

THE PIONEERS:

A NARRATIVE OF FACTS

CONNECTED WITH

EARLY CHRISTIAN MISSIONS IN BENGAL,

CHIEFLY RELATING TO THE OPERATIONS

OF THE

LONDON MISSIONARY SOCIETY.

BY

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visited but in cases of necessity, except by woodcutters and salt-makers, whose 'dreadful trade' is exercised at the peril of their lives; for the tigers not only appear on the margin in quest of prey, but often in the night-time swim to the boats that lie at anchor in the middle of the river."

On the eastern side of the mouth of the Hooghly, and forming the S.W. angle of the Sunderbunds, Saugor Island is situated. At this place, in the month of January, the Hindoos annually celebrate the great Bathing Festival, to which immense multitudes repair for the purpose of bathing in the water, at the junction of the river with the sea, under the belief that the sacredness of the stream will purify from moral defilement, and that the merit of ablution makes atonement for sin.

Anxious to direct them to the only Fountain opened for sin, and to that Sacrifice through which alone the guilty can be pardoned, Mr. Lacroix and I were appointed to visit the place at this annual festival, to preach to the people, and distribute among them portions of the Scriptures and religious tracts. Early in January, 1831, therefore, we left Calcutta in a boat large enough to serve as our dwelling-place for a month, well furnished by the Calcutta Bible and Tract Societies with books for circulation.

We entered the Channel Creek, which separates Saugor from the main-land, and proceeding a considerable distance, turned off to the south, into a large river, which we supposed would have conducted us in a few hours to Saugor Point; the stream, by degrees,

becoming exceedingly narrow, convinced us we had mistaken our way. Nothing, however, could exceed the wild romantic beauty of the scenery. On both sides was a thick jungle, with here and there groups of trees in the middle of the stream—their foliage reaching from side to side, and joining that of the trees on either bank, formed a natural arbour, almost impenetrable to the rays of the sun. The shore exhibited evident signs that the place was inhabited by beasts of prey; for the footsteps of the tiger were very visible, and impressions of a round, large-sized foot were observable, which led us to conclude, more especially from what we afterwards heard, that the rhinoceros is to be found in these parts, as well as the wild buffalo and bear. Deer also were very numerous; and on another part of this island we saw a fine herd of them grazing near the beach.

Having arrived nearly at the extremity of this *khal*, we with difficulty turned the boat, and retraced our way to the great Barratollah River; thence sailing S.W. we soon rounded the island, and entering into the Bay of Bengal, cast anchor at the mouth of the Ganges, on the eastern side of Saugor Point.

Here a most interesting sight met our view. Immediately before us was the sea, bearing numbers of boats from different parts of Balasore, crowded with pilgrims, to the general rendezvous. To our right, above 500 boats of various descriptions, from the two-masted Pinnace and large Ooriah craft to the small Pansway and Woolack of Bengal, were lying on or near the beach, each boat being decorated with some fanciful

ensign or ornament, according to the wealth or taste of the proprietor. No less than six or seven flags, elevated on bamboos from the prow, the stern, sides, and centre, adorned a few; whilst others had suspended from the masthead the remains of different idols, after they had been thrown into the river and robbed of all their gaudy trappings.

On the shore were thousands of persons in every direction; some in temporary booths erected on the beach, some in groups under the canopy of heaven, some surrounding the various idols, conducted thither by crowds of hungry *fakirs*, who, with bodies besmeared with mud, and faces painted in the most ridiculous and ugly manner, solicited or demanded alms from the persons around them. Boats from the Channel Creek were also seen crowded with pilgrims, in some of which were not less than 150 persons. About 100,000 or 120,000 persons were assembled in a spot of ground not exceeding two miles in length, and one in breadth; amongst whom were thousands of women and children, exposed to every inconvenience; while numbers of old, squalid, and miserable beings met the eye in every direction.

Great numbers of traders from Calcutta and other large towns were also there, and had fitted up booths, forming a long street of shops, in which were exposed for sale everything usually sold in the bazars. These were disposed of to great advantage, as the holiness of the place, it was supposed, greatly enhanced the value of the goods. The whole presented a scene well calculated to affect the heart, and to call forth the