

*Gustav-Adolf Union* has for about ten years, been of very important and still continuing influence, not *although* but *because* it rests on no settled confessional base. It is an unquestionable fact that there lives in the German people an ardent zeal for all that furthers the common good, and this union affords those who have separated themselves from positive Christianity an opportunity to bear a part in the intellectual and moral elevation and ennobling of the people.—Thousands support this union, only because the object which it has in view, consisting, as it does, in giving assistance to those isolated members of the evangelical church who live in the thick of a Roman Catholic population, finds an echo in their hearts in their apathy to Romanism. The faithful, who at first stood distrustfully aloof from the union, have thought, the more it progressed in its work, that they would not be justified in withdrawing from it their active sympathy, since they perceived that the building of churches and schools was its sole object, and that all influence on the teaching and general culture flowed from another quarter. In point of fact, the pure and unencumbered gospel is preached in these so-called *Gustav-Adolf churches*; and in the meetings of the union too, many testimonies of belief have already been mentioned, which far outweigh those that savor of the old or new Rationalism.”

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## Fireside Reading.

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### SKETCHES FROM THE FOREIGN MISSIONARY FIELD.

#### THE GODS OF THE HINDOOS.

JER. 50, 38.—“It is the land of graven images, and they are mad upon their idols.”

The three chief deities of the Hindoos are Brahma, the Creator; Vishnu, the Preserver, and Shiva, the Destroyer. From these (as they suppose) proceed three hundred and sixty millions of gods and goddesses. True, worship is not rendered to all, but the sacred books introduce the entire troop, and a set of men who are learned in these writings go, to and fro, through the country, place themselves under the shade of a tree, or in the court of a temple, or in a booth in the midst of the crowd attending one of the annual fairs, raise flags on high bamboo staves before them, adorned with pictures taken from the history of these deities, and explain these pictures to the multitude in pleasing songs and strains of eloquence. But these stories of the gods are for the most part such abominable re-

citals of vice and crime, and the gods are represented as without exception such guilty criminals, that in any civilized country they would have been condemned to death, ten times over. For example, Brahma is called the father of the gods; yet among the Hindoos he is so despised that not a temple is dedicated to him in the entire country. Such contempt he has already experienced, according to the stories, among his fellow deities, for his falsehood and his lewdness and excesses generally—he was a liar, a drunkard, a thief and an adulterer.

The deities which are most worshipped in the East Indies are, Vishnu, particularly in his two appearances on earth as Ram and as Krishna, also Shiva and his wife Kali or Durga and Juggernaut. Images are made of them all. In the image of Shiva, everything horrible is united. He has a threatening look, he holds in his hand a trident; his robe is a tiger skin; his necklace, a string of human heads; his bracelets wreaths of serpents. His wife has the same destroying, murderous character with himself. The blood of a tiger fills her with delight ten years long, but the blood of a man a thousand years. If one of her worshippers opens his vein a little and offers her his blood she is frantic with joy. If he cuts off a piece of his own flesh and brings it a burnt offering to her, her delight exceeds description. She is the especial friend of robbers, thieves and murderers. Every band of robbers before proceeding upon the particular errand it has in view appeals to her for success in their undertaking and makes her an offering. The offerings made to this terrible goddess are not only buffaloes and rams, but even yet, in spite of the prohibitions of the English government, human victims are continually slain in secret to her honor. A verse of the sacred books runs thus: “Let chiefs, statesmen, counsellors and innkeepers bring human offerings and they will become powerful and wealthy.”

#### PENANCE AMONG THE HINDOOS.

ISA. 43 : 24-25.—“Thou hast made me to serve with thy sin, thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities. I, even I am he that blot out thy transgressions, for mine own sake and will not remember thy sins.”

Sin requires an atonement; this the Hindoos too feel. Among the Hindoos the sacred characters called Fakirs seek to atone for their sins by self-inflicted sufferings and penances of the most dreadful kind. Some suspend themselves in the air upon large hooks and freely undergo the most indescribable torments, others cast themselves down from high, steep precipices, or look with unaverted eye upon the blazing sun of midday. Others again expect to pacify the incensed deity by measuring with their naked bodies, which they roll over the burning wastes of