

HOOK-SWINGING IN INDIA.

THE following story is a dark, sad one, and too true. A missionary from the United States writes about it to the *Missionary Herald*.

MADURA, INDIA.

Oct. 23, 1891.

Having learned that the old cruel practice of swinging was about to be revived after having been abolished for twenty-four years, the Madura Mission directed me to memorialize the Madras government, and pray them to prohibit its revival. The government replied that they would discourage it in every way, but were not willing to absolutely prohibit it. Their discouragement amounted to nothing at all, and it came off on the 21st instant in the presence of 10,000 people. Dr. Van Allen and I went out to see it, for the sake of being able to give an authentic account of it.

There are four villages in the vicinity of Solavandan, inhabited by people of the Kellar, or Robber, caste. In each village is a family that has the right of selecting two candidates for the operation. Out of the eight thus chosen, one was selected by lot, and the lot fell on a young man of twenty-three years, thick-set and muscular and rather short of stature.

These people worship the demoness Marimman, said to be the spirit of a Pariah woman who formerly was attacked by small-pox and was left to die without assistance. She has now become the patron of small-pox and cholera, and is believed to have the power to send or withhold rain; and hook-swinging is thought to be a means of propitiating her, so as to influence her to send rain in abundance.

In 1867 this practice was revived after having been prohibited for many years. But upon representation to Lord Napier at that time he again prohibited it; and now, after twenty-four years, the people, having learned that the present powers that be would do no more than discourage it, have revived it again with great *éclat*.

It is said that previous to the insertion of

the hook into the middle of the back the muscles and skin are rendered insensible by slapping and pinching. However that may be, there is no doubt that arrack was given to the man at the time. He was brought to the police station with the two hooks inserted back to back, one each side of the spine. The hooks were not large, and the flesh taken up by them very little. The wonderful strength of the muscles of the back was shown by this performance.

The car consisted of a rough platform on wheels, supporting a great frame about ten feet in length and breadth, and fifteen feet in height, the platform itself being six feet from the ground. Up through the middle of the great frame rose a stout circular beam of great strength, three feet above the frame, and on the top of this beam was pivoted the pole, sixty feet in length, from which the man hung thirty-five feet from the ground.

Promptly at three o'clock the hooks were inserted, within some building, and the man came rushing along the street, escorted by constables and others, who beat back the crowd, and kept up a vigorous fanning, urging the man to keep dancing. After the short stay at the police station they made a grand rush for the car, which stood on an adjacent street, and there the end of the sweep was lowered to receive its victim. Soon it was carried up again with the man attached. As he went up he clapped his feet and hands together in a measured way, and this he kept up during the whole performance. His ankles had jingles on them that could be heard as they beat together with a steady "ching, ching."

Before carrying him up to the greatest height the pole was held horizontally and the man was carried around in a complete circle, swinging over the tops of the houses. Then the car was drawn forward to the first corner, where it was delayed, that a kid might be sacrificed. Once in a while the man would draw up, with a rope, plantains and flowers and throw them down to the crowd below. In one place there was a ditch to be crossed and the jolt caused him to seize the rope that