

Our Mission Bands

MISSION BAND LESSON

INDIA—THE PEOPLE

By One of Our Missionaries.

In our last lesson we learned something about the great country of India where our Telegu missionary work is being carried on. We passed over the mountains; beside its rice fields with their thousands of workers; saw its palm and banyan trees waving in the warm breezes; saw its fine roads stretching like ribbons across the land and took a little peep into its towns and villages. We met a few of the people in a casual way, but today we will take a more intimate look at them to see what manner of people we are to live and work among, for if we cannot learn to love and respect them, we can scarcely hope that we can win their love and respect in return.

We are anxious to see the children, for love of the young is a universal trait in the Anglo Saxon race and we are no exception. "Ah, here they are," shouts the missionary, "Come and see them at their play." Sure enough as we turned the corner of the street there seemed to be dozens of them of all sizes and ages, cunning brown babies with no clothing at all rolling and playing in the sunshine. The older boys wore loin cloths and an upper jacket or shirt which was worn outside as we wear a smock. The little girls wore very long full skirts with a bright colored jacket and all of them had bangles on arms and ankles which tinkled as they walked or ran. We loved the little girls at once with their smooth shiny hair and great dark gentle eyes. They seem very bright and intelligent, but they are obliged to leave school so early to be married that they seldom advance very far in their education. The boys at first sight seemed not so attractive but one little fellow of perhaps ten, sidled gently up to the missionary and placed his small brown hand on his arm with a gesture of affection. Yes! we shall love the Indian children when we get to know them better.

We go on through the town and out into the country. In the distance we see the rice fields now being planted. When the first rains come in June the rice is planted in the seed beds. The transplanting is done when the second rains come in August. The fields

are plowed and the tender rice shoots are transplanted in these furrows a foot or so apart. The transplanting takes several weeks and hundreds of men and women work standing nearly knee deep in water. They work from six in the morning until about two in the afternoon for which they receive the equivalent of eight or ten cents a day. No wonder many of them are desperately poor, according to our standards.

We cannot approach too near for fear of wetting our feet and it is raining a little now. Oh what a funny sight! We can see the men and women working, putting in the rice shoots, padding the wet earth around them, but what are those queer round straw colored patches all over the field? They move a little and seem to look like huge beetles with four slim brown legs. The missionary laughs, "Oh those are only umbrellas made of palmyra leaves! As the people work they bend nearly double so that their arms are in the water too, they place the umbrellas on their backs to keep themselves and the sacred tuft of hair, or Jutta dry, as no Hindu man likes to get that wet, so the legs and arms are the four legs you see." As they work many of them are chewing the betel nut leaves which make their mouths red and disagreeable looking, or else the tobacco stick which is worse. These are some of the things we ask them to give up when they become Christians.

As we return home a Brahmin lawyer passes us on his way to court. We know him for a Brahmin not only by his sacred string, which he wears over his right shoulder and under his left arm, but by his bearing and appearance. He has an intelligent stern face, and we think that if he was won to Christ, he would make a staunch follower, but alas his heart is not yet touched by Christ's love. He draws his flowing garment about him and passes by on the other side of the street, lest the shadow of a passing low caste man fall upon him and defile him. We buy some food from a high caste man and toss the money into his hand, as our touch would defile him. Such is Caste; the most cruel of India's institutions.

On the following day an invitation came for the missionary's wife and myself to visit