

Alcalá de Henares July 30<sup>th</sup> / 76

My dear Mamma

Will you post the enclosed to Mr. Newman. I have asked him to write to Miss Engel and authorize her to make two arrangements with the printer Jacob Fisher. As the copyright is in his hands, it would be no use my mentioning the agreement I made to him at the time. I remember, but that must be three or four years ago now.

I think I will enclose one for Miss Engel too. Your letter was late too, this time not arriving until Saturday. With it there came a long and very interesting one from Philippe. It gives me the best idea of Pinar life I have had yet. Last Friday I saw for the first time a real Hindu religious festival. We heard that the "Sikoli pooja" was to be held at one of the fountains or bathing places on the fanges so John and I went to see it. He started about nine in the morning. As again the day before had made the air cool and pleasant and the grass was like a great sheet of emerald. I have seen nothing to compare with the pomp of the land here except at Thoury. Then about two miles from our house he reached the great road which winds along through trees from the city to the fountains where the temple is. It looked just like a long many coloured ribbon from the thousands of people on their way to the festival. We joined in with the stream (being the only Europeans I saw.) When we came within about half a mile of the temple the sides of the road began to be lined with

natives, sitting behind their "stalls" which consisted of a mat spread on the grass and covered with trays sweets and all sorts of things, just like a fair in England. There were knots of beads, hawks of brilliant coloured kilt, sequins, bangles, nose and toe rings, amulets, beads carved out of wood, little painted carts for the children, paper fans, various trumpets made of the twisted leaves of the plantain just the shape one sees in pictures of the taking of priests. The sound of them however is very familiar being exactly like the penny trumpet of the Westmoreland fair at York. The poorer sort of people had only a waistcloth on but the better sort were dressed in flowing white, red, orange, blue, crimson, violet, green, all colours. The women and children laden with silver ornaments on their heads, arms and ankles. It was very pretty to see the little boys carried on their father's shoulders or in pharries some handsome black and little fellows dressed in shirts of white embroidered net with scarlet and silver fringes, and strings of gold and silver coins shining on their bosom skins. One little lad about four years <sup>old</sup> also sat in a carriage well forward between two men was dressed in nothing but gold and silver chains. He sat as gravely as a little idol, evidently thinking himself very important. One man was riding on a white pony upon a saddle cloth, mainly covering it was positively thick with great bunches and flowers of white flowers.

Eight servants in dresses of purple silk and gold were running beside him one of them with a peacock tail fan. He passed groups of men singing and playing reminding me very much of "singers" on the sands at Brighton and we saw about these pagodas most horrid objects their hair matted their whole bodies coated with soot and dirt. At last we reached the river or rather the great shallow and sand beds which at this time of the year are overgrown. The sight was most wonderful. There are three temples very pretty little buildings close together on high ground overlooking the water. Standing by them we looked over a vast extent of swampy land covered with people in their many coloured ornaments. Thousands of red and orange flags were waving from tall bamboo poles many of the people carried umbrellas of the most brilliant orange, scarlet blue and green which produced a singular effect as they moved about. This mass of colour was set off by the intense vivid green of the foreground. The heavy masses of trees the white temples while beyond was the infinite stretch of the fanges with a dim grey reach of land on the other side. The men and boys came swarming up in bunches from the river with little baskets full of flowers or leaves and grass refuse filled with the sacred fanges water. We stood on the open temple platform

cell which hung from the roof, the men  
prepared forward with their flowers, laid  
them before the image of the god, poured  
a little water on it and then went on  
their way. This seemed to be all the worship.  
One image was covered almost to its neck  
with leaves and flowers which had been  
thus offered. I was so struck with the  
wonderful picturesqueness of the whole thing  
that I could not realize it as idolatry. It  
has never been seen anything like such an  
immense concourse of people gathered  
together in England and yet there was no  
disorder no parading fighting or drunk  
carnage. The poor people came washed away  
their sins, as they supposed, in the sacred  
river laid their little flower offerings at the  
feet of the god and then enjoyed themselves  
amongst the cakes and sweetmeats and  
boys as they went home. To see what I  
have seen at the Birminghams and  
Nottingham fairs, one would think the  
India and not England was the birthplace  
of this. This is considered a very small  
festival, so I am wondering what the great  
ones are.

We have had comparatively a gay week  
dining out twice, a very unusual thing  
lately. On Thursday we go to Lady Street.  
We are reading of Macdonald's story in  
The Day of Wrath, which Mr Harrison lends  
us, and I am enjoying the incidents  
abroad, the best book of travels I ever  
read.