

THE MELA IN BRINDABAN.

BY MISS PORTER.

ABOUT six miles above Muttra, owing to the character of the Jumna, the right bank of the river assumes the appearance of a peninsula. Here stands Brindaban, washed on three sides by the sacred waters. For several centuries this city has been one of the most holy of the Hindoos. The word Brindaban is derived from a physical feature, this particular spot having been previously a forest of "Tulsi" trees, "Tulsi" and "Brinda" are synonymous terms. From an early period of Brahminical history it has been a sacred place of pilgrimage. It has a most interesting series of ancient temples. Brindaban is not a city of trade or manufacture, but it is maintained purely by its temples and religious reputation. It contains more than six thousand temples and shrines. Here many festivals and *melas* are held during the year and one has the opportunity to see the daily religion of the people, and the annual festivals of the various Gods. This year a great *mela* was held in February called the *Kumbh mela*. It occurs once in twelve years, and is the most important event in the Hindu calendar. The time was set according to the astronomical movements of three special stars. Great preparations were going on during the two months previous. Sadhus began pouring into the city five or six weeks before the *mela*. Pilgrims travelled to it by the thousand. Brindaban has a population of twenty-one thousand; but when it was crowded with four hundred and twelve thousand pilgrims it assumed a different aspect. Above the city was a constant cloud of dust. The voices of the thousands pouring forth in songs, shouts and hideous cries, the noise of the various musical instruments together with other sounds, produced a constant hum and buzz over the city which did not cease for some time. The last day of the *mela* was the great day. To many persons it was the opportunity of a lifetime, and they came from all parts of India. It was a splendid opportunity for comparison and contrast of the people from the various places. The pilgrims came in every conceivable kind of conveyance, by train, gari, tonga, bailgari, unt gari, others were riding upon camels, elephants or bicycles, and some of the municipal officers were in motor cars. Weary, dusty and worn, hundreds reached the city just the evening before the day. They trudged from temple to temple, from one *dharamsala* to another searching for a place to spread their blanket for the night. Place after place they were refused, for every available place was occupied. Finally, hundreds crowded into their "garis" for the night, or sat out on the ground beneath the starry sky. I cannot vouch for the following statement, but I do not doubt the truth of it, that ground was rented for the night at two and a half annas per square yard. So great were the throngs that they could not satisfy their thirst from the wells in the city, and many of them went outside the city and drew water from old wells which had not been used for months. There was much cholera following the *mela*.

and many people died. Needless to say that families were separated. One very large company of Sadhus numbering two hundred came from extreme southern India, near Colombo. They travelled on foot having spent two and a quarter years in the journey. These pilgrims came seeking to purify themselves from the taint of sin, and to obtain some blessing. They were in quest of light and peace which they did not find, and not having found it they trudged on to the next shrine, in hope of finding that gleam of light for which their souls longed. Here are Sadhus, Fakirs, Pandits and Brahminical teachers of every description reading from their sacred books. The shameless decoit which is practised upon the worshippers is most disgusting. Here sit several Sadhus, each within a small circle of fire. Remaining here through the heat of the day is one of the company who hangs by one toe from a tree for hours, another who has been holding his arm extended since early morning, another is standing erect on his head for half the day, others are lying on beds of thorns or spikes. It was estimated that there were twelve thousand Sadhus present. Thousands of them marched naked, in procession through the streets of the city.

Every housetop, window, verandah and available space was crowded with spectators. A decorative crowd indeed, with paint spots on their brows, with lips and teeth stained with betel-juice. The colouring of their clothes against the sky, red, orange, green, and yellow presented a very picturesque sight, in great contrast to the awfulness of the display of the "holiest of men", who with marred countenances, and bodies smeared with ashes of cow-dung present themselves as religious leaders and teachers of the people. Again we look upon the mass of the people as they crowd to the river bank before daybreak, to bathe in the sacred Jumna desirous of finding salvation through the river's sacred waters that their sins be washed away. From early morn until the sun descends behind the western horizon they continue to bathe, all indulging in a drink of the sacred water. Near the shore huge tortoises appear in great numbers. Occasionally they become very friendly and take a bite from the thigh of the bather. How utterly empty are the lives of hundreds of these people as they go water-pot in hand, or stringing the beads of their rosaries, wandering hither and thither through the streets of Brindaban. Hundreds of old widows hardly able to walk, find their way to Brindaban at this *mela* time and count it a great blessing if they are permitted to die there. During the day, just outside the city, were seen holy men who were measuring their length in the dust over the entire circumference of the city which is not less than five miles. Shops were plentiful all along the main street to supply the people with wares and novelties from various places in India. Toys to attract and amuse the children, and English articles such as appeal to Indian people. Crude Ferris wheels and merry-go-rounds with their squeak squeak, added to the attractions provided. The display of carvings and decorations on the cars used for idols, is loathsome and disagreeable. There is mingled in the worship and ceremonies the strains of the pipe, drum, and cymbal. At the close of the day the Lucknow white marble temple was brilliant midst the splendour of

ten thousand lights. In these *mela* are great opportunities for religious work. There are hundreds of hearts truly seeking for the light. Many come in from the villages whose minds are unprejudiced and they gladly hear the Gospel. Perhaps we missionaries are accustomed to look upon the bright side too much, and give thrilling reports of our work, but all who gaze upon the proceedings of that day know there is a dark side, and that unthinkable, unspeakable conditions prevail. I hope this short sketch may be used in His name to win more prayer, prevailing prayer for India, and for all dark lands.

MY PATIENT IN RAJPUTANA.

BY MARGARET.

I LEFT Bombay for K—a State in Rajputana, by fast passenger train. The journey took 28 hours by rail and a few hours more by carriage. I was the only European lady passenger. On arrival at Baroda I had to change trains. During the journey I went to the different refreshment rooms for my meals. Some of them were fairly decent while others were not nicely served, also I had mostly to wait a very long time before anything was brought for me to eat, the result being I had scarcely finished the first course when the warning bell went for me to return to the train. This was bad management, as the guard always telegraphed ahead that I needed breakfast or dinner as the case might be. I was very annoyed as I had to pay for a meal I had hardly touched. I believe this is a trick for the benefit of waiting room butlers, they delay in bringing food so that they practically get the full amount of money with no expense to themselves. After 28 hours journey I arrived at the wayside station where I was to leave the train. I got out and found the station master. He told me I had a cart drive before me which would take 2½ hours. I informed him I was on my way to nurse the Rani of K—State. He at once became more affable and would insist that I should make use of his bedstead! I thanked him heartily but refused, he insisted and rather than give offence I said “very well.” The bedstead was placed in the waiting room, I put my own bedding upon it and slept until 6 a.m. In the meantime a carriage had arrived from the palace for me, and I found to my surprise it was no larger than a band-box, it rather resembled a rickshaw and was drawn by two strong horses. The station master asked me as a favour to kindly take his son with me to K—. Our Journey began, the country was wild, open and rugged and the one road was terribly in need of repair. The horses could not pull the little “band-box” easily, owing to the ruts and holes on the way, so two buffaloes were harnessed instead, and you can imagine our progress was slow, and the shaking we got can better be fancied than described! The two buffaloes after a while were brought to a standstill by the wheels of the conveyance sticking in the ruts, so four native assistants were employed to push behind when necessary. Many a time our progress was arrested by hundreds of pea-hens and some