

On the evening of the second day of the festival, I went to witness the inhuman and abominable custom of boring the parts of the body; and on arriving at the place where this horrid cruelty was practised, I saw one man holding an iron bar in his hands, and on looking more narrowly I perceived that his tongue was slit, and that the iron bar was put through the incision which had been made in his tongue. In this dreadful state, the man enduring the most racking pains, was moving on amidst a dense body of people who appeared gratified with the horrid spectacle. Turning away with heart-loathing from this sight, my attention was next arrested by the sight of several men, amongst whom were two boys apparently of fourteen years of age, with spears driven into their shoulders from which the blood was seen to flow, and judging by the anguish depicted in their countenance, the pain endured by these wretched victims of cruel superstition must have been extreme. Around these sufferers, and marching in procession with them, was a band of musicians, who with tom-toms and drums, kept up a dreadful noise. Close to this group I saw another revolting sight—a man lying on a bed of thorns, and carried in this fearful state of suffering on the shoulders of four men. I was glad after witnessing these distressing sights to turn away breathing the prayer in Psalm lxxiv. 20: "Have respect unto the Covenant, for the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty."

On the next morning—the last day of the Bengali year and the great day of the festival, we went again to the village of Rangong, and there was the Churnuck swinging. Before the swinging commenced, I took my stand beside one of the temples of Shiva, and saw one company after another bringing baskets of flowers and fruit, which they placed upon the image of Shiva. I also witnessed the sacrifice of a goat and two kids which were offered as an expiation in behalf of those who were about to take part in the swinging. I then beheld the Sannuasis (as they are termed) before their backs were pierced with the hook, stand before the temple, and in the presence of the Brahmans, with closed eyes and clasped hands, join in prayer. Then they bent forward, and a smith after feeling the back of each with his hand several times, so as to get the right place, bored the back with a sharp hook. Whereupon the wretched Sannuasi was led to a large pole of about twenty feet height to which a cross beam was attached and after being tied with ropes to one end of the transverse beam, was raised to the top of the pole, twenty feet at least above the ground. The cross beams were then set in motion, and the miserable devotee described a painful circumference around the upright pole for about the space of twenty minutes, supported only by the hook in his back. When taken down the blood was seen to be streaming from the lacerated back, and the wretched man appeared completely exhausted. I saw no fewer than four individuals performing this painful and degrading ceremony, and I left the place long before the inhuman rites had terminated. The place around the swinging tree was a scene of great excitement and uproar. Several of the swinging Sannuasis held in their hands baskets full of sweetmeats which they threw down to the gaping crowd beneath. All the time of the swinging there was a horrid din of deafening tom-toms, which was most grating to the feelings. But looking at the crowd of people, amounting to several thousands, the sight seemed to yield them no little gratification.

Who is there that will not join in the prayer that the time may speedily come, when all these cruel and bloody rites will give place to the peaceful and blessed religion of the Lord Jesus Christ, and when instead of the crowds which I had seen gathered to witness such cruel and debasing rites, there may be yet witnessed by me the pleasing spectacle of an equal number gathered to listen to the joyful sound of the gospel which proclaims, "Glory to God in the highest; peace on earth and good will to men."

As the Synod will be close at hand when this letter reaches you, I may mention shortly the state of the Mission here.

1. We are engaged in the great work of preaching the gospel to the heathen in their own tongue by the best of all agency—that of a thoroughly educated native ministry, which by the grace of God has passed through severe trials. Three times in the week I accompany Baikuntha to the surrounding villages where he preaches, and at the close I add a few words occasionally which he interprets. Frequently upwards of 100 people listen, and that most attentively, to the close of the services.