

## The Woman's Missionary Society.

[This Department is in the interests of the W. M. Society. All communications for it should be addressed to Mrs. Jos. McLeod, Fredericton.]

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### What is Caste, and how does it Hinder Missionary Work in India?

Perhaps we may help to answer these questions by the use of imagination. I belong—let us say—to the lowest caste in India. I am a sweeper. Sweeping and removing refuse from houses and streets is my occupation, as they have been of all my family for generations back and would be of my children, if I had any; for caste is hereditary.

You belong to the tailor caste—not that you yourself do tailoring. You are too stupid for that, but your husband can cut and fit, as well as sew and embroider, and of course you would never permit one so low as a sweeper to enter your house.

If you were about to meet me in a narrow street, you would call out to me to move, so that my shadow might not fall upon you if I chanced to be on the sunny side of the street. If I suffered my clothing to brush yours, you would swear at my impudence and, perhaps, strike me for it, though you would have to go through some religious rite of purification that would put money into the treasury of some idol, to atone for the contact of either hand or clothing.

In the same way I would be avoided by the members of all the other castes; the cooks, carpenters, smiths, laundrymen, gardeners, farriers, cowherds, shepherds, goat-herders, doctors, undertakers, and thieves; for there is a robber caste whose patron god is Krishna, himself an incomparable thief.

Highest of all the hundreds of castes and sub-divisions of caste, stand the Brahmins; for this word is the name of a caste as well as a system of religion. Sometimes the Brahmin caste claim for themselves the exclusive right to use a certain well or fountain, the best in the neighborhood. Sometimes they allow certain of the lower castes to use it at specified hours, reserving it for themselves at the cooler, more comfortable times. Sweepers are never permitted to drink from the same source as the higher castes, and often their only water supply is a stagnant pool covered with a green scum and swarming with loathsome forms of animal life.

How do strangers, meeting casually, recognize each other's caste? There are some distinctions of dress, ornaments, and cords tied over the shoulder, but if so, children may sometimes neglect them, for Mrs. Chandler, long a missionary in India, told me that she was once driving in Mandura when she saw a girl seven or eight years old fall to the ground in a fit. She requested her Hindu driver to place the girl in the

carriage, but looking resolutely at her, he said, "Madame, I do not know what caste she is of." No persuasions would move him, so she appealed to passers-by. None of them would touch the child for fear of defilement, and at last Mrs. Chandler herself succeeded in lifting the girl into the carriage without help.

Another missionary tells me that in her pre-missionary days low-caste women were not allowed to cover their bodies above the waist, they being permitted to high-caste women only. She adds: "After missionary schools were opened, the English missionary ladies taught the Christian women and girls to cover themselves, and they were severely beaten when they went to the market covered—they were usurping the badge of their betters." Some of the English missionaries brought suit for their protection, and it was decreed that they might cover themselves unmolested.

"The same was true of the carrying of umbrellas by both men and women; though I am not sure whether it was ever brought into court, or whether an enlightened sentiment prevailed. I think the court was called upon.

"But now! You should see the red and blue and white umbrellas that appeared in wedding processions among Christians. They certainly live up to their 'Christian privileges' in that regard."

How does caste hinder missionary work?

Most of all by implanting and nourishing the belief and feeling that some persons are to be shunned like poison or infectious disease.

The idea that all converts must belong to one church, and worship in the same room, take from the same plate at the Lord's Supper, and think of each other as brethren, is opposed to every Hindu custom and instinct, and prevents many from examining into the new religion to see what it may be. In a few cases missionaries have made concessions to native prejudice by providing separate seats in church and separate plates and cups for the different castes, but this policy has largely gone out of favor.

In the early work at a station, in the missionary schools, if a pupil of one caste was seen, that was generally held to be a sufficient reason for those of every other caste to avoid the school. If a child of higher caste than any already there entered a boarding school it sometimes necessitated providing a separate table and dishes that were to be used only for them.

But as the years go on, the converts to Christianity send their children to the boarding schools without question, and in the eyes of the heathen the Christians are looked upon as a new caste.

As an evangelizing agency, to reach girls in families still heathen, Hindu girls' schools—day schools—are still maintained in the larger cities by the missionaries where only caste girls are received. But in these the Bible is taught and a new world of thought is opened up to them.

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Early in the eighties, Mrs. Joshee, a cousin of the Pundita Ramabai, came from India to study medicine in Philadelphia. She had promised her husband that she would not become a Christian nor adopt foreign modes of living. The promise proved difficult to keep, but she struggled bravely to observe it, wearing gloves whenever she touched a patient in feeling the pulse or otherwise, and cooking her own food in dishes brought from India, and used only by herself. Whether from the need of meat (which no Hindu eats) in our climate, or from overwork in carrying out her caste rules while pursuing her medical course, or from change of climate, or loneliness in a foreign land, her health suffered, and she died soon after her return to India.

Those who knew her best in this land considered her really a martyr to caste. —Miss Mary Page White, in *Mission Studies*.

### CHRISTIANITY IN JAPAN.

A missionary who has worked many years in Japan divides society in Japan into two classes, the educated and the uneducated. He says: "Up to this time educated Japan, almost to a man, has been agnostic. Officials, naval and military men, and the literary classes have stood rigidly aloof from the gospel, with a few exceptions. But there are not wanting indications that some of them are beginning to feel dissatisfied. If we turn our thoughts to the masses of Japan, we shall find much cause for expectant prayer. Professedly, most of them are Buddhists, really many of them have no very deep religious convictions. Buddhism is not in touch with modern thought in Japan. It is a message of despair. Buddhism might do for Japan so long as she was content to be the hermit nation, but those days are gone forever. She has broken with the past and her thoughts and aspirations centre on the future. She has felt the impact of Christianity. The living Christ is working in the Land of the Rising Sun, and the spirit of his teaching is, it may be slowly, but nevertheless surely, permeating society

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### NOTICE.

The annual meeting of the Woman's Mission Society of the Sixth District will be held in connection with the District Meeting at Norton, King's Co., on Saturday, July 9th, 1904.

BLANCHE P. GOSLINE,  
Secretary-Treasurer.

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