

THE SACRED CENTRE OF HINDUISM.

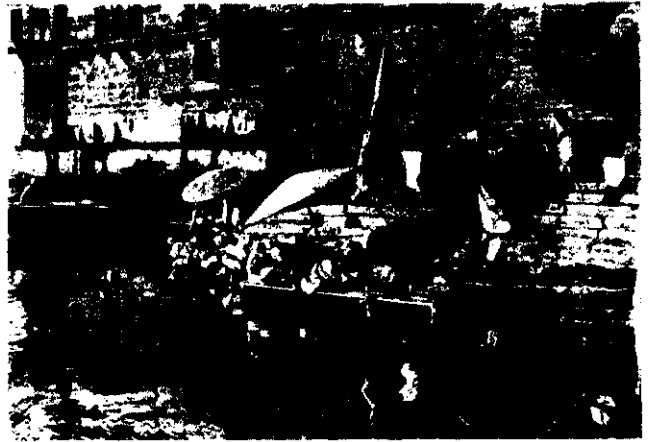
SOME IMPRESSIONS OF BENARES.

(By Cecil Leys.)

Concluded from May 19.

The visitor to Benares rises early in the morning, and after a drive of some three miles, arrives at the Ganges while the sun is still engaged in lifting the mists from the river, and in driving the chill of dawn from the air. It is then that the pilgrims bathe in greatest numbers, and the various phases of life on the great stairs are best seen.

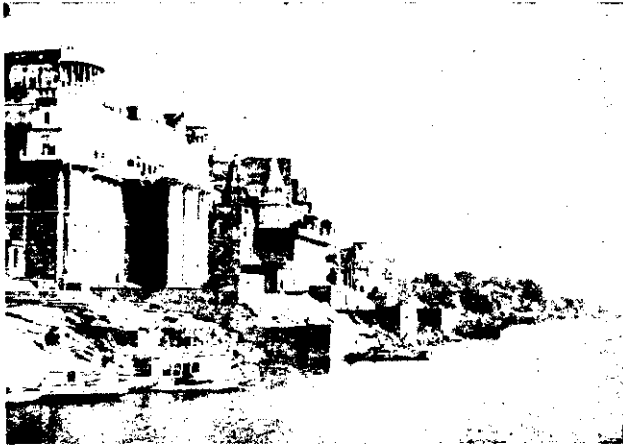
gilt trident or perforated disc that surmounts buildings given over to the worship of Shiva. Descending the steps, and pausing on the platforms where preachers take their stand under the great spreading umbrella, one soon sees that the ghats have their commercial use. Great numbers of native craft are moored alongside, and the platforms are encumbered with their cargoes of stone, fodder or firewood. The usual procedure is to row up stream, keeping close to the edge. As the morning mists clear off the surface of the water the sun shines out on a scene of extraordinary fascination. Although the morning may be cold, the lower steps are crowded with devotees carrying out their devotional ablutions. Here is an old widow with closely shaven pate, almost undistinguishable with her heavy jowl from an ill-favoured fat man. Here, again, is a pretty mite, her only costume a medal



MOVING SHADOWS.

of his grey smeared face like coals, their light the light of fanaticism. Alongside is a youthful native whose peculiar lightness of skin immediately attracts the eye. He is suffering from an incurable disease, the whitening of the skin in connection with which is but a symp-

white bundle which a native is busy attaching a stone to. He places it on the prow of one of the rudely constructed native boats, and pushing off some thirty or forty feet into the stream drops his pitiful little burden overboard. Mother Ganga takes the mite



SHIVALA GHAT,

once a fort of Chet Singh, Raja of Benares, now occupied by the descendants of the Mogul emperors pensioned by the Government.

It is usual to take one of the queer-looking high-sterned craft at Dasawamedh Ghat, about the centre of the line. As one enters upon this ghat a stonemason's yard is worth glancing at. Here temples in stone to suit the buyer's taste may be purchased ready made and complete down to, or rather up to, the

suspended by a string round the hips; her mother is washing her head, and in place of soap scoops up a handful of the black Ganges mud and rubs it in freely—its cleansing properties, I believe, are renowned. Over there is an old fakir covering his lean, hairy body with ashes; his sunken eyes glare out



GENERAL VIEW OF THE GHATS.

Looking down the river from below Dasawamedh.

tom, and it is to be feared that his pilgrimage will physically avail him little. Ahead the blue smoke of a funeral pyre rises lazily on the still air from the midst of the blackened remains of many similar primitive cremations. The white shrouded figure is plainly visible through the curling smoke. Alongside is a little

to her ample bosom. A little further yet up stream a man is towing out to the channel the carcase of a buffalo, and as its bloated body on liberation floats down the sluggish stream the evil-looking vultures, scenting their prey, gather from the far bank and settle on the derelict. There will be little



A SACRED COW IN ONE OF THE CITY'S NARROW STREETS.



A SMALL LOAD OF THE COUNTRY'S EARTHENWARE POTS.

ROUND-THE-WORLD PICTURES

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