

Ireland. I am credibly informed, that in many places it is impossible to find an unmarried girl of thirteen, and in the course of extensive travels, covering a period of more than twenty years, I have myself met but four spinsters or confirmed old maids. It is needless to add that these were persons who possessed great native strength of character and firmness of purpose, and all seemed highly respected in their own family and social circle. One, the daughter of a Mujtahid, or highest religious teacher, was thoroughly versed in all the special studies of her father, who had educated her. She understood Persian, Arabic, and Turkish, being able to read and write them well, and was often consulted on difficult points in the Koran, by the Mullahs, who admitted that she understood it better than they. Another, living in a large family of several brothers, enjoyed the esteem and affection of all, and was most sincerely mourned when she died.

These are, however, great exceptions, and considered as directly opposed to the command of the Prophet. It is regarded as a cardinal sin not to marry, and our single ladies are often assured the only prospect before them is of the eternal pains of hell-fire, as the penalty for the obstinate disobedience in this particular. Even the lepers, segregated in their wretched villages, feel the pressure of opinion and are obliged to marry in accordance with religion.

Theoretically, no girl is married against her will; but practically, the pressure from her family and