

Bernares. Jan 22<sup>nd</sup> / 1877.

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My dear Mamma

I have got up a little earlier than usual this evening to have a quiet time for writing. I do not go home now until Thursday night and on Saturday Mr & Mrs Knox come so that if I do not begin betimes I shall only get a short letter off by next mail. And I want to tell you about this wonderful place whilst it is still fresh. We began our explorations last Wednesday by going to Larantla where almost the oldest architectural remains in India are to be found, in the shape of a huge solid mound of masonry. I suppose about the size of Clifford tower with a dome like top some hundred and fifty feet high. This tower was built to commemorate the spot where Sakya Muni the originator of Buddhism began to teach the doctrines which have more disciples even yet than Christianity. He came here in the 6th century before Christ and founded a monastery. In the fourth century of our era a Chinese traveller came here and described the tower as "an ancient building," so by this time it is very ancient indeed. There is not much beauty in it now, except a band of sculpture all the way round, about midway up the tower but the carving on this is most exquisite scrolls, lotus flowers, diaper work &c.

clear and fresh as if they had been done  
in the last century. Some of them are just  
like what I have seen in English Cathedral.  
Then we went over the ruins of the aqueduct  
which are about the 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> century, and  
had the pleasure of discovering amongst the  
masses of fragments all around the head  
of a statue of Buddha, sticking out of the  
ground. Mr Hall sent for some men, who  
began to excavate, and presently brought  
out the complete statue, about four feet  
in length, with an inscription beneath.  
These statues are constantly being found.  
We have brought away one or two little bits  
of sculptured stone which we found lying  
about. Next day Mr Hall got a steam launch  
from the Bijanagram, and we went down  
the river. I wish I could give you any idea  
of what we saw that day, but it is impossible.

We drove first through a multitude of  
narrow streets to the celebrated monkey  
temple dedicated to the goddess Durga. This  
is the first temple I have ever been in.  
It is filthily dirty, like all the rest of them, with  
masses of decayed leaves and flowers which  
people offer to the idol. He sits in a shrine  
with hundreds of monkeys all over him, and  
thrice a week he has a goat sacrificed to him.  
I was disappointed in this temple, for the  
carving is not at all beautiful, but it was  
very curious as a specimen, pure and  
simple, of Hindu idolatry. Monkeys swarm  
and chatter and grin in every direction  
and there are sacred oxen too, walking

leisurely about, and nibbling the remains  
of the flowers. At the entrance of the temple  
is the block where the goats are sacrificed.  
From there we drove down to one of the  
great ghauts, or bathing places, and got into  
the steam launch which carried us gently  
down the river for about two miles, past a  
succession of temples, palaces and mag-  
nificent flights of steps. I suppose the river  
front of Benares is about five times as  
long as that of York, but it is only built on  
one side, and that side rises with a deep  
slope so that you see the city like an amphitheatre.  
It is certainly very beautiful. On  
the grand flights of stairs you see the people  
sunbathing about in their picturesque  
many coloured duffles, and the women  
coming down to fill or wash their water  
pots. Some of the rajah's houses have grand  
carved verandahs and eels overhanging  
the river, and in these you see drunken  
turbaned men spitting and smoking. The  
sides of the flights of steps are lined with tiny  
little temples, in which the people deposit their  
offerings of wet flowers after they have bathed.

On two or three of the ghauts a gigantic idol  
fifteen or twenty feet long, coloured flesh colour  
and blue, was lying stretched out. After going  
about half a mile down the river we landed  
and struggled up a huge waste of steps to  
the celebrated Mammundil Observatory, built  
by a Mohammedan prince about two hundred  
years ago. The instruments here are all of  
stone, on a scale compared with which

overs took like children's toys. Unfortunately  
there was no one to explain them to us, so we  
could only stare and wonder. I thought Mr.  
Piper would have enjoyed it. He came down  
to our boat again and dropped leisurely  
down the stream past the Nepalese temple  
a strange but very picturesque sweep of carving  
to the burning platform where the Hindus burn  
their dead and then scatter the ashes in the  
river. A body shrouded in white was lying  
with its feet just touching the water, whilst the  
fire was being prepared for it just above.  
All over the steps leading down were little  
square altars marking the spots where widows  
had burned themselves with their husbands.  
We got out again at the flight of steps leading  
to the Mosque of Aurrangzeb, the most beau-  
tiful Mohammedan temple in Benares, with  
its two tall slender minarets which can be  
seen for many miles. After getting to the top  
of the flight we had to mount little narrow  
lanes of steps between old tumble down houses  
where the smells were so vile that we should  
have been thankful for smelling bottles. We  
did not go up the minarets, but just rambled  
about, watching the curious life going on.  
This mosque is built on the site of a Hindu  
temple, and the neighbourhood is all Hindu.  
Some temple music was going on close by.  
In two little cells, cut out in the mud walls,  
with openings just large enough for a man  
to come in and out, we saw two Yogis, a holy  
Brahmin, engaged in becoming absorbed  
into the Deity. One of them, shrouded to a  
skeleton, was turning over the leaves of an old

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Manuscript, the other also appeared  
to have got further on in the process of absorption  
sat just like a lifeless mass, his face decubed  
over with grey ashes, his hair matted, his eyes  
leaving out into space, but apparently seeing  
nothing. They gave me a very curious feeling,  
yet I suppose they were happy enough in their  
own way. He returned to our boat again and  
got down to the bridge of boats where the carriage  
was waiting for us, and then we drove  
through the narrow dark streets, to the temple  
of Baironanth, the god magistrate appointed  
by the supreme deity of Benares, to keep the city  
in order. It is up a narrow street, where the  
houses almost meet over your head, so narrow  
that the carriage could not get in, so we had  
to get out and walk, followed by crowds of natives  
asking for bachelors. I felt almost afraid  
sometimes, they might so easily have made away  
with us into the horrible, gloomy places all  
about. We met a procession of civil, dressed well,  
with drums and music, carrying trays of  
ornaments on their heads, to a wedding. These  
were women more peaceful than they looked  
in the twilight, with their bangles and nose  
rings, and fillets flashing through their veils.  
There were many worshippers in this temple.  
Each one made a salaam, then a flower or  
placed a garland on the idol, then rang a  
bell to intimate to the god that he had per-  
formed his devotion and came out. As  
he returned, we met a group of people singing  
and yelping in the most unearthly manner  
and then a white matted corpse flung  
past us in the gloom. The whole thing was  
very weird and uncomfortable, and I

thankful to get home to a good fire and  
happy European faces round it. Next day  
John and I went to have tiffin with Mr  
Fennell, the chaplain and then he took us  
for a walking tour amongst the temples.  
We hired a gharry into the city, then got out  
and began our rambles, beginning with  
the bazaar for the famous Benares traps  
north. They keep up here the old custom of  
having streets set apart for different trades.  
The trap bazaar is a very picturesque old place  
many of the house fronts beautifully carved  
and with the sun shining on the brilliant  
colouring of the men's clothes, it made a  
curious picture. From there we went to the  
temple of Bisheshwar the great deity of  
Benares. It stands in a great courtyard which  
is crowded with beggars in the last stage of  
filthiness. Oh the smells and sights! The  
temple is beautifully carved and gilded  
and has a lovely marble pavement. We saw  
a poor woman performing her devotions  
before the lingam, a black conical stone  
which is the supremely sacred symbol of  
the Hindu religion. She was prostrated on the  
ground before it, sometimes bending her fore-  
head quite down to the ground, then she  
rubbed the thing reverently with melted  
ghee, heaped white leaves and flowers upon  
it, sprinkled a little fragrant water over it,  
laid a wreath of marigold flowers round  
it, made another low salaam, rang a bell  
and came away. A priest stands at the  
entrance of the shrine with garlands to sell  
to the worshippers. All round the outer court

of this temple are little shrines which the  
people sprinkle with offerings of rice and  
then the sacred goats or oxen, who are always  
straying about, come and nibble it off.  
In one corner of the court was a cluster of  
beautifully dressed and jewelled dancing girls.  
I don't know what business they had there, for they  
are not at all religious, but they looked very  
picturesque, and close to them was a young  
Brahmin muttering his devotions. Another  
Brahmin came to us here, and guided us  
through the rest of our journey, showing us what  
ever was best worth seeing. The city here is  
just one nest of temples, crowded as close together  
as they can stand, with here and there a sacred  
well most reeking and filthy, which is sup-  
posed to give eternal life to who all who can  
be sprinkled with its water. These wells are  
half filled with sacred leaves and flowers, cast  
into them by the pilgrims, so you can imagine  
the foulness and rotteness. Then, as for drainage  
I suppose such a thing is not known. We went  
to the temple of the goddess Laxpurna, or Plenty,  
and many were the worshippers here. They  
went one by one to the shrine, prostrated them-  
selves, folded their hands, prayed, rang a bell  
and came away. The little lanes about these  
temples are thronged with shops where images of  
the gods are sold. We bought one of Kishishwar.  
One temple whose name I do not know, is one  
mass of the most exquisite carving I ever saw.  
From the marble pavement to the top of the  
highest pinnacle, you could not put your  
hand on a plain piece. It is literally a piece  
of stone lacework, and for a wonder, is made  
quite clean. At every step here, you come upon  
a little shrine, with a flower or two laid upon

the image of the god. Then it is wondrous, as  
you go along through the narrow, winding lanes  
thronged with spectral creatures, to come sud-  
denly upon some grand old piece of carving  
bedded into a mean and nasty house, some-  
times the base scapitel of a column, or a  
fragment of scroll work, or the lotus flower  
emblem of Buddha, showing that you are  
treading upon the ruins of a place which was  
only in its prime more than two thousand  
years ago. Turning a corner once we came  
upon a horrible sight, a fakir, sitting upon  
a mud step, his body smeared with ashes  
his hair matted together with filth, his right  
arm up in the air stiff and motionless, his  
left holding on to an iron trident. He had  
<sup>24 sept. for a few hours at night for an indefinite no. of years, by tradition said 30.</sup>  
been sitting here for ~~some~~ years. In another  
lane, we were examining a curious shrine  
when the unearthly singing and chanting was  
heard just behind, and we had but just time  
to sidle aside and let another corpse be  
carried past us. They bind them tightly up  
in white or coloured cloth which outlines  
all the body, put them on a bamboo frame  
without any covering, and so carry them to  
be burned. Close by the burning place is the  
temple of god who has to be worshipped after  
the burning of every body, and near to that  
is a tank in which every piece of Hindu battles  
once a year, for the washing away of his sins.  
After seeing these things, we went back to our  
carriage, glad to have done with it all, yet  
it is a sort of education one would not have  
missed. From there we drove to the Raj  
Shant Fort, a little eminence overlooking

the river, and about a quarter of a mile  
from the city. Even here we were surrounded  
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of "remains." There are the ruins of a beauti-  
ful Buddhist cloister in the fort here, con-  
sisting of four rows of carved pillars, some  
of them most peaceful designs, and further  
on are the ruins of a temple of about the  
same date. These buildings were only destroyed  
by the Malomedam in the 16th century, and  
probably they had been standing some cen-  
turies then. We sat down on a bit of stone-  
work near the overhanging bank, and there  
watched the sunset over the sacred river  
and city. It was certainly the pleasantest part  
of the day's performance. We were too far off  
to see any of the appeals and felth of the  
place. All was just a haze of crimson and  
pep, out of which the domes and minarets  
and temples rose, and on the other side of  
the river was the great white palace of the  
Maharajah with the palm trees and plain-  
tains round it.

On Saturday, Sunday the little face of  
Baroda came to Benares on a visit, with  
his court. Mr. Hall, as magistrate and  
collector of the district had to go and see him.  
He says he is a pleasant, good looking little  
lad, and the native gentleman appointed  
by the Government to take charge of him during  
his minority, is well educated and liberal.  
Yesterday a most noisy salute of 21 guns  
was fired in his honor. This visit will be  
a splendid thing for the Barabumins, for the little  
Prince must worship at most of the temples,  
and will make enormous presents to them.  
We are going tomorrow to the Raj ghant  
again to see the sunrise over the river and

city. They say it is a wonderfully beautiful sight. Benares, as a station, is much prettier than Allahabad more thoroughly Eastern. Some of the roads are lined with dense clusters of bamboos, and you see palm trees, plantains, aloes, and hedges of huge prickly cactus all over. But I fancy in the rains it must be very unhealthy. Fortunately the civil lines are nearly three miles from the city. I will leave this most amiable hostelry to-morrow. I am enjoying so much the rest here. There are no clits to answer and no sodas of servants but still I shall be quite ready to settle down at home again. I hope my next visit will be to Agra and Delhi, and then I shall feel that I have seen the best of India.

Tuesday. I have your letter, sent on by Mr Harrison, and one from John also got safe to Calcutta on Sunday morning. Thank you very much for Wynn's Journal, which came at the same time. It will be very useful to me. I have seen some numbers of the Green Wire too, from which I shall get some valuable hints, and then one sees so much good dressing here, by way of practical illustration. I wish I could have been at that service which you describe

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