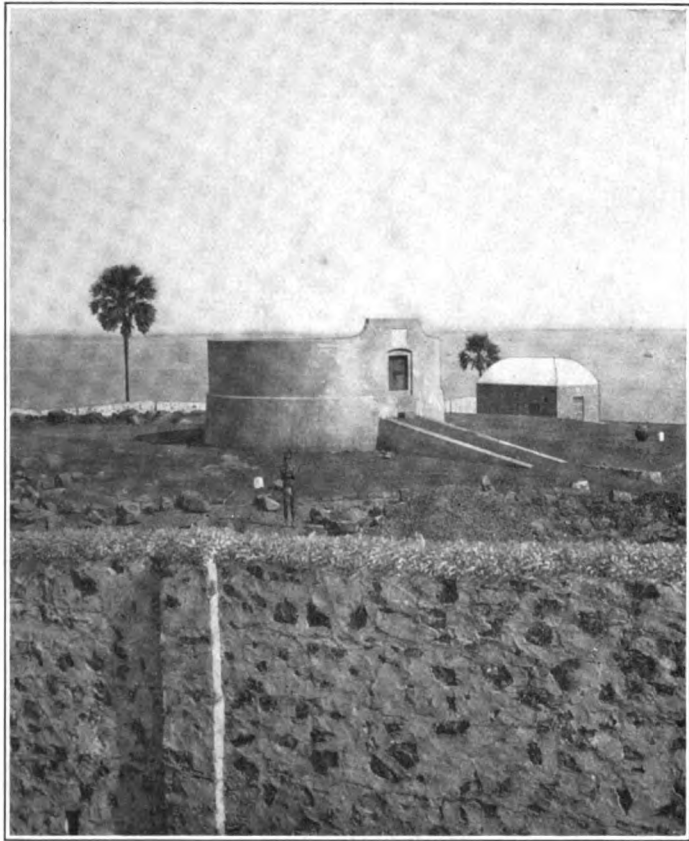
The holding of the curtain between the bride and the bridegroom and its subsequent removal are meant to show that up to the time of the ceremony they were separated from each other, but that they are so no longer. Their being made to sit opposite to one another at first and side by side a little later on also expresses the same notion. The grasping of their right hands by each other and their being tied by a string signify that they are thenceforth united. The putting round of the string and the cloth, so as to encircle them with a double





A Parsee Wedding





The Tower of Silence and Fire Temple at Uran

The photograph was taken from a rock in the cliffs of the overhanging mountains by an artist especially sent out by Messrs Underwood & Underwood, of New York. The Tower has been but recently dedicated, and hence the grounds are yet unimproved. The wall, capped with broken glass, that surrounds the grounds is noticeably in the foreground. The Tower is not a large one. The inclined pathway to the door that admits the corpse and pall-bearers is very distinctly shown. The oblong white arched-roofed building to the right, near a targola palm, is a small Fire Temple, where the sacred fire is ever burning, and is used by the mourners for prayers.

knot at the ends, means that they are now joined and made one. The object of using raw twist, and of its being put round them seven times, is to show that while raw twist itself can be very easily broken, when it is strung round seven times and twined into one it forms so strong a band that it cannot be broken by ordinary strength, thus implying that

the love and affection of the husband and wife for each other should be so strong that nothing can undo it.

The reason for the twist being strung round seven times is because this number is held to be very auspicious among the Parsees, there having been seven archangels, seven heavens, and seven continents known to the ancient Per-



A Model of a "Tower of Silence"

This model gives a fair idea of a Tower of Silence; the circular wall, steps, drainage wells, the door, and also the inside construction are exactly represented in miniature.

sians. Lastly, the throwing of a few grains of rice upon each other is watched with much interest by the friends and relations of the bride and bridegroom.

The eyes of all, particularly of the ladies, are upon the pair to see which succeeds in throwing first the rice as soon as the curtain is withdrawn. The one who succeeds is supposed to evince the more love and affection of the two.

Then the senior "dastur" begins the more solemn part of the marriage ceremony, and pronounces the following blessing: "May the omniscient Lord bless you with many sons and grandsons, with good livelihood, heart-ravishing friendship, and an existence of one hundred and fifty years."

Portions of the brief address which follows the blessing are given below.

By the helping name of Ahura Mazda may your happiness increase.

May you be brilliant.

Try to do good deeds.

Be increasing.

Be victorious.

Learn to do good deeds of piety.

Be worthy to do good deeds.

Think of nothing but the truth.

Speak nothing but the truth.

Do nothing but what is proper.

Shun all bad thoughts.

Shun all bad words.

Shun all bad actions.

Praise deeds of piety.

Commit no acts opposed to piety.

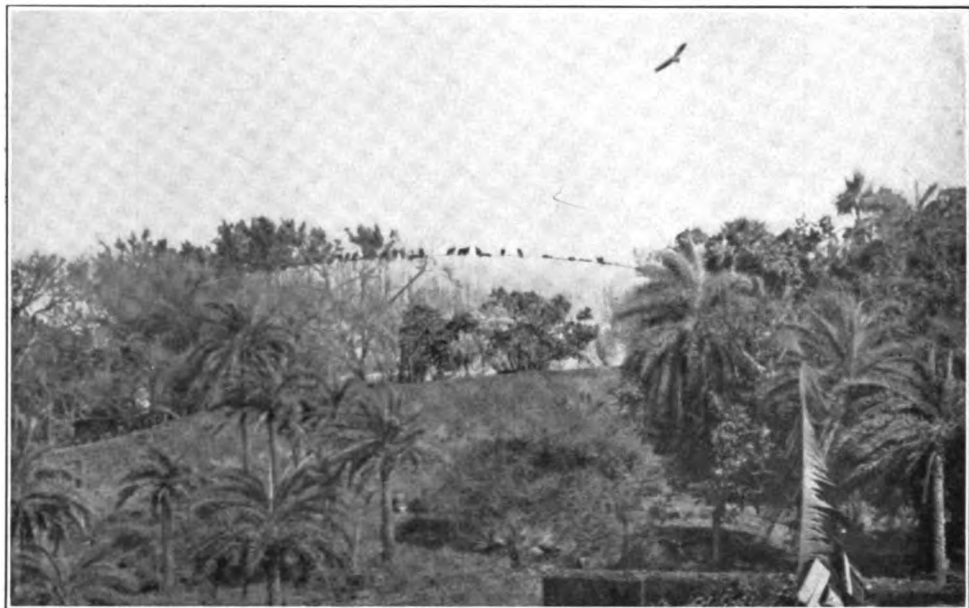
Praise the Mazdayasnan religion.

Do nothing without mature consideration.

Acquire wealth by good means.

Say what is true before your superiors, and act according to their orders.  
 Be courteous, sweet-tongued, and kind toward your friends.  
 Do not indulge in scandals.  
 Avoid being angry.  
 Do not commit sins for the sake of avoiding shame.  
 Do not be ambitious.  
 Do not torment others.  
 Do not entertain wicked jealousy.  
 Do not be naughty.

Treat your friends in a way agreeable to them.  
 Do not enter into any discussion with persons of illfame.  
 Speak in an assembly after great consideration.  
 Speak with moderation in the presence of kings.  
 Preserve the good name of your father.  
 In no way annoy your mother.  
 Keep yourselves pure by means of truth.  
 Be immortal like Kaikhosru.  
 Be well-informed like Kaus.  
 Be as brilliant as the sun.



From Stereograph, copyright, by Underwood & Underwood

### Tower of Silence

Where vultures devour the Parsi dead, Malabar Hill, Bombay, India.

Avoid evil thoughts.  
 Avoid evil passions (revenge).  
 Deprive not others of their property.  
 Keep away from the wives of others.  
 Be industrious in following good professions.  
 Do good to the pious and to the virtuous.  
 Do not quarrel with the revengeful.  
 Never be a partner with an ambitious man.  
 Do not become a companion of a backbiter or a scandal-monger.  
 Do not join in company of persons of illfame.  
 Do not cooperate with the ill-informed.  
 Fight with your enemies only by fair means.

Be as pure as the moon.  
 Be as illustrious as Zarthosthra.  
 Be as strong as Rustam.  
 Be as fertile as the earth.  
 As soul is united with the body, so be you united, friendly with your friends, brothers, wife, and children.  
 Always keep good faith, and preserve a good character.  
 Recognize only Ahura Mazda, the omniscient Lord, as your God.  
 Praise Zoroaster as your spiritual leader.  
 Treat Ahreman, the evil spirit, with contempt.

When the ceremony has been concluded the bridegroom, accompanied by his friends, retires to his own house, where they all sit down to a banquet. The bride's party are entertained by her father. The ladies are first served, and when they have left the table it is prepared for the gentlemen.

The Parsees, from their earliest sojourn in India, have refrained from eating meat on the day of marriage, to avoid giving offense to the feelings of the Hindoos. The viands, therefore, consist of fish, vegetables, sweetmeats, fruits, preserves, and similar articles. Wines are drunk freely, and several toasts are proposed by the company, including the health of the wedded pair, their parents, and the chief men of the assembly. After dinner the ladies retire to their own houses, but the gentlemen sit till a late hour enjoying the pleasures of a "natch," or of a band that follows. A repetition of the nuptial benediction is also performed by the priests after midnight before a few select friends and relatives.

As the couple are invariably young, separate accommodation is seldom allotted them after their marriage, nor even when they have attained adult age do they leave the parental roof. They live in the same house with the other members of the family.

Though a father has six or seven sons they all reside, with their wives and children, in the house of their sire, and the gray-headed old man is often able to look with pride and pleasure upon the group of children and grandchildren around him.

#### THE TOWERS OF SILENCE

Mr John Fryer, who arrived in Bombay in the year 1671, says in his book of travels: "On the other side of the great inlet to the sea is a great point abutting Old Women's Island, and is called Malabar Hill; a rocky, woody mountain, yet sends forth long grass.

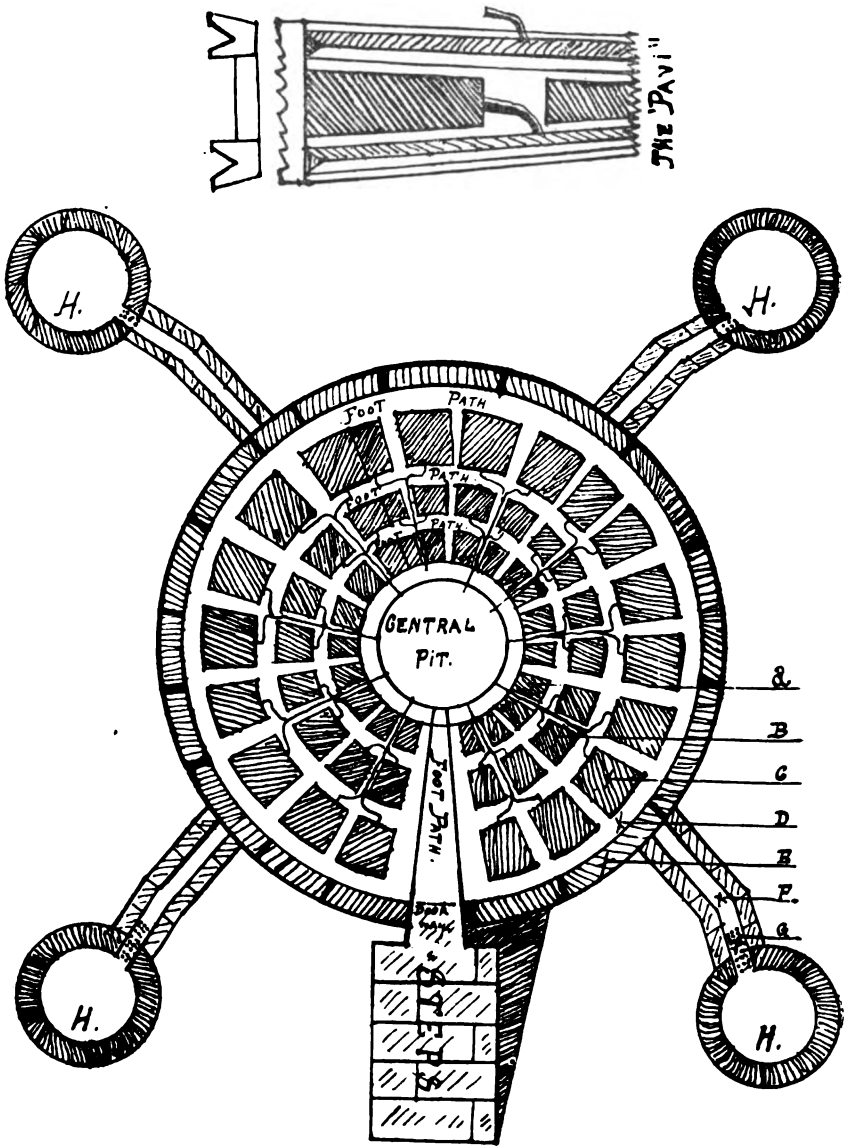
At the top of all is a Parsy tomb, lately reared. On its declivity, towards the sea, the remains of a stupendous pagod, near a tank of fresh water, which the Malabars visit it mainly for." This "Parsy tomb," or "dokma," as it is called in the vernacular, still exists on Malabar Hill.

In accordance with religious injunctions, the Parsees build their Towers of Silence on the tops of hills, if available. No expense is spared in constructing them of the hardest and best materials, with a view that they may last for centuries, without the possibility of polluting the earth or contaminating any living beings dwelling thereon.

On Malabar Hill, a long, prominent, rocky ridge, paralleling and overlooking the Arabian Sea, are built the "Towers of Silence." They are five in number, the one mentioned by Dr Fryer now more than 230 years old; another for the use of suicides only, and three others.

They are surrounded by about sixteen acres of ground, artistically laid out and planted with beautiful flowers and tropical plants. Just inside the entrance gate is a peculiarly constructed building, set apart for a fire temple and a house of prayer. These "Dokmas," or "Towers of Silence," are built upon one plan, but their size may and does vary. The largest of them measures 276 feet in circumference, or about 90 feet in diameter, surrounded by a circular wall, 20 to 30 feet in height, built of the hardest stone, and faced with chunam or white plaster. There is an opening or door just above the ground level, through which the dead bodies are carried by professional corpse-bearers, who have gone through certain religious ceremonies and who are alone privileged to carry the corpses into the tower. No one else can enter or touch them.

That an intelligent idea may be given I have annexed hereto a ground plan of a tower of silence. Inside the tower



Ground Plan, Towers of Silence, Malabar Hill, Bombay

- |                                     |                              |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <i>a.</i> Row of Pavi for children. | <i>e.</i> Outer wall.        |
| <i>b.</i> Row of Pavi for females.  | <i>f.</i> Underground drain. |
| <i>c.</i> Row of Pavi for males.    | <i>g.</i> Charcoal filter.   |
| <i>d.</i> Foot paths.               | <i>h.</i> Underground well   |



is a circular platform, about 270 feet in circumference, and entirely paved with large stone slabs, and divided into three rows, called "pavis," for the bodies of the dead. As there are the same number of pavis in each concentric row, they diminish in size from the outer to the inner ring.

#### THE DISPOSAL OF THE DEAD

The outside row is used for the bodies of males, the next for those of females, and the third or inner row for those of children. These receptacles or "pavis" are separated from each other by ridges called "dandas," which are about an inch in height above the level of the pavis, and channels are cut into the pavis for the purpose of conveying all the liquid matter flowing from the corpses and rainwater into a "bhandar" or a deep hollow, in the form of a pit, the bottom of which is paved with stone slabs. This pit forms the center of the tower.

When the corpse has been completely stripped of its flesh by the vultures, which is generally accomplished within an hour at the outside, and when the bones of the denuded skeleton are perfectly dried by the powerful heat of a tropical sun and other atmospheric influences, they are thrown into this pit, where they crumble into dust, the rich and poor thus meeting together after death in one common level of equality.

Four drains are constructed leading from the bottom of the pit. They commence from the surrounding wall of the bhandar and pass beyond the outside of the tower into four wells sunk in the ground at equal distances. At the mouth of each drain charcoal and sandstones are placed for purifying the fluid before it enters the ground, thus observing one of the tenets of the Zoroastrian religion, that "The mother earth shall not be defiled." The wells have a permeable bottom, which is covered with sand to a height of 5 to 7 feet.

However distant may be the house of a deceased person, whether rich or poor, high or low in rank, he has always a walking funeral. His body is carried to the Towers of Silence on an iron bier by official corpse-bearers, and is followed in procession by the mourners, male relatives, and friends, dressed in white flowing full-dress robes, walking behind in pairs, and each couple joined hand in hand by holding a white handkerchief between them in sympathetic grief.

This mode of disposing of the dead, which the Parsees have practiced for countless generations, is repulsive to the sentiment of nations accustomed to bury their dead in the ground; but it is thoroughly sanitary, and clears away most effectually one of the greatest difficulties encumbering the path of sanitary reformers in great cities.

According to their religion, earth, fire, and water are sacred and very useful to man, and to avoid their pollution by contact with putrefying flesh, the faith strictly enjoins that the dead bodies shall not be buried in the ground, burnt, or thrown into the rivers or sea. They further claim that it really carries out the doctrine of the equality of man more satisfactorily than burying or burning, since the bones of the whole community, rich and poor, rest together at last in the well within the Tower of Silence.

A dismal impression is made at first thought upon the foreigner by these towers, where absolute silence has reigned for centuries, and where, within the last half century, more than fifty-thousand Parsees have been exposed.

#### THE VULTURES

It is estimated that some five hundred vultures make their homes in the lofty tropical palms in the gardens that surround the towers, and when a corpse is exposed in one of them they swoop down and do not rise again until all the flesh has been devoured. Within its silent precinct they are secluded and free from

all outside interference, and I have been told by those who have watched for the purpose that they never rise to the top of the tower with any substance whatever. They are disqualified by the form of their weak, little curved, unretractile talons from seizing or carrying away living prey.

These birds lay two eggs at a time, and are said to produce but once a year. Like the American eagle, they build their nests in inaccessible rocks and places remote from the hands of man.

These jackals of the air are large in size and have remarkably keen sight. They have naked heads and necks, a broad, powerful, hooked bill, and strong, thick legs. They are gregarious, slow in flight, gluttonous of habit, and prefer carrion to living prey.

In view of the fact that the corpses of all Parsees, regardless of the cause of death, even of the most contagious fever, smallpox, Bombay plague, or cholera, are thus exposed in the towers, it is remarkable that these vultures have never been known, so far as investigation can determine, to spread the contagion or suffer from it themselves. When all is over they come to the top of the towers, where they sit for hours without moving.

There is nothing of a sacred character ascribed to the birds which admirably perform this disgusting though useful work in the economy of nature. The fact is that there is no unpleasant taint of this charnel-house in the grounds about the towers, there being not the faintest odor of death to mingle with the perfume of the flowers blooming in this beautiful garden.

Europeans may regard the Parsee system as barbarous and repugnant to civilized ideas. The Parsees are quite as much justified in so regarding our system of sepulture. The undoubted fact remains that from the sanitary aspect the Parsee system is infinitely the better of the two. True, we do not like to think of the vultures hovering around the funeral procession for the last few miles, or of others awaiting it, perched on, and greedily gazing down into, the tower. Their system is at all events the more perfect solution of the sanitary side of the question, especially in this hot and moist tropical climate. Death is a solemn reminder of the equality of all men before the law of nature, and their mode is an efficient preventive to post-human distinction, vanities and funeral pomp.

## CHINA AND THE UNITED STATES\*

BY SIR CHENTUNG LIANG-CHENG, K. C. M. G.

ENVOY EXTRAORDINARY AND MINISTER PLENIPOTENTIARY FROM CHINA TO  
THE UNITED STATES

**F**ROM the earliest intercourse of the United States with China, the relations between our two countries have been of the friendliest character. When the governments of Europe in the past century, singly or in combination, took aggressive action against China, the United States always refrained

from acting with them or following their example. But especially since the days when your distinguished citizen, Anson Burlingame, after having represented the government of the United States at the court of Peking, served so ably as the ambassador of the Imperial Chinese government in making a series of treaties with

\* An address to the Commercial Club of Chicago, November 11, 1905.