

Benares is the great centre of the idol-making business, though in all parts of India the trade flourishes. Potters, the day through, may be seen in the sacred city, moulding images of clay for temporary use. Sculptors also may be found producing representations of the gods in stone or marble. Carpenters, moreover, make great wooden idols for the temples; and workers in metal—goldsmiths, coppersmiths, and brassworkers—turn out more or less highly-finished specimens in their respective metals.

"Special value," one writer says, "attaches to golden images of certain gods and goddesses, while for others, copper or brass, or an amalgam of mercury and tin, is preferred. Sitala, the Goddess of Small-pox, is always represented in silver; but the most sacred of all materials for the manufacture of gods is a perfect alloy produced by mixing eight metals—viz., gold, silver, brass, lead, iron, tin, mercury, and copper.

I have heard it whispered in more than one quarter, that many of the idols that are worshipped in India are manufactured in England; but I would fain believe that the report is not correct, for I do not like to think ill of my fellow-countrymen. Miss Cumming, in her book entitled "In the Himalayas and on the Indian Plains," speaking of some images offered to her by a vendor of idols in Benares, says, "I strongly suspect that every little idol in his basket was pure 'Brummagem,' and not without reason, for it is currently reported that Birmingham exports an immensely large proportion of the idols of Hindustan, and finds them a very profitable speculation." Again I would remark that I hope the report is incorrect. If the people of India will have idols to worship, it is certainly not for Christian England to supply them.

When speaking of idols it should be borne in mind that images turned out by the potter, sculptor, carver, or manufacturer, are not considered sacred or fit to be worshipped, until certain mystic words have been uttered over them by a priest. The ceremony of "the giving of life," as it is called, to the image, is a very solemn affair, and when it is done the

idol is regarded as holy, and must ever afterwards be approached and treated with the utmost reverence.

Out of many millions of so-called gods in India, all of whom are counted worthy of worship, three are regarded as specially sacred, and form the Hindu Triad or Trinity. They are respectively Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva. Of these, it is stated, the second person of the Trinity only has been represented on this earth by human incarnations. Through one or all of these gods the Hindus believe they may obtain salvation. Brahma represents the way of salvation by wisdom, Vishnu, by faith, and Siva by works. It is immaterial which method is adopted, as they all lead to the same goal.

And from what do the Hindus wish or hope to be saved? Well, I can say, once for all, that it is not, generally speaking, from sin. "The idols are not worshipped for spiritual blessings, holiness, and aids to moral culture, but to obtain exemption from the physical evils of life—relief from sickness, victory over enemies, healthy children, wealth, good luck, worldly gain, temporal prosperity. According to the philosophical system of Hinduism, only temporal benefits are to be obtained from idols." The Hindus have not yet realised that "God is a spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth."

Soon after I landed on Indian soil it was my lot to obtain possession of an idol, under most interesting circumstances. It was at Madras, where I had gone on shore to visit a college friend who had preceded me to India by a year or so. My friend told me how his heart had been cheered by a Hindu, whom he knew, forsaking idolatry, and becoming a follower of Christ. I rejoiced with him, and in course of conversation I asked what the new convert would do with his old household idols. For reply I was asked if I would like to possess one of them, as a memento of the event, and of my visit to Madras. I promptly answered "Yes"; and my friend brought from another room a tiny brass idol, and, placing it in my hand, said, "Take it, and welcome. It was