

Among the Rice Fields.

We started from Bhowanipore, Mr. Le Quesne and I, says an Indian missionary, in a ghari. A ghari is a two-horse conveyance, something like our London growlers, but rougher-looking and possessing far greater capacity for jolting and swinging jerkily from side to side. It was a Saturday morning, and our destination was Kaurapukur, which is a village some five or six miles south of Calcutta. We passed through Bhowanipore with its dirty streets, teeming population, and small native houses and shops; past Kulighat, the celebrated Hindu temple; across the Talygunge Bridge, and so on into the country, jolting and bumping over the Kaurapukur road. One coming fresh from England misses the familiar hedges and trees, but there is plenty of vegetation, and tall palms of various kinds, tropical trees, creeping and climbing plants, bamboos and jungle, make up a pleasant enough picture to the eye tired of city sights and streets.

An hour's drive brings us to Kaurapukur, Mr. Banerji comes smilingly out to greet us, and says all is ready for a start.

We go across the road to the khal, or small natural canal running past Kaurapukur into the rice-fields. On one side of the village landing-place is the dock for the 'Tara,' the fine new mission-boat used for work on the Isamutty. The dock is merely dug out of the bank, and into it the 'Tara' can be floated at high water. She is pretty constantly used, however, in the cooler parts of the year by parties of evangelists visiting the Sunderbund villages. At the landing-place three or four shaltis, or punts, are tied up. Ours was flat-bottomed, about ten feet long and less than two broad. Three wicker footstools, placed on the bottom of the shalti, served as seats.

Carefully we stepped off the clayey bank and took our seats, and when the crew had embarked we were thankful that no one of our party was of Pickwickian build, as not only would he have found it difficult to accommodate himself to the width of the boat, but would have gone far to sinking her, as, being overloaded, she was decidedly low in the water. Our crew was made up of two natives, shiny, brown-skinned, and scraggy, each dressed in a cotton loin-cloth (once white), and carrying a long bamboo. They punted along, pulling their bamboos out of the mud with a jerk when they stuck, somehow keeping their own balance and the boat's, and asking, when the water came over the boat's side and she only just recovered herself, and we remonstrated: 'Of what are you afraid?' The rascals! wetting to them would be rather refreshing than otherwise.

The khal banks were high, and so we could not see much of the scenery until we got out and walked, being rather cramped with our unusual positions in the shalti. The country is quite flat, with long stretches of rice field, relieved by clumps of palm-trees, marking the position of villages. There was plenty to look at. Now other shaltis would pass us; now we would meet a party of women trotting along the bank carrying their goods on their heads to market; now it was a man grubbing about in the mud at the bottom of the khal for small fish; now a man fishing with a kind of net I had never seen before; now we passed a cluster of huts and paused to see four or five oxen, tied to a post, walking round in a circle, and treading out the rice, or to watch women husking or beating it out.

At this season of the year the rice-fields are flooded to the depth of a few inches, and the channels, which are deeper, run to the various villages. The whole scene was bath-

ed in bright sunshine. On each side of us stretched the rice fields, with here and there the islands marked by clusters of palms. Men were reaping the harvest. Wading in the shallow water, they cut down the rice and tied it into sheaves, which they left floating on the water to be picked up by shaltis, which take the place of our harvest waggons in England.

Now we passed between two islands, with the trees meeting over our heads, and the women and children come out of their mud huts to have a look at the 'padres,' as missionaries are styled out here; whilst half-wild, lean dogs stand and yelp at us. Again we came upon three or four brown little maidens fishing with basket-nets made of bamboo, up to their knees in the water, and not troubled with a superfluity of clothing.

There is continually something fresh to interest or amuse. After about three hours' journey, and after passing a fair number of villages, we approach Gangrai. We pass up a channel overgrown with water plants, in which are moored three or four other boats.

The teacher and catechist bring us coconuts, and open them with a small hatchet, and we find the milk very refreshing after our long ride in the sun. The men are out harvesting, but a group of little brown girls and boys soon gather, and watch our proceedings with evident interest. Some of the girls are pretty little things, and shyly peep at us from behind cloths drawn half over their faces. The women are busy about the huts, and some have been beating out and husking rice, which is lying in heaps on mats in the sun.

Mr. Banerji points out things of interest and answers plenty of questions, so that our tour through the little village is full of interest. The life of these village folk seems very quiet and simple, but it is very narrow, and here, as elsewhere, those passions and sins which only yield to the Christ-power hold sway and rule.

There is a school carried on by the teacher, a bright-looking, intelligent young fellow, who may, perhaps, come later to our Institution here as a theological student. Otherwise the children grow up in utter ignorance, their education consisting in learning to catch fish with net and trap, to manage a shalti, and to sow and reap rice. The number of Christians is small, but they meet from Sunday to Sunday in their little village chapels, the service being conducted by the catechist, and Mr. Banerji takes the villages in turn.—Jas. H. Brown, in 'L. M. S. Chronicle.'

The Power of a Hymn.

(By Margaret Curry.)

The words of the hymn 'Nearer, my God, to thee,' came floating out from the kitchen, where Sarah was at her daily work. They fell, softened by the distance, on the ears of two women as they sat on the front porch of the spacious country-house, watching the sun set.

The younger woman spoke:

'Aunt Catherine, that hymn is inseparably connected in my mind with an incident which happened here in our little village a few years ago. We were just now speaking of trust. This illustrates my idea of trust, and what it does for us.'

'You never knew our neighbor, Mrs. G——, so I must tell you of her in the first place. She was one of the most lovable women I ever knew—always cheerful and sympathetic. Although she never seemed to realize it, she was the leading spirit of all our Christian efforts, inspiring us all with her bright, sunny ways. Mr. G—— was just such a husband as you would wish such a woman to have. A lovely daughter, two

promising boys, and a little curly-headed tot, the pet of all, completed the happiest home circle it has ever been my good fortune to enter.

'In the spring of that year, Mrs. G—— had a severe illness. After many weeks of suffering, she arose from her sick-bed, but with the loss of her reason. The woman we had so admired and honored was a complete wreck, henceforth to be a burden in the home she had before made so happy.

'I knew Mr. G—— to be a man of deepest piety. Often I had heard him, in our prayer-meetings, thank God for 'a religion that could comfort us in the darkest hours of trial.' My own religious experience was quite limited then, and I confess I was wondering whether he found grace sufficient to support him under this terrible blow—whether he could say, 'As for God, his way is perfect.'

When the evening came for the next prayer-meeting, he was at his post as usual. His face was pale, but otherwise calm, even peaceful. He had always led the congregation in singing; and when the meeting had progressed a little, our pastor, who was leading, asked him to start "Nearer, my God, to thee." From the first words, the old hymn I had known from my childhood began to take on a new meaning. I had thought it a beautiful conception, and I liked the music; but to-night it was the impassioned outpouring of a soul filled with intensest longing for God, as the weary, benighted, storm-driven traveller longs for home. The song was soon a solo. Every heart in the little congregation was stirred. Tears choked our utterance and blinded our eyes. The singer seemed unconscious that he sang alone, or that he had any hearers save God. What infinite pathos he threw into the pleading,

'There let the way appear
Steps unto heaven:
All that thou sendest me,
In mercy given:
Angels to beckon me
Nearer, my God, to thee!
Nearer to thee!'

'It was not a pleading that the afflicting hand might be removed, but for a faith that could pierce the gloom and recognize it as the hand of love. Even while he asked the answer came. A note of victory shook the air as he sang:

'Out of my stony griefs,
Bethel I'll raise;
So by my woes to be
Nearer, my God, to thee!
Nearer to thee!'

'I felt certain that he had an experience like that of Moses on Sinai, for his face shone; and we knew that the most joyous man among us that night was he over whose home there hung so dark a pall of misery.'—S. S. Times.'

The First Dandelion.

A little wee flower with a cap on its head
Peeped out of the ground one day,
'It is spring, and high time to get up,' it said,
'The snow has melted away.'

'The sun is beginning to shine very strong,
The wind is whistling for glee;
I really believe, though perhaps I am wrong,
The wind is calling for me.'

So it quickly took off its nightcap of green,
Then smoothed down its golden hair,
And smiling up bravely and brightly was seen

Spring's first dandelion fair.
—Lizzie Willis, Toronto, in 'Educational Journal.'