

"High Caste and Low Caste"

Boys, did you ever have a new pupil come into your school who could not appear quite so well as yourself, who did not have so much money to spend, and whose parents worked harder than yours for a living? Did you ever make fun of him, or feel ashamed to be seen doing him some kindness, because he did not belong to your "set," as you called it?

Girls, did you ever turn your head the other way, and draw your dress aside for fear it might touch the plainer one of your little neighbour as she passed by?

If ever you are tempted to feel or act so again, stop and think: That is the way the heathen of India do, those who know not God or His word.

It is not strange that the heathen should do so, because they have never known that it is wrong. But it must grieve the kind Father of all very much to see us do so when we know of His love, and when He tells us so plainly in His letter that "One is our Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren."

If you could once visit India and see how much better some classes of people are treated than other classes, and how selfish and cruel it causes people to become, I think you would see the foolishness and sinfulness of all such feelings and actions.

"The Hindus believe that after Brahma, their great god of the universe, had made the world, he made the people to live on it. Out of his mouth came the Brahmins, who were highest of all. This is the priestly caste or class.

"From Brahma's shoulders came the next caste, who were strong and brave, and became soldiers and chieftains.

"Next came the merchants and traders, who sprang from the loins of the god.

"Lastly, from Brahma's feet came the lowest caste of all, the Sudras, who were to be the servants of the higher castes."

After awhile these four classes were divided into a great many more, until now, jewellers, merchants, shepherds, carpenters, tailors, weavers, robbers, basket-makers, writers, farmers, potters, hunters and fishers, palm cultivators, barbers, washerman, sweepers, and there, all form separate castes. Besides these a great many people do not belong to any caste and are called Pariahs, or out-castes.

As the Brahmins are the highest caste, they must be treated very politely by all other castes, and must be obeyed. They are given costly presents and worshipped as gods. This has caused the Brahmins to become very proud and selfish. The people do not love them, but are polite to them and treat them well only because they are afraid they will get into trouble if they do not.

I hope that you will learn all that you can about these different castes, for there are many interesting things that we have not time to tell you.

If you were a little Hindu and your father were a merchant, you could play only with the children of merchants. If your father were a carpenter, you could eat and drink only with the children of carpenters. It would never do for you to eat with one of lower caste, or drink out of a cup that had been touched by one of lower caste, or give up your religion, or do thousands of other things, or you would lose your caste, and then you would become an out-caste, despised and abused by every one. Your friends would drive you from their doors and leave you to perish from hunger and want. They would rather have you die a thousand times than have you break your caste. "No crime is considered so great as breaking the rules of caste. A man may commit murder and it will not effect his standing. But let him take a mouthful of food, or a drink of water from a low-caste man and he becomes defiled." And then he has for ever lost his caste unless he can get money enough to buy it back. It matters not whether he did it purposely or not. If he did it by accident it is just the same.

Once during a great famine in India, when men, women, and children were dying for something to eat, one poor woman was so hungry that she went to a place where food was prepared for them, and ate a little, although it was cooked by one of lower caste. It is said that she then went back to her own village, and was afterwards found lying in the road, so weak and tired that she could do nothing to help herself; and no one would touch her, because by doing so they would get defiled themselves!

The Brahmins have the power of giving back caste to those who have lost it; but they will not unless they get a very great deal of money for it.

Another thing: If you were a Hindu you would have to learn your father's trade and never could work at anything else as long as you lived. If your father were a jeweller, then you would be a jeweller, or if he were a street sweeper or a washerman, you could be only a street sweeper or a washerman.

But we are thankful to say that the feeling about caste is not so strong as it once was. Some are beginning to see how useless and foolish it is. And as the entrance of God's word giveth light on this, as well as on every other thing that men need to know on the way to heaven, we know that the Indians will be led into all truth as soon as they learn to follow the true Guide-Book,—God's precious word.

But remember that you have the Bible and they have not, and they are your brethren. Therefore you are in debt to them. You are not only to follow the true Guide-Book yourself, but you are to be a light-bearer for Jesus carrying or sending this wonderful lamp of life to these who still sit in darkness and know not the truth.

The Present Truth – April 20, 1893

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