

THE BATHING FESTIVAL AT BALIGOTTAM.

Narsapatnam, India, Feb. 23, '09.

Baligottam, a village about a mile and half from Narsapatnam, has a temple on the side of a hill at the foot of which flows a small stream. Once a year it is thought that the god Benniah condescends to visit this temple, and therefore great merit is obtained by pilgrims who come at that time and bathe in the river, then go and worship the god. This festival is just over and the god is gone. I saw the Brahmin who represented the god going away in an ox-cart this morning. He was draped in a cloth dyed with saffron. The festival lasted five days.

I would like to tell you what I know of the manner of their worship at this festival. Last year I went into the temple and saw for myself, but this year I was forbidden to enter. The people come from far and near to worship here. They first bathe in the stream, which is only a few steps across and not more than ankle deep. Then in their wet clothing they ascend the hill on the north side and go into the temple. There is an outer court in which there is a large brazen bull, but I did not see them make much ado over that though there were flowers and leaves scattered around it. Inside the temple there are two rooms which I suppose correspond to the Holy Place and the Hol. of Holies. I only entered the first, but was not permitted to enter the second unless I wished to worship.

The worshippers upon entering the first room brought wicks in small holders and after lighting these by a light which was already there, placed them near an idol which looked as if it were made of iron or black stone. It was all decorated with garlands of

marigolds and leaves and streaked with saffron and other powers. This idol was also in the form of a bull. When they place the lights they fold both hands together and bow very low before the idol. There was not room to prostrate themselves or they doubtless would have done so. This room was crowded, but there were policemen at the door of the inner place and only those who gave a copper coin were allowed entrance. After gaining admittance they worship the god Benniah, who is supposed to be in the Brahmin who sits there. They break a cocoanut and let some of the milk run on his head and the remainder is poured over his feet from whence it runs through a trough to a cistern outside the temple. I went around afterwards outside and saw people come and drink from this.

It had flowed over the sacred feet therefore great merit would be obtained by drinking it. The cocoanuts and other fruits were given as offerings to the Brahmin.

The worshippers descend the hill on the opposite side where the path is lined by shops of all kinds on both sides. I think there is a good deal of money made by the merchants at these times as well as by the Brahmins.

Another feature of this festival is the bringing of the village bull to be purified and worshipped, then taken back to its village to be worshipped all the year. It is brought in a procession with a great noise of all sorts of their musical instruments. It is bathed and taken into the temple, where it too is garlanded and worshipped and then led away from home, all the while the cymbals and tom-toms, etc., are clanging.

Many, many of those who came this year are confessing that there is no merit in this but they are bound by the chains of custom—the custom of