

## PARSEE CHILDREN.

BY FANNIE ROPER FEUDGE.

THE little folks whose pictures you will see on the next page are the natives of a sunny clime, born probably in Bombay or its vicinity, and have spent all their few years in the beautiful oriental homes, and among the graceful palms, of that land of flowers. It is true that the word *Parsee* is a corruption of Persian, and that all the modern Parsees are descended from Persian ancestors; but very few of them are now found in the land of their forefathers, and India has become the adopted home of nearly the whole race.

More than twelve hundred years ago, Persia was overrun and conquered by fierce Arab soldiers, who laid waste fields and gardens, murdered or drove out the inhabitants, burned their houses, and committed every sort of violence. The Arabs, who were Mohammedans, added to their desire for plunder a bitter hatred of the Persians, because they were fire-worshippers, and hunted them down with relentless fury, in order to compel them to adopt the Mohammedan faith. But the poor Persians fled from their homes, and gave up all their possessions—their beautiful fields and gardens—rather than renounce their religion. Most of them settled in Bombay and other cities along the western coast of India, where they have prospered and increased, till they form, at the present day, the most intelligent, wealthy, and charitable portion of the communities in which they live.

As the Parsees do not often intermarry with other races, they have, during all these years of exile, altered but little; so that a Parsee boy or girl, such as those you see in the picture, and whose ancestors for forty generations have not set foot on Persian soil, is in features, dress, manners, habits, and religion a perfect copy of the first exiles, whose well-preserved portraits are among the most precious adornments of the Parsee temples of India. No one but a Parsee is allowed to enter these temples; but they were described to me as entirely empty, except for the great altar in the center and these treasured portraits of the first exiles, with a few historical paintings representing scenes connected with their flight. Upon the altar burns the sacred fire kindled by their renowned prophet, Zoroaster, four thousand years ago. From this, they say, the exiles lighted brands, which they brought with them in golden vessels from their native land. I cannot assure you that this marvel-

ous story of the fire-brands is true, but every Parsee boy and girl is taught to believe it.

Parsee children learn, from the very cradle, to be quiet, respectful, and obedient to all the forms and ceremonies required by the faith of their parents. The hours for eating and drinking, the kinds of food of which he may partake, and even the cut of his garments, are all prescribed by a Parsee's religion. His shirt must have five seams—no more, no less; and in wearing, must be laid across the breast in a particular way. Were he to fail, though ever so slightly, in observing any of these rules, he would be utterly cast off by his people, and not allowed to worship with them or to marry into their families; not even to buy or sell among them, or to enter the dwelling of his nearest kin.

The dress of the men consists of a shirt and loose trousers, both of white silk or linen, over which is worn a long *caftan* of embroidered muslin, confined at the waist by an elaborate girdle. This girdle, like the Mandarin's button in China, is the characteristic portion of a Parsee's dress, being more or less adorned with gold and precious stones, according to the rank and wealth of the wearer. On the head is worn a pasteboard cap, some ten inches high, covered with velvet and silk for rich people, and gray or brown nankeen for those of humbler grade. The costume of the women and children is very similar to that of the men, only that the women's *caftan* is longer and more flowing, and the turban not quite so high. The material of all the garments is usually silk or fine muslin, sometimes nearly covered with embroidery, like some of those in the picture.

The *caftans* of the little girls especially, are fairly radiant in their many-colored flowers of the brightest tints, and with the glitter of gold and jewels. The garments of infants even are of silk, though very plain and simple in form, consisting of a single long robe of soft white silk, and without a sash at the waist. Both men and women wear around their bodies a double string of twisted silken cord, which is always loosened when the wearer is at prayer. The Parsees attach so much importance to the wearing of this cord, that no contract is considered binding if made when either of the parties happens to be without it.

A child is first invested with the cord when he enters his ninth year; and the occasion is regarded

as the most important of his whole life. A great feast is made; all the kindred are invited, and generally come loaded with presents, and for three days and nights nothing is thought of but music and dancing, feasting and frolic. After this, a boy may eat at the same table with his father, which before he was not allowed to do; and a girl, being now thought old enough for betrothal, must, from this time, be kept in retirement with her mother, and entirely away from the society of men and boys.

of which is a sort of dais, or raised ottoman, the seat of honor belonging to the head of the family. Here he frequently sits, attended by one or more assistants, occupied in weighing or counting out money, while at desks ranged below him are clerks, some of whom are probably the sons of the house, all daintily clad in white nankeen, and busy with pens and account-books. Opening from this room, and ranged on either side, are the private apartments of the male portions of the family, while at



SOME PARSEE CHILDREN.

Among wealthy people, the girls grow up in ignorance and idleness, like so many pretty dolls. Few of them read or work, or even embroider; and music they do not care for, because they will not take the trouble to learn it. All their time is spent either in bathing and dressing, or in lolling on silken ottomans, fanning themselves, or twining fresh flowers in their beautiful hair. Boys, on the contrary, are carefully educated, and strictly trained to business habits, from a very early age. The large, central room on the first floor of Parsee houses is always the gentlemen's parlor, at one end

the ends of the hall are long, covered verandas, where are kept in waiting, messengers and coolies ready for service at a moment's notice. In this domestic business college, under the immediate eye of their fathers, the sons of Parsee families are trained to the practical business of life, learning, almost from the cradle, in a sort of home bank or counting-house, the lessons in buying and selling and getting gain, by which they are expected to amass fortunes when they go out into the world. The second floor of the house, arranged on precisely the same plan, is for the use of the female

members of the family; but a more striking contrast can scarcely be imagined than that presented by the listlessness and indolence of the occupants of the women's room, and the lively industry of the busy hive below.

The results of this difference in early training are plainly seen in the contrast between the two sexes when the girls and boys are grown up. All the Parsee men I ever met were intelligent, active, and in a measure, at least, both witty and wise. Most of them were energetic and successful in business, and very many had made large fortunes in trade. But the women of the same families were indolent, ignorant, and uninteresting. The solitary exception that I remember was the daughter of a Mr. Manuchjee, who, having traveled extensively in Europe, and being especially pleased with the manners and accomplishments of English ladies, determined to educate this daughter in the same way. He purchased a harp and a grand piano, hired an English governess, and gave his child every advantage his great wealth could command. She was about sixteen when I first saw her; in face and form fully matured, and very lovely, graceful, and accomplished. She was one who would be sure, in our country, to win admiration and esteem; but her father said she would not be likely to marry, as her own people were

afraid of accomplished women for wives. It is certainly true that they frown down all attempts to introduce among their daughters a higher education, as well as the lovely, womanly employments that render our homes so attractive, and make the wives and daughters of America the companions of their husbands and fathers.

The Parsees are all fire-worshippers, and I think these devotees of the sun-god never change their creed for another. In Bombay and other large cities whole crowds of them may be seen an hour before sunrise, gathered in groups on the esplanade, eagerly watching to catch the first glimpse of the sun's cheery face. Even the last reflection of his fiery chariot at evening is watched with reverent devotion, followed by a general prostration. But there is a difference in the morning and evening worship. As their god sinks beneath the horizon, he is followed with saddened gaze, whilst his appearance is greeted only with joy. A group of juveniles, expecting this, may be seen in the illustration silently, almost devoutly, awaiting the first glimmer in the East that betokens the sign of his coming. Not an outspoken word is heard; all the uproariousness of childish glee is hushed for the time, and their very breathing seems subdued in the interval of eager watching, ended at last by one glad shout, that proclaims the advent of their King.

## HE DID N'T MIND—AND WHAT TOLD.

BY MARGARET EYTINGE.

"NOT get into the hammock?"

Well, if he had n't been told not to get into it, it would n't have been half so hard to stay out of it. And above all things, a hammock!

But Uncle John had said, oh! so gruffly, "Don't you try to get into it; and, what's more, don't you go near it. When I come home this evening, we'll see. Now *mind!*"

And so, of course, Barry had been thinking about it ever since, and he could n't, for the life of him, study his geography lesson. Everything seemed bounded north, east, south and west by hammocks.

At last he threw down his book and ran out into the garden, and stood looking at the red and yellow net as it hung between two splendid old oak-trees.

"I would n't go near it, now, if he said I might," said Barry. 'Try to get in it,' indeed, as though

a baby could n't get in a hammock, let alone a fellow as big as I am. He need n't be afraid; I'll stay away." He was standing about thirty feet from it, under a great big apple-tree. "But I'll look at it as much as I please.

"Uncle John's great, he is! What'd he bring it here for, if he was n't going to let a fellow swing, and swing right away, too?"

"The best fun in the world is swinging right away. Wonder what it's made of? Don't care; I'll stay here and eat apples."

And he sat down under the tree and picked up a fat rosy-cheeked apple, and took a boy's bite out of it.

"It's sour," said Barry, making a wry face, and throwing it away.

"Oh! what a story!" said the apple-tree, in a loud whisper.