

AN ARMENIAN GIRL'S BETROTHAL AND MARRIAGE.



FROM a very interesting little volume entitled "The Daughters of Armenia," by Mrs. S. A. Wheeler, missionary in Turkey, we extract the following story.

Perhaps few of our readers are unacquainted with the fact that Bible-women are doing a great work amongst their humble sisters at home. But many may not know that scores of these, natives of Armenia, are teaching hundreds of their fellow-country-women how to be happy here and hereafter. Let us hear Mrs. Wheeler's account of one such.

Before we do so, we must premise that this educated and accomplished lady is one of the noble band of more than 200 American women who have left their homes to live and labour in that dark part of the East. She thus describes her first entrance into one of their houses:—"We went through a long, dark passage, not a ray of light pierced the gloom, and the floor was so uneven that I feared to fall at every step. We enter the low, narrow door by stooping, and think this cannot be the place where the family live, but an outside room for cooking, for it was full of smoke struggling to make its way through the hole in the roof, and the one little window a foot square in the side. But this smoky room was the home of an Armenian family. It is a cold morning, and we are invited to put our feet into the fire-place to warm them. I say into, for it looks like a small well. It is a hole in the earth, three or four feet deep, stoned round the sides, and in the morning grass and brush or dried turf are brought and a fire kindled. These village houses have but one room; and if the owners are rich enough to keep cattle it serves as a stable too. These people have no comforts, but just drag out a miserable existence. The only thing that can elevate them is the light of the bible."

Now let us see what this has done. In one of these wretched hovels lived a man named Sarkis, with his wife and three daughters. Sarkis heard of God's love, and became a new man. He was so changed, that though formerly he looked upon every woman as "only a donkey," he now wanted his girls to learn to read. Formerly he said, "it will only make them impudent and lazy." Now he came bringing Mariam, his firstborn, to Harpoot, begging the missionary lady to teach her. Mrs. Wheeler says his clothes were so coarse and old he looked like a beggar, but the father was so much in earnest that he gave one-fourth of the money required for her. A few months passed, and father and mother made a journey to see their child, who was diligently improving at school. She then took lessons in another school, and, of course, her learning and goodness, for she had become a Christian, were discussed in more villages than her own.

Meantime, a young man named Geragos, who had been at the boys' school, and had learned to study and to prize his bible, was advanced to become a graduate at the American Theological Seminary. Geragos wanted a wife, and one bright morning the native pastor came and asked Miss Pond, the lady at the head of the girls' school, if Mariam

would not make him a very good one. The matter made quite a stir in their village. The parents gave consent, and it was all settled.

Then came the betrothal. Geragos went to the bible depôt and bought one of the best, gilt edged, red covered bibles, worth three dollars. On the blank leaf was written the betrothal pledge. Then he was ready for the betrothal, which was made in Miss Pond's sitting-room. The missionaries were invited, and the schoolgirls were present. Extra lamps were lighted, and at seven o'clock the native pastor and Geragos made their appearance.

Mariam was seated between her beloved lady teacher, Miss Pond, and Kohar, the native assistant teacher. On the entrance of Pastor Mardiros and his friend, Kohar, Mariam, and all the girls rose, went forward, and made their usual salutations. When again seated, Mardiros read a chapter, offered prayer, and then all sang a hymn. Then, taking the new bible in his hands, and going forward to the parties to be betrothed, he reminded them of the sacredness of the pledge they were about to make. Handing the bible to Mariam he said, "By accepting this you pledge yourself to be the future wife of Geragos." She then accepted the bible, and Geragos put what we should call the engaged ring on her finger. After this, tea and cake were served, a hymn sung, and the bridegroom cleft and his pastor bowed and left.

In many cases years elapse in Armenia between the betrothal and the marriage, but it was important that someone should at once begin to teach the ignorant women in the village where Geragos was to labour amongst the men. It was arranged that the wedding should take place in a few weeks. The usual custom is to have it celebrated in the house of the father of the bridegroom, but Geragos's had now been some time dead. His mother was living, but she was not yet won over to the truth, and her dislike of the gospel made her reluctant to receive a Protestant daughter-in-law. It was, therefore, decided to have it in the schoolroom where the betrothal had taken place. It is usual, too, for the bridegroom's family to furnish the bride's wedding-dress, but poor Geragos had no friends to do it. The Pastor Mardiros's wife therefore kindly volunteered to do it. It was made of Turkish silk, and the colours were green, yellow, and red! Nevertheless, it was declared by common consent to be very pretty. The jacket was of green broadcloth, and she had a light head-dress made of gauze. The wedding, of course, took place in the evening, according to the custom in Eastern countries. Friends on both sides were invited. The room was carpeted with rugs, and well lighted, and a table of refreshments arranged in the centre of the room. All being ready, the bridegroom, with a party of his friends, went out with lanterns to the house of the pastor, where Mariam was waiting, and the bride and her attendants were escorted back to the schoolroom with songs of rejoicing. Poor Mariam soon after her marriage met with a sore affliction. Geragos never became a teacher. He fell ill, and lost his reason. Her life was now a sad one. It was very touching to see her leading him in the streets when he went out; while others shunned, and were afraid of him, she could always quiet him, and if she left the house even for a short time he would call after her, and beg her not to leave him.

After a time the husband recovered so far as to be able to go out as a labourer in the fields. Mariam was then asked to become a bible-woman. She would visit from house to house telling her neighbours of the love of Jesus, and reading to them from the bible.

Mrs. Wheeler describes a day she spent with her. "We started on our visiting,

Mariam having her baby in her arms. She had sixty pupils, and gave thirty short lessons a day. Our greeting in one room was very cordial: 'Good morning, hanum. A thousand welcomes.' 'How do you succeed in learning to read?' I asked. 'O,' replied the grandmother, 'they can all read but me. Even these bits of children know more than their old hana. I wish it had come in my day. I can only listen, but I thank God it has come to my house. I thank Him for the blessed bible that Keoork reads.' 'Do you think your son is a better man, now that he reads the bible?' 'O, yes, hanum, we are all better. Mariam, the Lord bless her, is doing a good work. I wish all to read. They will be better women and do more work.' We next entered a small room, where a little girl sat without shoes or stockings. 'Bring your bible, Anna,' said Mariam, 'and turn to Isaiah lvii.' She took her book from a box, and read very correctly, asking questions about God's ancient people. She seemed to love her bible and asked us to pray with her." Mrs. Wheeler concludes the account of one of her village journeys by saying, "Before I had taken off my wraps a villager came in. When told where I had been he looked at me with wonder, and said 'Hanum, how can you go into our dirty homes? Yours is so light and beautiful, and ours so dark and filthy. We wonder that you ever go. Surely it is not to please yourselves. Your religion must be different to ours.' I told him we came just because we wanted better homes to be found in every part of their land. Homes where Christ is loved, and trusted and obeyed as their best Friend; but they could never have them while their poor women were forbidden to read, and treated as slaves or children."

We speak of the "romance of missions," but there is much stern reality and hardship in the work, requiring patient endurance and laborious self-sacrifice, which only the love of Christ and of poor souls could sustain.

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS.

EDUCATIONAL.

ORPHAN.—We do not think that a knowledge of Latin and French is exacted of lady pupils in a hospital; at the same time, it is desirable that you should be able to read a doctor's prescription. You should write, or apply in person to the secretary or the lady superintendent of the hospital into which you desire to enter, and obtain a prospectus of all that you will have to do, and all that will render you eligible for reception. Your writing is carelessly performed. Make the stroke belonging to each "t" through it.

HEATHER BELL.—See vol. i., page 543. For further particulars apply to the secretary of the Civil Service Commission, Cannon-row, E.C. Your writing will do much in your favour in obtaining a clerkship, as it is exceptionally good.

ELSA.—You had better have the number of THE GIRL'S OWN PAPER required sent to you by your family in England. Such situations are only to be obtained by personal inquiry and first-class recommendations, as well as ability. The teacher would do as she pleased in the matter.

PUZZLED GIRL.—How can you expect us to advise you on such a question as the changing of your business without telling us how much you obtain in your present vocation, and how much you could make in the other? Also, you do not name the number of hours engaged at one of these callings. Beware of giving up a certainty for an uncertainty. If you employed a better pen, and took a little more pains, your writing might give satisfaction as a book-keeper.

NELLIE.—We are not aware of any reason why you should not qualify yourself in the course you have proposed to take for a situation as private certificated governess. At the same time, we strongly advise you to reflect much before you decide on such a mode of making a living. That calling is so overcrowded, and is rarely conducive to happiness. It would be far better to be a daily visiting governess, or to give lessons at schools or private houses in certain branches of education.

KETTLEDRUM.—See "Nursing as a Profession," page 454, vol. i., and "Food for Invalids," page 611, vol. i.,