

household in India is without its own tutelary divinity which is peculiar to that community. Such a goddess—for the most popular are females, and receive the general appellation of “mother”—is adopted as the village deity because more active, watchful, and forceful than the pleasure-loving male. She is believed to be the protectress of children, the preventer of small-pox and cholera, and the patron of all enterprises consigned to her care by a special vow invoking her aid. The village to which reference is to be made is an abandoned seaport, now composed mainly of fishermen’s huts, with some few houses of a better stamp belonging to men who are the faded remnants of better and bygone days of commercial prosperity and prominence. Our missionary party occupied a disused warehouse near the surf line of the seacoast, presented to our mission by a well-disposed merchant in a distant town. A sand plain lies between the old warehouse and the village. In the center of this plain is the temple of the village goddess. This is no larger than a small bake-oven in this land might be, and, like it, is built of masonry even to the roof. The image of the goddess consists of a simple stick, not two feet in length, and rough-hewn to some remote resemblance of the female form. She lies upon the summit of an ant-hill, and has recently received fresh daubs of yellow ochre, red lead, and oil. The hot season is well advanced, for it is late in April. The sun shines down through cloudless skies upon the burning sands of the seashore. The season is not propitious for fishing.

Taking advantage of the forced idleness, the fishermen, at the instigation of the village priest, have determined the date of the annual festival of the goddess. On this day all vows made to win her favor, propitiate her anger, or invoke her blessing must be paid on pain of fearsome and calamitous visitations. Soon after nightfall—for no twilight intervenes to break the abruptness

of the transition from light to darkness—an unusual commotion rises above the ordinary noises of the village. When all preparations are completed, the procession breaks through the main entrance to the village and is ushered into the open plain in a flood of light from many torches. Its approach is heralded and headed by a troop of almost naked drummers, their dark and oily bodies glistening in the torchlight as they spring about in mad efforts at a contortionist’s accompaniment with every limb and member of the body to the wild and rapid music of the drums and the discordant blare of half a dozen trumpets and long horns. One more supple than the others accompanies his drumming with somersaults forward and back, never for a moment, not even when in mid-air, interrupting his noisy contribution by drum and voice to the general uproar. Men leading goats and sheep, boys and women carrying hens and cocks, little girls and old women with brass platters loaded with flour, grain, fruits, and paints, poised upon their heads, make up the motley following. Every living thing with vocal capabilities contributes a not insignificant offering to the volume of noise—by no means to be despised as a recognized essential in the worship of their gods. The long procession three times encircles the temple, then masses in front to celebrate the sacrifices and pay the accumulated vows of the past twelvemonth. The goats and sheep are led to the altar. Before it they are placed with necks outstretched by the leading cord. Then a brawny fellow wielding a sickle-shaped ax with one stroke severs the bleating head from the trembling trunk. In rapid succession scores are thus slaughtered. All about, the cocks and hens are being leheaded. Incense is burned at the foot of the goddess in the shrine, where all the offerings are displayed, a little of each being left in the temple, the rest being retained to provide the night’s feast. The mingled smells from smok-