

in the nursery with some fifty others. Whether they pay for them there, or claim them when they get older, I do not know. Against this the condition of the backs of horses, the bullocks, baggage camels and donkeys is often quoted. But it should be remembered that the horses very quickly get sore backs from the native saddles, the yokes often gall the bullocks necks, and they twist their tails to make them mend their pace, which is cruel; but this seems rather from ignorance—a part of the unchanging customs of the East.

My Gugerati boy-teacher Keshionji one day, to my surprise, produced the New Testament in Gugerati, and the Gospel of St. John in English. He told me they were sent by an unknown lady from the United States of America to the village postman, and by him lent round the village. He thought our sacred books were very like their Vedas, the precepts similar, but theirs were the better of the two, since they enjoin kindness to animals, and forbid their being killed and eaten. The people say the Mahomedans are cruel because they eat meat, the English eat meat and are not cruel, and they cannot understand it.

Keshionji was a thoughtful boy of the Bania Brahmin caste, who spent his time in the priest's house, reading the sacred books, thinking much, and taking part in all the discussions of the village. For two years before plague came there had one discussion been going on, and the village was divided into two factions on this momentous question—"Was the earth round or flat"? The younger progressive section held that it was round, as was declared in some little English school books they had got hold of, while the older conservative section held that it was flat, their ancestors had said so, if not, prove that it was round? This the progressives were unable to do and Keshionji brought the question to me.

The Patell of Kadoya, not long before we left the village, came to ask me to go and see a Sadvee or Priestess of the Bania Temple, who had a bad knee. Arriving at their house, I entered a large room at the far end of which sat four women on fine straw-plaited mats. They were all dressed entirely in creamy white, with manuscript sacred books in Moorish stands before them, and also arranged on a cream covered table behind them, with finely worked linen cloths covering the books and other little tables about. They each of them carried white cloth covered sticks with a sort of mop at the end for sprinkling holy water, and from beneath their many folded saris, their fair placid, gentle faces, looked somewhat doubtfully at me. They resemble the Roman Catholic nuns whose prototype they probably are. The priests "monastery" was close by, and they dress in the same flowing, creamy white, but when they go into the street they wear a patch of white linen over their mouths. Two of the priests were present to see I did not prescribe anything religiously wrong for the "nun," and Keshionji was there as interpreter.

The sick Sadvee had had a bad knee for the last two years, and it appeared to be tubercular. She also had a cough and seemed phthisical. They do not mind external applications, but are suspicious of fluid drugs to take, so painting the knee with iodine, and bandaging it on a splint, I merely advised her being put on a bed instead of remaining on the cold floor all day and night, and also to be fed up. Before leaving the neighbourhood I went several times to see her,

but there was only a little improvement in the knee and none in her general condition.

Some time after, in a distant part of Cutch, I saw another of these priests, a pilgrim. At a chatterie, or monument to a saint, very numerous in the State, he was worshipping. A tall, graceful man, clad in the same soft, flowing white robes, I watched him with interest. He first lit his lamp, sprinkled incense over it, then walked round the shrine many times, bowing low each time he passed the front, then he knelt before it, praying quietly with folded hands and bowed head. One could not help being reminded of his R.C. and High Church imitators, though he had the advantage of naturalness and easy positions.

The Jain or Bania temples are often very beautiful, and whether large or small are always built in the same style, the exterior covered with rich mouldings, and sculptured figures, and the interior more or less ornate. After our hospital work in Mandvi, one day we were taken to see the chief Jain temple there by the chief magistrate himself a Bania Brahmin. Leaving our shoes at the bottom of the usual flight of steps, with carved elephants on the lower pillars, we entered under the square doorway to a room some 15 ft. square, paved with white and black marble in geometric designs. Facing us was the most holy place, into which only priests may go. This was separated from the main hall by double doors covered by thick beaten silver work. As they stand open in the day-time, we were allowed to see the clean impassive-looking gods; that are usually in groups of three, and made of white or black marble, representing the Parsenath, or eighty-four gods of the Bania castes. One is always struck with the cleanliness and order in these Bania temples, which distinguishes them from other Hindu temples. This is so, because the priests have to wash all the gods and their thrones with sandal-wood water daily, and keep the whole interior scrupulously clean. This was equally true of the large temple of Bhadrassa, which has authentic records dating back 2,400 years. It consists of one central large temple with 54 smaller ones ranged round, underneath one roof, which is supported by pillars, that even now are marvels of architectural beauty, though some bear traces of vandalism said to be the result of the overrunning of Cutch in the time of the "Great Mogul," and former raids once so frequent in India.

In the little Mandvi temple, there was much gold plate displayed, and small gold and jewelled replica of the gods, while the walls round were hung with silken curtains covered with beautiful needle-work.

In the outer hall a large square box was placed with a small opening for money contributions of the worshippers. The walls were covered with gilding and mirrors. On the mirrors in the larger spaces were embossed paintings, representing temples, celebrated people, legends and parables.

On one a man was climbing a tree and clutching at the fruit, heedless of five cobras hissing from the ground at him, a mad elephant charging him, and an evil beast on the branches of the tree approaching him. This, said Mr. Shunkerlal, represented men who will have pleasure at any cost, and will spend no time in the meditation of higher things.

Presently we went to the magistrate's bungalow, and learnt more of his personal religion. We found him to be a devout old man, not strictly an idolater. He showed us his praying-chair—low, flat, carved

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)