

legs, shrinking into some recess lest the shadow of a passing Englishman or Mussulman should fall upon them, a calamity which spoils the effect of the sacred cleansing and renders it needful to creep back once more to the chill water. Hundreds of aged creatures of both sexes are always in Benares, having left home and family, perhaps a thousand miles away, never to return happy and glad to chill themselves slowly into heaven in the sacred waves of the Ganges.

Nothing in all their religion is so dear to the devout Hindu as their beloved mother Ganges. Pilgrims to her banks carry back bottles of the precious water to their kindred in far-off provinces; to die and be burnt on her sacred margin, and have their ashes borne away to the ocean on her loving bosom, is the last wish of millions of Hindus. No river in the world does more to justify the reverence of the people, blessed, fed and sustained by the water she brings down to the fertile plains from the "roof of the world." Every turn of the street, every step of the ghat, every group on the platforms present some incident exciting the greatest curiosity, which can only be satisfied by someone versed in the customs of the Hindu religion. It will be well to ascend the soaring minaret of the Mosque of Aurangzeb for the marvellous bird's-eye view it affords of the ghats, the whole city, and the sweeping mother Ganges bearing away the sins of her faithful and devoted children to be merged in the mighty ocean. This mosque is the finest building in Benares, and, in many respects, is unique. Springing lightly into the air, like the tall stems of some beautiful flower, are two exquisite and graceful minarets, 150 feet from the floor of the mosque. These slender pinnacles are only eight and a quarter feet in diameter at the base, tapering to seven and a half feet at the summit. The river is 150 below the mosque, so that the whole building rises 300 feet, almost sheer from the water's edge, forming the very crown of the city. Mohammed, the theist and the idol breaker, thus appears to dominate with lofty and desolate scorn the 1,400 temples of that ancient Brahman faith, which survives alike the precepts of Buddha, the fierce persecutions of Aurangzeb, and the mild and gentle teaching of Jesus. To sit in the air, on the topmost balcony of one of these slender minarets, with the city and river at one's feet, the pigeons and parrots whirling between, is an experience never to be forgotten.

At the Burning Ghat, may be observed corpses undergoing cremation. Hawkers sell peacock fans, warranted to blow away fiends and evil spirits; at the top of the steps is a goddess with a silver face, who protects her devotees from smallpox.