

## INDIA AND ITS IDOLS.

"IDOLS, IDOLS, EVERYWHERE."

**I**F one were asked to describe India, I think the first remark that would spring from one's lips would be—"It is a land of idols! There are idols, idols everywhere!" I can well remember as a boy that at a certain missionary meeting in England, when the missionary held up two or three idols for our inspection, I greatly marvelled at the sight, and wondered whether I should ever visit India and see idolatry for myself in all its powers and degradation.

And now that I have been in the East my astonishment is no whit lessened at the fact that so many millions of boys and girls, young men and maidens, and older people, human beings like ourselves, can bow down before gods of wood and stone and brass. Idolatry seems to have a fascination for the Hindus; it is the very air they breathe; it is the food of their souls. They are the willing slaves of custom in this respect, for the common people of India, it is easy to be seen, are passionately interested in and devoted to the worship and service of idols.

The late Rev. M. A. Sherring, of Benares, in his well-known book entitled "The Sacred City of the Hindus," says: "Indeed the love for idolatry is so deep-seated and intense in the breasts of the people, that it is a common thing for both men and women to amuse themselves with manufacturing little gods from mud and clay, and after paying divine honours to them, and that too with the same profound reverence which they display in their devotions before the well-known deities of the temples, to throw them away."

Mr. Sherring then gives a striking instance in proof of his assertion. He says: "One day on entering the courtyard of the temple of Annapûrnâ, the Goddess of Plenty, my attention was arrested by an aged woman seated on the ground in front of a small clay figure, which, I ascertained, she had with her own hands manufactured that morning, and to which she was solemnly paying homage. Close by was a brazen vessel containing water, into which every now and then she dipped a

small spoon, and then gently poured a few drops upon the head of the image. She then reverently folded her hands, and muttered words of prayer, occasionally moving one hand to her face, and with finger and thumb compressing her two nostrils, in order that, holding her breath as long as possible, she might increase the merit of her worship and the efficacy of her prayer. Having completed her devotions she rose, took the image which she had worshipped in her hands, and threw it away as of no further use."

So strong in fact are the Hindus in this passion for worshipping something they can see and handle, that they will almost use anything for an idol. I have heard of a Hindu gentleman in South India who wanted to get possession of an English doll for purposes of worship. The doll had been given by a missionary lady to a native Christian girl as a prize for good conduct at school. The little girl had carried it home, of course, and shown it to her friends with great glee, little thinking any one would wish to deprive her of it. A neighbor, an acquaintance of her father, however, having seen the doll, took a fancy to it, thinking it would make a capital idol, and tried to bribe the little girl into parting with it. The child refused, though offered the equivalent of ten shillings for it; and had the courage to tell the man that he was foolish to worship idols at all, and that he would show wisdom by putting his trust in Jesus Christ the Saviour of the world. The Hindu sharply replied, "I don't want your Christ, but only that pretty image, if you will sell it to me."

It would be impossible to compute the number of idols that there must be at the present time in India. The Hindus pretend to have 333,000,000 gods, and these are represented by innumerable idols, so that we are quite bewildered with the thought of taking the census of the idols of India. The population of the whole Indian Empire is now about 300,000,000, and probably the country contains ten times as many idols as people. The world is therefore a long way off the fulfilment of that Bible prophecy which says, "And the idols shall He utterly abolish."