

SORABJEE THE PARSEE.

BY H. D. BARROWS.

Eduljee Sorabjee, the Parsee, resident of Los Angeles for more than twenty-five years, who died at Long Beach July 16, 1913, was a native of Bombay, East India, where he was born March 16, 1852.

Some notes concerning his life, which Mr. Sorabjee recounted to me in 1889, may possibly interest members of our Society for whose benefit I here transcribe them.

Mr. Sorabjee's ancestors, he told me, were driven out of Persia by the Saracens nearly 1300 years ago, and a few hundred people of the Parsee faith fled to India, where they were permitted to settle by the Hindu king only on condition that they would change their language and dress, and adopt the customs of the Hindus in regard to the marriage ceremony, and promise not to kill the cow, and promise also to fight the Mohammedans whenever they invaded the country.

These promises, made by their forefathers so many hundred years ago, the modern Parsees of India claim their race have ever kept in good faith.

Mr. Sorabjee came to Los Angeles in 1885, and soon after his arrival became a naturalized citizen of the United States.

Mr. Sorabjee was educated in Bombay, where there are schools in which Oriental languages are taught. He spoke five languages, including Hindustani, Persian and English.

When still a young man, he was sent to Manchester, England, where he lived nine years, to learn mechanical engineering and cotton-spinning by his god-father, Sir Dinshaw-Manockjee, who was one of the chief manufacturers of Bombay, and who was a man of great wealth and intelligence and of high social standing. This enlightened Parsee was renowned in India for his princely charities which he dispensed to the needy without regard to their race, caste or creed, and for which Queen Victoria created him a baronet.

Mr. Sorabjee, after finishing his education in England, went back to India to superintend the shipment and installment of the machinery, including mammoth Corliss engines, etc., which he had purchased in England for his god-father's mills. Returning to England, his health gave way in the damp climate of Lancashire, and his doctor ordered him to quit England and return to Bombay, which he said is healthy, but not at all equal to the all-the-year-round

healthful and agreeable climate of Los Angeles, which he said was the most perfect in the world. Soon after his arrival here he entirely recovered his health, and that without the use of medicine.

Having heard of Los Angeles in England, and having a liking for liberty and equality and a republican form of government, he came to Los Angeles instead of going back to live in India. Mr. Sorabjee was twice married, both times to Christian (English) women, although he himself remained true (in essentials) to his hereditary faith. He married his second wife, Miss Mary Harris, in Manchester in 1883, by whom he had two children, one born in England and one born here in East Los Angeles, where for many years he had a beautiful home. Over the entrance to his grounds was inscribed ' "Bombay House."

Mr. Sorabjee was a thorough man of the world, and there was little in his manner or speech to distinguish him from a cultured Englishman or American.

In regard to the religious creed of the Parsees, Mr. Sorabjee told me that they believe in one, and one only Supreme Being. They have been called the Unitarians of India. "Think well, speak well, do well," are the fundamental maxims of Zoroasterism, for they are followers of the teachings of Zoroaster, who flourished two thousand years before the Christian era. Prof. Max Müller, the Oriental scholar, calls Zoroaster "the great health officer," because his teachings seem to have had special reference to the good health of the people.

According to the creed of the Parsees, the four elements, fire, air, earth and water, are sacred. Fire, or the sun which in prayer they face, are kept sacred by them, *as symbols only* of God; they are *not fire-worshippers* any more than Christians are worshippers of their sacred symbols; in each case the worshiper looks *beyond* the symbol to the great Supreme Intelligence thereby faintly typified.

The Parsees believe that the four elements should not be contaminated, therefore they do not dispose of the bodies of their dead by cremation, aqation, inhumation, but place them in "*Towers of Silence*," to perish by dessication, as being, in their belief the most innocuous mode of resolving them into their original elements.

Parsees in India are not eaters of the flesh of the cow only in deference to the promise made by their ancestors to the Hindus, who are forbidden to kill that animal. But the Parsees, even in India, do eat the flesh of other animals, as do the Hebrews.

Mr. Sorabjee told me that if he had cared to return to Bombay he could have entered the service of his god-father at a very high salary; but he liked America too well; and that he preferred liberty to caste and the climate of Los Angeles to that of any other part of the world.

