

THE
ROYAL TOUR IN INDIA

A Record of the Tour of T. R. H. The Prince and
Princess of Wales in India and Burma, from
November 1905 to March 1906.

915.2
—
REE

BY

STANLEY REED,

Special Correspondent of the "Times of India."

With Preface by SIR WALTER LAWRENCE, BART., G.C.I.E., *Chief of the Staff.*

BOMBAY:
BENNETT, COLEMAN & CO.,
THE "TIMES OF INDIA" OFFICE.

1906.


(*All Rights Reserved.*)

CHAPTER XXIX.

Kashi: "The Splendid."

THE ROME OF THE HINDUS—THE BEAUTY OF THE HOLY CITY—THE STAMP OF THE RENAISSANCE—THE CITY OF BENARES—VENICE BEHIND THE GRAND CANAL—THE PRINCE'S STATE ENTRY—THE SPIRIT OF BENARES: ITS HINDUISM—A REGAL ELEPHANT PROCESSION—SCENES FROM INDIAN MYTHOLOGY—CHOLERA IN THE NEPAL SHOOTING CAMP—ENFORCED ABANDONMENT OF THE EXCURSION—ALTERNATIVE ARRANGEMENTS—A SECOND VISIT TO GWALIOR—"RIVER OF FLAME": BENARES ILLUMINATED—THE REWARD OF VALOUR—LEAVING BENARES—THE PRINCESS' UNOFFICIAL TOUR—AMONGST THE HIMALAYAS.

BENARES, *February 19th.*



IN certain aspects the river front of the Holy City of Benares enthral's you by a beauty not even surpassed by the fairy grace of Udaipur. The high-walled, tortuous streets, leading from the Chowk to the river, possess a charm, a character and an atmosphere of mystery found nowhere else outside eastern Italy.

Viewed in the pellucid freshness of the early morning, or in the quick-ebbing twilight that is the glory of the Indian day, who can forget the fillet of palace and temple, ghat and minaret, that binds the upper bank of "Mother Ganga?" The turquoise crescent of the mighty river now lazily laps its tawny sandbanks, but in spate climbs half way up the steps and walls, and claims the miles of lowland to the distant fringe of trees for her bed. The massive stepped ghats plunge boldly into the silent tide—ghats from which arises the array of silent palaces, some warm with red sandstone, others glistening with the whitewash which only the Indian sun can make beautiful, generous in the bastion-like buttresses that hold the retaining walls, graceful in the dainty towers and cupolas that suggest Agra and Fatehpur Sikri. Over all stand sentinel the minarets of the mosque that the dour iconoclast Aurungzebe raised on the site of the temple of Vishnu to set the seal of Mahomedan conquest on the

“Kinkob,” arch erected by the craftsmen who vie with those of Surat and Ahmedabad, and the Idolmakers’ arch, each niche occupied by figures from Hindu mythology.

The programme was simplicity itself—a drive to the Municipal Offices, where an address was presented; an elephant procession through the Chowk and the return by carriage to Nandesar House; but each part of it was made to fit into the general scheme. The route took Their Royal Highnesses past the Queen’s College—a handsome building in the Italian



The Idolmakers Arch, Benares

style, which must be amongst the oldest educational foundations in India, for it was in 1791 that Jonathan Duncan, then Resident at Benares, suggested to Lord Cornwallis the establishment of a college for the preservation and cultivation of Sanskrit literature; past the Prince of Wales’ Hospital, of which His Majesty the King-Emperor laid the foundation-stone when he visited Benares thirty years ago; past Madho Dass’ Garden, where Warren Hastings was encamped when he put Raja Chet Singh under arrest in 1781, and whence he was forced to flee to Chunar, five days later; and so to the Town Hall, which was opened

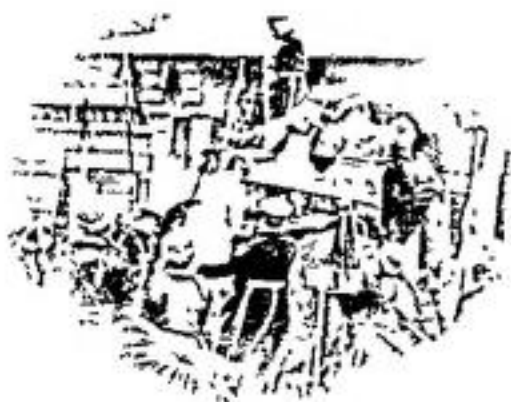
by King Edward in 1876, and where now his Heir received an address that was a model of terse expression and devoted loyalty.

This paved the way for the elephant procession. It was headed by two noble beasts, bearing lustily-beaten drums; then came the Prince and Princess of Wales on a superb animal whose forehead was dyed Imperial purple, whose trappings of gold swept the ground, whilst a tiger rampant was poised on each side of the howdah of beaten gold. Followed a score or more of elephants caparisoned in scarlet and green, with the Staff and the principal members of the Maharaja’s suite, the Maharaja and Sir James La Touche riding immediately behind the Royal elephant, which was preceded

by priests from the various temples, scattering flowers and blowing wailing conches. The scenes in the streets were typical of every phase of Benares life. There were scores of *fakirs*, with their ash-smeared bodies and coiled black-brown hair; hundreds of orange-robed *sunyasis*, upon whom the tired eye rested gratefully. But entirely dominating this side of sacred Benares were the tens and tens of thousand of prosperous Hindus and Mussulmans, enterprising merchants and keen traders, who regard pilgrims as rather an encumbrance.

Along the route were enacted scenes from the miracle plays of the Hindus. Here were temple mummers, elaborately decked out, playing the

Coronation of Ram and Sita, which is usually the last act of the Dasera festival. Next came the "Krishna lilla," representing Krishna and the milkmaids, the very human episode in the life of the god that makes him so popular a deity. The *pahlvans* (Indian wrestlers) were ranged in line with massive Indian clubs and enormous discs of stone, but if the portly gentlemen standing beside these trophies were in reality the wrestlers of Benares, then it was long since they had swung those clubs, or moved those discs, without the assistance of a hand cart! Through such scenes, and through a lane of people

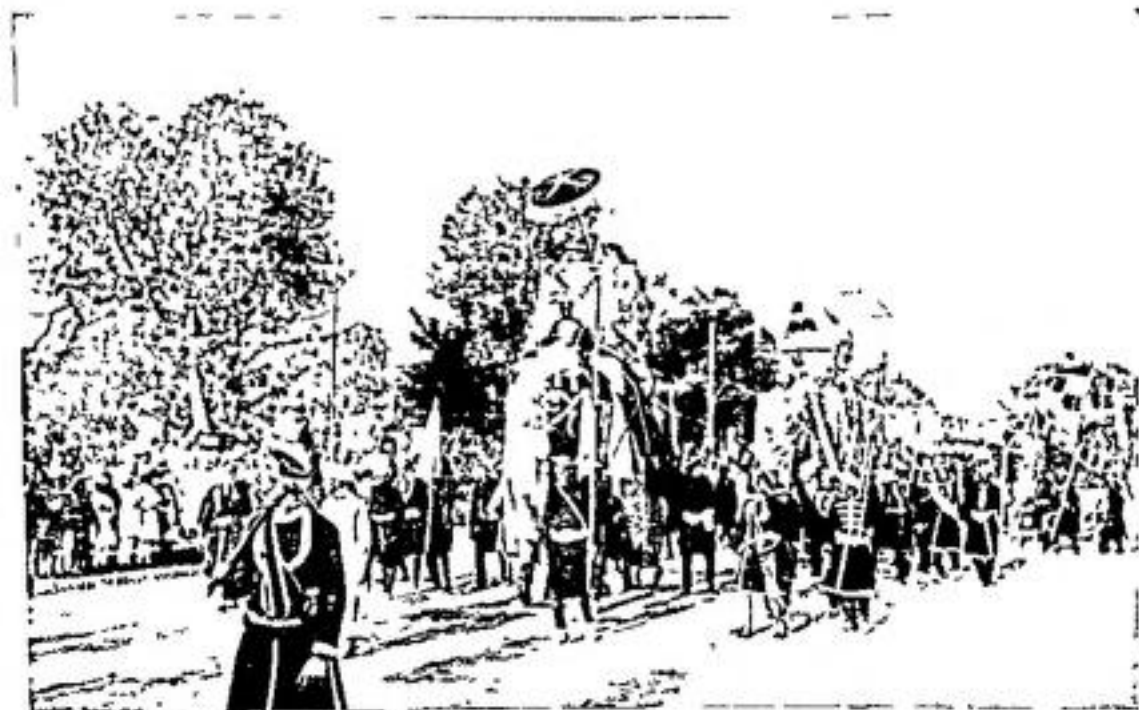


Mounting the State Elephant, Benares

quivering with pleasure, and to the crash of oriental music, Their Royal Highnesses moved at the stately pace of my lord the elephant to the circus where the Chowk joined the Chetganj Road. Here were massed the students of the Central Hindu College, which owes its existence to the self-denying efforts of Mrs. Annie Besant, a wind-ruffled pool of lilac, azure, lemon, and rose-coloured turbans.

To-day has been a day of disappointment. The Prince of Wales, with his enthusiastic love of sport, had naturally been anticipating with no little pleasure a fortnight in the Nepal *terai*. There, quite free from official pomp and ceremony, he would have enjoyed such *shikar* as is only given to Princes. The Maharaja of Nepal made arrangements on the most comprehensive scale. Camps were prepared at Thori, close to the border between Nepal and British India, north of Bettiah, and then forty miles into the

Chitwan district of Nepal. There were elephants by the hundred, and beaters by the thousand, and everything pointed to a record bag of tiger and rhinoceros, with perhaps an elephant or two. Then, last night, came news of an outbreak of cholera, and when this was confirmed, all idea of the shoot had to be abandoned. It was of course a very bitter disappointment, and mingled with this a sense of keen regret that the Maharaja of Nepal should have made these great preparations for nothing. But what was to be done during this fortnight? The wires were soon busy and the Maharaja Scindia, who had begged the Prince to revisit his State if any part of the



The Royal Procession. Benares.

tour was abandoned, was delighted to welcome His Royal Highness, who with a very small staff will proceed to Gwalior on Thursday for a quiet shoot. Otherwise the programme will be adhered to. The Princess of Wales, with Sir Walter Lawrence in attendance, will spend the time between Lucknow and Dehra Dun, and Their Royal Highnesses will then fulfil their engagements at Aligarh, Quetta and Karachi.

With the discretion that has characterised all the arrangements at Benares, the Prince and Princess of Wales were able to see the chief glory of the city—the river front—under its everyday conditions. There was no bunting, no trium-
February 20th.