

Among The Circles

A FABLE FOR MISSIONARY WOMEN

Once upon a time a large family was assembled about a well-spread breakfast table. It was hard to tell how many there were, because they kept moving around instead of sitting quietly in their places; that is, all but the mother.

When the food was placed on the table this mother helped herself to the best of everything. Her cereal was smothered in cream, her steak was cut and eaten with leisurely enjoyment, her coffee was sipped with relish; she appeared utterly unconscious that anyone but herself was at the table.

Meantime, Tom undertook to cut himself a piece of steak, which acted as such things usually do, and performed a gymnastic exercise, sending gravy all over that end of the table. He finally secured a piece, and bolted it in large morsels.

Susie endeavored to break an egg into her cup, but her little fingers were unskilful, and the egg was hot. In consequence, there was a sudden collapse of the egg, and Susie spent some minutes in a doleful attempt to fish out the shattered egg shell. After she had finally started to eat, sounds of gritting teeth and contortions of countenance bore witness of the fact that she had not found it all.

Nellie buttered her bread with joyous abandon, anointing the tablecloth at the same time. Charlie upset the jam reaching for the bread tray; while the baby bestowed milk impartially on the tablecloth and the floor in a heroic effort to fill his own mug from the pitcher.

Is the mother deaf and blind? For still she continues serenely eating her breakfast, paying no attention whatever to the devastation caused by her family. Let us ask her what it means.

"Oh," she replies, "my children have plenty to eat. My table is abundantly spread, and they help themselves."

"But," we exclaim "while the food is plentiful and nourishing, they do not know how to wait upon themselves. They are only children, and without direction and help they will not be able to prepare the food so that it will be digestible, or even so that they will get enough to nourish them."

"That isn't my concern," says she. "The food is there; I have done my duty."

"No," we insist, "your duty is not done until you have seen to it that each child gets what is most suitable to its needs, and is properly fed. Your children will go to school or to play without the fuel their bodies need, and in time they will fall behind, in study as well as in sport."

"Oh, well," says the mother, calmly pouring her second cup of coffee, "they do seem to be hungry all the time; but I have a very kind neighbor, and when they are playing out in the yard she often calls them over and gives them a piece of bread between times; so I guess they get along!"

And that is the satisfaction she gives us.

What an absurd picture, you say! No such scene ever was enacted in a civilized land! Now, if they had been wild Africans, snatching a handful out of a pot, it would seem more natural. But the mothers who sit at well appointed breakfast tables never do such things. As a matter of fact, it is quite the other way in the homes we know. There the mother helps and guides the little fingers, serving everybody rather than herself; and usually she gets nothing until the food is beginning to cool, and the choicest bits have been distributed to the others.

But wait a moment! Have we ever seen anything that might remind us of this abnormal picture?

There is another whose table is richly spread. Her name is Mrs. Woman's Missionary Society. Her children are many; they are the future workers of our churches, the future pastors and teachers and missionaries, who are growing up, a fair and godly stock, in the midst of her house.

Abundant, indeed, is the feast of information set before this family; the knowledge of the whole world and its needs, the hero-stories of all the missionary ages, the inspiration of noble words and deeds. But they are prepared for the mother, not for the children. It needs some help, some guidance of older hands, to bring this food to the little folks, to help them assimilate it, that they may grow thereby. And too often we see that mission-