

◆◆◆ W. B. M. U. ◆◆◆
OF THE MARITIME PROVINCES

MOTTO FOR THE YEAR—"Workers together with Him."

Dear Girls and Boys.—A glimpse of something in India I am to give you. Here is one I have just had for the first time.

We are twelve miles from the station. Our home for a month has been in this indigo factory. It is a rough place, but there is ample room for us all and we are very comfortable. Around us are hills; some extend in short ranges, others rise abruptly from the plain, somewhat like huge haystacks in a meadow. I look out of my door; far above the factory towers one of these haystack hills. Its summit glistens in the sun—a snow capped mount? Ah, no, a temple, crowned peak. The temple has recently been white-washed and the white chunma sparkles in the sunlight. At the foot of the hill stands another temple. Just over these is a large one where Gopalaswami is worshipped. Yonder beneath that wide spreading tree is the shrine of some village goddess. That big tree beyond shades another small temple. Thus we find them on every hand. How truly may we say of this people, "They also built them high places and images and groves on every high hill, and under green trees."

The most important temple in this part of the country is that perched on the hill-top. How many of you remember Mrs. Morse's letter about it? What, at this distance, appears to be a path up the hillside, is really a stone stairway, twelve feet wide. The evening Mr. and Mrs. Gillison and I visited the temple we counted the steps, relieving each other after each hundred or two hundred. A tiring climb it was. Again and again we were forced to stop and rest before going further. One hundred, two hundred, three hundred, four hundred,—we have already mounted more steps than are in the stairway leading up to the temple on Bimli hill,—five hundred, surely we must be more than half way up, six hundred, eight hundred, ten hundred, we are very tired, our heads throb, hearts beat rapidly and we are bathed in perspiration, eleven hundred, twelve hundred, twelve hundred and ninety! We are upon the top, tip-top of the hill, within the courtyard of the temple!

Of necessity the building is small and the outside is very plain. There, in the surrounding wall is a stone image, and in that niche in the temple is another. In this side is a recess entered by crawling through a square opening. The odor of the place is most offensive, for it is the home of bats, but fakirs visiting this temple actually stay in that dark, dank hole whilst they receive the poojah and alms of the people coming here to worship.

Since the doors are locked we cannot get even a glimpse within the sacred portals, but it is not at all probable that were the priests here we could gratify our curiosity. Among the common people there seems to be a vast amount of ignorance regarding the contents of this temple. We have

been surprised to find many living even in the shadow of the hill quite unable to tell us the form of the idol. But our Christian Kirnam tells me that even the sacred books do not agree regarding the legends connected with the gods. The people are taught to take things as they are, and that they must not try to account for the difference; to do so is sin.

I give you one story about this particular deity, Padmanabhamswami. This is one of the names by which Vishnu is known. The special incarnation of Vishnu supposed to be represented in this temple is that of the fish. At the time of the flood, the creator, Brahma, was lying asleep upon a banyan leaf floating on the water. A demon seized the opportunity to steal the sacred books from Brahma; whereupon Vishnu assumed the form of a fish and coming to earth recovered the books.

It is said that the special fish whose form Vishnu assumed must not be found in any water within sight of the temple, neither can a certain class of merchants who sell these fish live within the same limits.

I wish I might try to give you a glimpse of the enchanting view from this height, but my letter will be too long if I stay longer on the hilltop. Just think of these 1290 steps, what it has cost to build them, what it means to go up and down them, and all for what? Merit, Salvation, Heaven. During these four weeks, seldom have I looked up this stairway when I have not seen some poor deluded heathen going zigzag up the steps that he might worship at the shrine above. I do not wonder that these ignorant people can be made to believe that by so doing they are doing something towards their own salvation. A weary task it is! I never was so lame in my life as during the days following our visit to that temple. Before the soreness had left, I went one day into the station. Seeing me limp, Vuracharyulu enquired what had happened; when I told him we had climbed up to the temple of Padmanabhamswami, he replied, "I suppose you went up with your shoes on and in anger the god has punished you with lameness." It is easier to come down the hill than to go up it, but perhaps more painful. They say that when some one from exhaustion or through pretence sinks upon the steps, his comrades declare that the spirit of the god has come upon him, and carry him to the foot of the hill. Oh, what an idea of God! How far from the truth! We have been telling the people here that God "dwelleth not in temples made with hands," that "He giveth power to the faint," that salvation is not of works, but through Jesus Christ. Many have listened well. One evening between five and six hundred heard the story of Jesus.

You have heard of "Prayer-meeting Hill," near Ongole. The evening of our visit to the temple on Padmanabham hill we made of it a prayer-meeting