

THE SHYNESS OF HINDU CASTE WOMEN.

ONE evening in company with some native helpers I had gone to preach to the caste people of a certain village on the Vuyyuru field. In the very heart of the place there stood on some high ground with a flight of stone steps leading up to the entrance the house of the village mayor, a man from whom we had always received only the greatest of kindness. Seeing at a glance what a good pulpit that stairway would make, I asked whether he would have any objection to our using it as a rostrum from which to address the people, and received his very courteous permission to do so. Just in front of us, with its top somewhat above the level of the stone steps upon which we were standing, was a brick wall enclosing the yard of a large house on the opposite side of the street.

After we had sung a hymn or two, one of the native helpers stood forth and began to preach to the unusually large mass of people in the narrow street below; while I sat listening to the preacher and watching our audience to discover, if I could, the effect of his message upon them, and so determine the line of my own remarks when my turn to speak should come. Out on the far edge of the gathering one could see a thin fringe of outcaste women arrested by the preaching as they had been homeward bound from the fields, but as far as I could discern not a single caste woman was anywhere to be seen. For some time, however, I had noticed women shyly and stealthily lifting their heads up from behind the wall across the street. They would rise up just far enough to enable them to look over the wall and peer eagerly, but cautiously at us and the crowd (vivid street-preaching scene) until they noticed our glance turn in their direction when they would drop down quickly again out of sight. This was repeated again and again, so that had there been a clatter of boards and a shriek or two one might have concluded that their sudden disappearance was due to an unexpected crash of that upon which they had been standing. But since there was none, one knew that they were only acting as Hindu caste women usually do in the presence of men, and while anxious to listen to the Gospel were very careful to keep the brick wall between them and us and themselves hidden from public gaze.

On another occasion I was preaching with the aid of the Magic Lantern in that same village. From time to time I found it necessary to open the lantern slide to regulate the light in the

rising night wind there in the open square, and each time I did so a stream of radiance would flow out lighting up the shadowy faces of great groups of men sitting silently listening under cover of the darkness. The only evidence, however, of any caste women being present was now and then the sound of their voices as, sitting far back in the friendly shelter of the night, they spoke in low tones to one another of the wonderful light-pictures shining out so radiantly on the big white sheet before them. Then, too, once in a while some woman would in her excitement unintentionally betray her presence, as (for example was the case) when one night there flamed forth in sudden distinctness and splendor a beautiful picture of the Christ Child, one of them in her surprise and delight for a moment, so forgot herself that we could all (plainly) hear her cry out, "Look, look! A beautiful white child, a beautiful white child!" This was immediately followed by a general titter on the part of the men, and a low startled "Hush!" from the women. When at the end of the lecture I lighted my travelling lantern again and looked around I found that those women had either fled away into their homes, or were hovering here and there, shadowy-like, on the edge of the darkness.

True, there do arise now and then opportunities for our native evangelists to tell the old, old story face to face even to caste women, such as that which befel one of them in a village where the night before we had been using the Lantern. Next day as he was passing through one of the less public thoroughfares a group of caste women ventured to stop him saying, "Last night we sat back in the darkness and saw those light-pictures your master made to shine on the big white canvas, and we heard all the strange things you told concerning them. But although we know you said it over and over again last night, none of us to-day can rightly re-call the name of your God—the God of the Christians. We want you to tell it us." So standing there in the narrow street the delighted outcaste evangelist, scrupulously careful to keep at a proper distance, cried the name "Jesus Christ" over again and again whilst they repeated it in chorus after him until they could pronounce it properly. In doing this he, with a skill born of long experience, managed to tell them many things about that Christian's God in whose name they were so greatly interested. But the particular pains that the evangelist took on returning