

causes, and a bevy of young women who really governed Hilltop. And this bright afternoon a few of them were holding their last missionary meeting before vacation.

Katherine Grant, a tall, dignified girl with eye-glasses, was president and also hostess. It was half past three, and she rapped upon the round table in the middle of the arbor.

"O, Katherine!" cried Sarah Norris, "do you really expect us to concentrate our minds upon missions this afternoon? Now if we were in the vestry facing the map of Asia, and a cold sleet was driving against the windows, I could give my whole soul to the subject; but now—"

"When every prospect pleases and only man is vile," hummed softly Margie Holmes.

"It isn't time to sing yet," retorted Sarah; "I was only going to say that I felt too happy to think about other people's miseries."

"So do I," said Lulu Dyer in her soft, drawing tone; "I've been watching those ridiculous robins hopping down the path. Did you ever see any creature make such a sudden and total pause as a robin will? You'd think he had had an instantaneous 'arrest of thought.' One moment he hops along as if he were after the doctor, and the next instant—"

Katherine was laughing with the rest of the girls, but shook her head. "Girls, we must abide by our constitution and our convictions," she said.

After the opening exercises and reports, always faithfully given, a paper read by one of the members on a selected topic, and followed by a free discussion. It was Katherine's turn to-day, and her subject in connection with India lessons was *Caste*. Her aunt Anna, now a Hilltop minister's wife, had once been a missionary in India. Hence at the parsonage Katherine had found not only books and papers, but helps from actual experience.

She had given much time and thought to the subject, and her six listeners felt that her paper was "simply perfect."

The system of *Caste* as an ancient form of religious belief,—its oppressive influence upon the Hindus, and its power to thwart Christianity, was clearly explained. The Brahman stood as a type of the system. In her own picturesque style Katherine sketched this head of all castes, this aristocrat of the earth "by the grace of God." Poor, idle, even immoral he might be, but he was never anything but holy. He must not touch or speak with a person of lower caste. He must not eat food cooked by him, nor must the shadow of the vile man fall upon him. His bathing, eating, meditations and devotions are all governed by fixed laws; and, in fact, he, the sacred Brahman, claims *worship* from low-caste men.

"And what," read Katherine with intense voice, "what is the sign of this supremacy? Why, a cotton string of three strands which passes over the left shoulder and across his breast! At eight years the Brahman boy receives this, and is ever after reckoned among the 'twice born.'"

As Katherine paused the girls were strongly impressed by her fine scorn of the ancient fraud "sitting by the Ganges," and were ready to ask questions, and advance opinions of their own. They did not refer to the heathen as if they were either mummies or idiots,—we must congratulate them on such an advance,—but they could not forget the marked superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race, nor fail to express their disapproval and disgust for all that pertained to the old cotton string. It was a pity the old Brahman could not have heard that discussion of what ought to be!

While they talk talked, Lisa, the little Swede maid, came out with cake and lemonade on dainty trays, smiling broadly as joyous exclamations arose over the suggestive tinkling of ice in the big pitcher.

As they gathered about the table Katherine said: "Now we must talk business while we eat. This is our last meeting until September. Some time that month we must hold an 'at home.' Aunt Anna expects a missionary visitor, which will give us a splendid opportunity to reach the people. I would like to have our church parlors beautiful with autumn leaves, flowers, and all the lovely things we can think of—really artistic, you know, with a reception committee in their loveliest dresses. How are you impressed, girls?"

"I move that we have this truly superior and artistic gathering," said Alice Bradford, the "practical member."

Jessie Adams seconded the motion, and a little later they nominated as a committee, "Our President, Sarah Norris, Jessie Adams, Clara Sprague,"—Katherine looked around the table doubtfully. "Do you really think it wise to make Clara one of the committees?" she asked.

Alice Bradford had nominated her, and her face flushed as she replied, "Clara hasn't been away from Hilltop, I know, and she isn't very stylish, but with half a chance she would surpass us all."

"Oh, I know it!" Katherine hastened to say; "Clara is pure gold, but—"

"She would be awkward enough in that place, though," said Jessie.

"But how she would enjoy it!" exclaimed Alice.

"Yes, but—" sighed Katherine.

"Hm! Katherine wears the cotton string, girls; I thought she would reveal it."

"The idea! Sarah Norris, eat those words with your angel cake," commanded Katherine.

"But what is 'our-set-ism' and 'position-ism' and—?"

"Culture-ism and best-clothes-ism," interpolated Margie.

"Yes," continued Sarah, "what is it all but Brahmanism, in a sense? That old half-nude man with his brass baby-dishes and his sacred messes really *believes* he is 'way above other castes.'"

Beth Carlton, who had not given an opinion before, leaned forward with an earnest expression. "I couldn't help thinking so," she said; "what have we had,—Christian birth, education and social advantages—aren't really a part of us. That is, we might have been very common people indeed without them. So, if we place too great stress upon them, aren't they cotton strings 'in a sense,' as Sarah says? Don't feel offended, Katherine, your paper was splendid,—but in my inner heart I thought how careful I must be not to claim superiority on account of any of these things."

The "Silent Sister," as Beth was lovingly called, was small but wise. The little silence which followed was broken by Lulu's comfortable tones: "I move we study the fitness of things and let Katherine choose her own committee."

But Katherine shook her head. "I must think it out, girls. If I'm a Brahman I ought to know it. Like Lulu's robin, I have had an 'arrest,' and when I can tell you about it I will call an extra meeting."

They saw that she was deeply moved, but she instantly laid the subject aside, and as they walked and talked in the beautiful garden, the other girls forgot for a time all but the delightful features of the afternoon.