



The Ganges.

I told you last month, young reader, of the fearful worship of Juggernaut; and this month I am going to set before you a not less cruel superstition of India—the worship of the Ganges.

In the north of India flows a large and noble river, called the Ganges. It rises amongst the Himalaya Mountains, and then, after flowing through a long and beautiful tract of country, falls into the sea, near Calcutta, by several mouths. The Hindus believe this river to have once been a goddess, called, Gunga, who transformed herself into this stream with a hundred mouths, in order to restore to life sixty thousand persons. They say that, to raise these men to life, the goddess descended to earth, and not knowing where they were, turned herself into a river with a hundred mouths, and then streaming forth, sought them out, and finding them, the moment her stream touched their dust, they all started to life and rose to Paradise. The story is very foolish, and all untrue; but it has made the river a sacred thing in the minds of the superstitious Hindus, and made them treat it as a living thing, and worship it as a good and mighty goddess.

This idea of the river being a goddess gives rise to many foolish notions on the part of the Hindus. They think it has still the power of conferring eternal life, and that to die with the feet in it, or be drowned in it, is a sure way to eternal glory. Many poor foolish people when they are dying, are thus often carried to the river, and either drowned in it, or so placed with their feet in it that they may die in the stream. They believe, too, that if they bathe in this stream they will wash away their sins; that if they think upon it wherever they may be, and utter one of their prayers, it will have the same effect, and that if they take a drink of its water it will make them most good and happy.

Certain places in the river are considered peculiarly sacred; such, for instance, as where other sacred streams join it. To bathe here, or die here, or drink the waters here, is thought peculiarly blessed, and a singularly great favour. These spots are accordingly places of great interest to the Hindus, and places of pilgrimage at certain seasons of the year.

At Allahabad, where the Jumna meets it, is one of the most sacred of