

## WOULDN'T HAVE SAID IT.

One night, in a crowded sleeping car, a baby cried most piteously. At length a harsh voice called out from a neighboring berth, "Won't that child's mother stop its noise, so that the people in this car get some sleep?" The baby ceased for a moment, and then a man's voice answered, "The baby's mother is in her coffin in the baggage car, and I have been awake with the little one for three nights; I will do my best to keep her quiet."

There was a sudden rush from the other berth, and a rough voice, broken and tender, said: "I don't understand, sir; I am so sorry; I wouldn't have said it for the world, if I had understood. Let me take the baby and you get some rest;" and up and down the car paced the strong man, softly hushing the tired baby until it fell asleep, when he laid it down in his own berth and watched over it till morning.

As he carried the little one back to its father, he again apologized in the same words: "I hope you will excuse what I said; I didn't understand how it was."

Ah, if only they *understood*, those dear Christian women! If they understood what it means to be a heathen woman in China, India, or Africa! If they had any idea of the frightful sin and consequent suffering of five hundred millions of these sisters of ours; if they understood what it costs to give up home and parents, and children and health, to do this necessary work, if they dreamed of the agony of leaving lonely graves in those far off lands; if they knew how the unkind criticism and indifference of the home workers grieve those who have given their lives to this work; if they understood that it is for this Christ came; that he instituted and commanded this work, and taught us to pray, "Thy kingdom come," it would all seem so different!—*The Mission Gleaner*.

## A VISIT TO A HINDOO MELA.

### A WIERD PICTURE.

OF the frequent melas, or religious festivals, held in so many places in India, few can compare with the annual Magh Mela at Allahabad, held about January.

Important as this Magh Mela always is, it assumes still vaster proportions every twelfth year, when it is called the Kumbh Mela. The special feature is the gathering together of great numbers of Sadhus, or Fakirs, and hundreds of thousands of pilgrims travel long distances by road and rail to attend the festival, and wash away their sins by bathing at the Tirbeni. Tirbeni means "three streams," and is the name given to the meeting point of the Ganges, Jumna and Saraswati rivers. The two former will be found marked on any fair map of India; not so, however, the third; its very existence is a matter of faith, and no fleshy eye can note its course at this meeting with the two other sacred rivers.

It so happened that this was the year for the Kumbh Mela, and feeling eager to see it once in my lifetime, and thinking that I should find at some opportunities for Christian work, I started off from Kachhwa, on January 31st, to spend a few days at the sacred festival. I had a fifteen mile run on my bicycle that evening, and the remaining forty-three miles before breakfast next morning.

The road was crowded with pilgrims, and at eight large encampments were formed under the trees by the roadside, where the weary travellers cooked their evening meal, rolled themselves in such bedding as they might be fortunate enough

to possess, and slept on the ground. Most of the people were on foot, but in some cases the women and children were conveyed in a two-wheeled waggon drawn by bullocks.

Friday was a very wet day, and also the latter part of Thursday, so I did not get down to the mela on those days. The visitors must have had a sorry time of it. Some of them would secure lodgings in the city, but the great majority would be encamped either under trees or in grass booths, which could have afforded little shelter from the heavy rain.

On Saturday I had a good long day of it. The wide reach of sand, stretching out to the point where the Ganges and Jumna meet, presented a busy scene. The people were flocking hither and thither on their way to or from their sacred bath. The Tirbeni was the specially attractive spot, and great was the rush of eager bathers to that place, but thousands had to content themselves with a dip in the Ganges before it meets the Jumna, and the Ganges is sacred at any point.

In the middle of the river a large sand bank had formed, and on this island the Sadhus or holy men had been located. The bridge of boats connecting the mainland with this island had broken down in parts, and thus many who wished to visit the fakirs' encampment had to wade through a foot or two of water here and there. Some missionary friends and I secured a boat and crossed.

How many of these Sadhus, or begging devotees, had assembled I cannot say; one of them told me forty or fifty thousand, but I can hardly think that there was anything like that number. It was a weird assembly. Here and there would be a tent and gaily decorated awning, marking the temporary abode of a mahunt (chief of Sadhus). Beneath one of these awnings was a party of musicians and a dancing woman.

The Sadhus, on the whole, were not a very prepossessing lot of men. Speaking generally, their bodies were not worn by their austerities, nor their faces intellectualised by study and meditation. Charity would not be outraged by the statement that many of them lead a lazy, worthless, loose life, doing little good for themselves, nothing for the people, but partaking liberally of their food and hard-earned money.

Some few of the men laid claim to special sanctity by torturing themselves. I saw three beds of spikes; two were unoccupied at the time we passed, and the owner of the third was sitting by the side, having his hair dressed by a disciple; but he got on to his uninviting couch before we came away.

One would not like to speak lightly of men who, however mistaken, were sincere in their belief that by self-inflicted tortures they could please God; but I could not but notice that mercy was not altogether wanting in this devotee's treatment of himself. The spikes were certainly sharp; but, in lying on them, not a little of the man's weight fell on a wooden belt, and the nape of his neck rested on a board. He looked strong and well, and there was no sign of a wound in his body. He had a fine, intelligent face, had received a good education, and it is difficult to understand how a man enjoying such advantages could ever have adopted such a life.

One of the party desired to take his photograph. His willingness, his pose, and his careful arrangement of his long plaited locks of hair indicated that the last vestiges of vanity had not been eradicated.

Another man we saw had his left arm held