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The Caste System in India.

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For twenty-five centuries, what is known and recognized as the caste system in India, has controlled the life of more than one-fifth of the human race. Other countries have, or have had class distinctions, trades unions, religious sects, philanthropic fraternities, social guilds and various other organizations, but India is the only country where these are practically welded together into one mighty whole. India declines to recognize any distinction between the social and the religious. These two are brought to the same rules, and must yield obedience to the same authority. Religion to the Hindu, permeates the entire social domain, and social order is sanctioned and enforced by the penalties of religion. To marry outside one caste; to eat food cooked by an out-caste; to delay unduly the marriage of a daughter,—these and a thousand other delinquencies, which to us of the West, seem harmless and insignificant, are by the Hindu regarded, not only as social irregularities, but also as "sins," for which the soul may be punished even beyond the grave or burning-ground.

The origin of caste, is a subject of much uncertainty and debate. Tradition has it, that Brahma, the first God of the Hindu Triad, was the immediate source and founder of the caste order; for he caused, it is said, the august Brahmin to proceed out of his divine mouth, while the warlike and royal Kshatriya emanated from his shoulders, the trading commercial Vaisya from his thighs, and the Sudra from his feet.

These four—the Brahmin, the Kshatriya, the Vaisya and the Sudra, were the four great castes, and are to-day, after twenty-five centuries, still the four great castes. But into each of the four have crept divisions and sub-divisions many, until in the Brahmin caste alone, there are 1,886 divisions, no two of which may inter-marry or inter-dine. Besides these, there are the out-castes—the Pariahs—the untouchables, who are the slaves and serfs of all the four.

Inter-marriage within the caste, is perhaps the first and most important of caste laws. No member of any caste may look beyond the sacred borders of his own caste for conjugal bliss. And Social Reformers in India to-day, have not as yet dared to advocate anything further than the right of the sub-divisions of any caste to inter-marry. This caste law of inter-marriage within the caste, deters many a man in India to-day, from confessing his faith in the Saviour of the world. Educated for generations back, to regard marriage for his children within his caste as the only possible course, it is not easy to readjust his social ideas and accept the freedom his new-found faith would give him, particularly when he is a member of some one of the higher castes, and the Christian community is made up of men and women who formerly belonged to a lower caste, or to the despised outcastes.

The writer is personally acquainted with men and women, not a few, who are thus in bondage to their old law of