

pride themselves on keeping up a residence in Holy Benares. Its population, apart from its innumerable companies of pilgrims, is about 200,000, three-fourths of which are Hindu and one-fourth Mussulman. There are not 300 Christians all told.

To the pious Brahman Benares is what Mecca is to the Mussulman, Jerusalem to the Christian. The longing of his whole life is to visit this place of spotless holiness and wash away his blackest sins in the sacred Ganges before he dies. The palaces which fringe the river are full of the aged relatives of their owners, come together from all parts of India, waiting with calm, patient, ecstatic happiness the summons of the angel of death, for Benares is, indeed, the very gate of heaven.

Benares is equally revered by that other great religion of the East, the Buddhist. Twenty-five centuries ago Buddha preached his first sermon here, and made it the centre from which he sent forth his missionaries to Ceylon, China, Japan, Burmah, Nepaul and Thibet, until half the human race came under the sway of his doctrine. Benares was even then so great a centre of religious thought and influence, that Buddha naturally selected it as his centre of operations, and endeavoured, first of all, to secure the countenance and support of its learned pundits and teachers. Tradition avers that it was from Benares Solomon procured his "apes and peacocks," both of which are still held sacred in the Hindu temples of the city. It is also said that one of the wise men of the East, who brought presents to the infant Jesus at Jerusalem, was a Rajah from Benares. However that may be, there is probably no sacred city in the world with so ancient and unbroken a record, or which even to-day exercises its sway over so many millions of devotees; dear alike to that religion which is saturated with idolatry, and to its great rival which, scorning idolatry and polytheism, teaches that every individual man, by a holy life, can lift himself into and become part of the Divine.

Modern Benares is wholly given to idolatry. Buddhism has long since succumbed to Brahmanism, and been swept out of India altogether. Benares is without question the most picturesque city in India. It lies on a bend of the Ganges, along the crest of a hill about a hundred feet above the water. Viewed from the river, it presents a panorama of palaces, temples and mosques, surmounted by domes, pinnacles and minarets, stretching three miles along the top of the bank. From these descend great flights of stone stairs, broken into wide platforms, on which are built exquisite Hindu shrines, bathing-houses, and preaching canopies. Long piers project into the river, on which sick people lie, carefully tended by their relatives, to get the beneficent healing of the great mother Ganges.