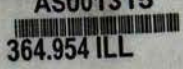




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Illustrations  
of  
The History and Practice  
of the Thugs  
and notes of some of  
the Proceedings of the  
Government of India  
for Suppression of the  
Crime of Thuggee

London  
Wm. H. Allen & Co.,  
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### INTRODUCTION.

THE limited portion of information recently obtained in this country as to the existence and practices of the classes of Assassins known by the name of Thugs, has had the effect of directing public curiosity to the subject; and the following pages have been compiled with a view to the gratification of that feeling. The best authorities have been consulted; and the general views which are presented to the reader may claim at least the praise of accuracy.

As the object of the writer was to convey information, and to afford as just, and, at the same time, as vivid a picture as possible of the strange state of society which it was his duty to exhibit, he has in many instances given the confessions or depositions of members of the Thug fraternity in their own language, in preference to rendering them into his own. This plan, it was conceived, would afford





## INTRODUCTION.

to the reader a degree of insight into the characters and feelings of these murderers, superior to that which could be derived from the perusal of a mere narrative.

The authorities for the facts related are, in many instances, referred to: but it would be unjust to close these remarks without a general acknowledgment of the services rendered by Captain Sleeman to the cause of justice and good government, as well in the collection and diffusion of information respecting the Thugs, as in more active labours for their suppression. To the researches of that Gentleman, all writers on the subject, in common with the author of this volume, must be deeply indebted.





ILLUSTRATIONS  
OF THE  
HISTORY AND PRACTICES  
OF THE  
**THUGS.**

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CHAP. I.

THE existence of large bodies of men having no other means of subsistence than those afforded by plunder, is, in all countries, too common to excite surprise; and, unhappily, organized bands of assassins are not peculiar to India! The associations of murderers known by the name of Thugs present, however, so many remarkable points of character and manners, that curiosity may reasonably be excited to inquire into the history, and ascertain the feelings, opinions, and motives of persons differing, in many respects, so widely even from all other followers of their own horrible occupation.

In different parts of India, these ruffians assume, and have been designated by, various names, derived either from the mode by which they dispatch their victims—from the purpose for which they destroy life,





life, or from the arts by which they inveigle their prey to destruction. In the more northern parts of India, these murderers are called Thugs, the name by which they are most generally known among Europeans. This term signifies "deceiver." In some provinces to the southward, according to Dr. Sherwood, they have obtained the name of Phansigars, or "stranglers," from the Hindostanee word *phansi*, a "noose." By the same authority it is stated, that in the Tamul language they are called Ari Tulucar, or Mussulman "noosers"; in Canarese, Tanti Calleru, implying "thieves who use a wire or cat-gut noose"; and in Telagu, Warlu Wahndlu, or Warlu Vayshay Wahndloo, meaning "people who use the noose."

It is remarkable, that, after an intercourse with India of nearly two centuries, and the exercise of sovereignty over a large part of the country for no inconsiderable period, the English should have been ignorant of the existence and habits of a body so dangerous to the public peace. This, however, seems to have been the case: and it may be regarded as affording a strong proof, how little progress was made by the Europeans, during a long series of years, in knowledge of the people among whom they resided, and over whom they exercised the functions of rulers.

There is reason to conclude, that the British Government knew nothing of the Thugs until shortly after





After the conquest of Seringapatam, in 1799, when about a hundred were apprehended in the vicinity of Bangalore. They did not engage general attention: nor would it appear that they were suspected to belong to a distinct class of hereditary murderers and plunderers, settled in various parts of India, and alike remarkable for the singularity of their practice and the extent of their depredations. In the year 1807, between Chittoor and Arcot, several Thugs were apprehended, belonging to a gang which had just returned laden with booty from an expedition to Travancore; and information was then obtained, which ultimately led to the development of the habits, artifices, and combinations of these atrocious delinquents.

The Thugs that invested the south of India some years ago were settled in Mysore, on the borders of that province and the Carnatic, in the Malaghat districts ceded to the Company by the Nizam in 1800; and they were particularly numerous in the Poliums of Chittoor. The sequestered part of the country which comprehended these Poliums maintained little intercourse with the neighbouring districts, abounding in hills and fastnesses; and, being immediately subject to several Polygars, afforded the Thugs a convenient and secure retreat. The protection of the Polygars was extended to them, in common with other classes of robbers, in consideration of a settled





contribution, or, which was more frequent, of sharing in the fruits of their rapacity.

It is impossible that such criminals as the Thugs, living by systematic plans of depredation, could long remain in the same place in safety, unless their practices were encouraged or connived at by persons in authority. Hence, after the establishment of the Company's Government over the Carnatic and the districts ceded by the Nizam, and the consequent extinction of the power and influence of the Polygars, some of whom had succeeded in rendering themselves virtually independent of the former government, many of these murderers changed their abodes, and assumed other names: others, who remained, endeavoured to shelter themselves by subterfuge and dissimulation.

While they lived under the protection of Polygars and other petty local authorities, and among people whose habits were in some respects analogous to their own, it was unnecessary to conceal that they subsisted by depredation. They and their families lived peaceably with their neighbours, whom they never attempted to molest. Between them there subsisted a reciprocation of interest, in the purchase and disposal of the plunder which the Thugs brought with them, on returning from their expeditions. Conscience in the East is neither very delicate nor very enlightened; and if any scruples arose, the countervailing profit would  
more





more than balance them. The Thugs at all times engaged in the tillage of land, even under the native chiefs, when they had settled habitations. They either sowed the lands, or prepared them for seed, during the season that they remained at home; and left the care of them to their women and children, in their absence. This peaceful pursuit afforded them a screen, on the extension of the English Government, and, while pursuing their criminal practices, enabled them to appear dependent on honest and laudable industry.

According to Dr. Sherwood, who wrote in 1816, and whose acquaintance with Thuggee appears to have been founded principally upon observations made in the territories subject to the Presidency of Fort St. George, a gang consisted of from ten to fifty, or sometimes a greater number. Captain Sleeman states, that the gangs have often contained two or three hundred; but, in such instances, they commonly follow each other in small parties of ten or twenty, upon roads parallel to each other, being prepared to concentrate, on any point, when necessary. Different parties frequently act in concert, apprising one another of the approach of travellers whose destruction promises a valuable booty. They assume the appearance of ordinary inoffensive travellers: sometimes they pretend to be traders; and, if enriched by former spoliations, travel on horseback, with tents, and pass for wealthy merchants,



merchants, or other persons of consequence. Sometimes they commence their route in more humble characters; but acquiring, in their rapacious progress, horses and bullocks, these at once furnish them with the means of transporting the remainder of their plunder, and of making pretensions to higher degrees of wealth and station.

Thugs are accustomed to wait at choultries, on the high roads, or near towns where travellers rest. They arrive at such places, and enter towns and villages, in straggling parties of three or four persons, appearing to meet by accident, and to have no previous acquaintance. On such occasions, some of the gang are employed as emissaries, to collect information, and especially to learn if any persons with property in their possession are about to undertake a journey. They are often accompanied by children of ten years of age and upwards; who, while they perform menial offices, are gradually initiated into the horrid practices of Thuggee, and contribute to prevent suspicion of their real character. Skilled in the arts of deception, they enter into conversation, and insinuate themselves by obsequious attentions into the confidence of travellers of all descriptions, to learn from them whence they came, whither and for what purpose they are journeying, and of what property they are possessed. When, after obtaining such information as they deem requisite,





with pain, in order to excite the pity of the intruding travellers, and to detain them from the scene of murder.

Such are the perseverance and caution of the Thugs, that, in the absence of a convenient opportunity, they have been known to travel in company with persons whom they have devoted to destruction, for several days before they executed their intention. If circumstances favour them, they generally commit the murder in a jungle, or in an unfrequented part of the country, and near a sandy place or dry water-course. Particular tracts are chosen, in every part of India, where they may exercise their horrid profession with the greatest convenience and security. Much-frequented roads, passing through extensive jungles, where the ground is soft for the grave, or the jungle thick to cover them, and where the local authorities took no notice of the bodies, were favourite spots. The Thugs speak of such places with the same affection and enthusiasm as other men would of the most delightful scenes of their early life.

In these chosen spots, a hole, three or four feet in depth, usually forms the grave of the unhappy traveller, who is placed in it with his face downwards. The barbarous character of the Thugs is displayed in their treatment of the wretched remains of the murdered persons. Though death brings a termination of suffering, it does not put an end to





to the outrages of the murderers. Long and deep gashes are made in various parts of the bodies: sometimes the limbs are disjointed, and the figure distorted into unusual positions. These outrages arise from various motives. Their intention generally is, to expedite the decomposition of the body, and to prevent its inflation, which, by causing fissures in the superincumbent sand, might attract jackals, and thus lead to the discovery of the corpse. Sometimes, however, these deeds have been the result of disappointment, and the emanations of a petty and unmanly revenge. When the amount of plunder is less than had been expected, the villains have frequently vented their displeasure in wanton indignities on the unconscious remains of the dead.

If, when a murder is perpetrated, a convenient place for interring the body be not near, or if the Thugs be apprehensive of discovery, it is either tied in a sack, and carried to some spot where it is not likely to be found, or is put into a well. In Oude, where the fields are almost all irrigated from wells, the bodies were generally thrown into them; and when the cultivators discovered these relics of crime, they hardly ever thought it worth while to ask how they came there, so accustomed were they to find them. In Bengal and Behar, where the most frequented roads pass along or frequently across rivers, the bodies are cast into those rivers.

If





If none of these expedients be advisable, a shallow hole is dug, in which the corpse is buried, till a fit place for interring it can be discovered; when it is removed, and cut in the manner already mentioned. If compelled to perform the interment under circumstances which subject them to the risk of observation, the Thugs put up a screen on the wall for a tent, and bury the body within the enclosure; pretending, if inquiries are made, that their women are within the screen. If the traveller had a dog, it is killed, lest the affection of the animal should cause the discovery of the body of his murdered master. The office of mangling the dead body is usually assigned to a particular person of the gang. The Thugs are always provided with knives and pickaxes, which they conceal from observation.

It will thus be seen, that the system of the Thugs is well devised to secure that concealment so necessary to the continued success of their horrid practices. The mode of destroying their victims, and of disposing of their remains, almost preclude the possibility of rescue or escape, of witnesses to the deed, of noise or cries for help, of effusion of blood, and, indeed, of any trace of the crime. An impenetrable veil of darkness is thrown over their atrocities.

It has been supposed, that formerly a long string with a running noose was used by the Thugs for  
seizing





seizing travellers, and that they robbed on horse-back. These practices do not at present, however, appear to be common. They sometimes use a short rope, with a loop at one end: but a turban, or sash, are more usually employed, as these answer the atrocious purpose in view as well as a regularly-prepared noose, and have the additional recommendation of exciting no suspicion. When a waist-cloth or sash is used, it is previously doubled to the length of two feet, or two feet and a half: a knot is formed at the double extremity, and a slip-knot tied about eighteen inches from it. In regulating the distance of the two knots, so that the intervening space, when tightly twisted, may be adapted to embrace the neck, the Thug who prepares the instrument ties it upon his own knee. The two knots give a firm hold of the cloth, and prevent its slipping through the hands in the act of applying it. After the person attacked has been brought to the ground, the slip-knot is loosed by the Thug who has hold of that part of the cloth: and he makes another fold of it round the neck; upon which placing his foot, he draws the cloth tight, in a manner similar to that—to use the expression of a Thug informer—"of packing a bundle of straw."

If, which scarcely ever happens, a traveller escape from the persons attempting to strangle him, he incurs the hazard of being dispatched by one of the parties on watch. These men have  
swords,





swords, and will endeavour to cut down any man who escapes from the stranglers. Should he finally escape, or should any other circumstance occur to excite alarm or apprehensions of being seized, the gang immediately disperses, having previously agreed to re-assemble, at an appointed time, at some distant place.

Travellers resting in the same choultry with Thugs are sometimes destroyed in the night. On these occasions, a person is not always murdered when asleep; as, while he is in a recumbent posture, the stranglers find a difficulty in applying the cloth. The usual practice is, first, to awaken him suddenly, with an alarm of a snake or a scorpion, and then to strangle him.

In attacking a traveller on horseback, the Thugs range themselves in the following manner: one of the gang goes in front of the horse, and another has his station in the rear; a third, walking by the side of the traveller, keeps him engaged in conversation, till, finding that he is off his guard, he suddenly seizes the victim by the arm, and drags him to the ground, the horse at the same time being seized by the foremost villain: the miserable sufferer is then strangled in the usual manner.

Against Thugs, it must be obvious, that arms, and the ordinary precautions taken against robbers, are unavailing. When a person is armed with a dagger, it is usual for one of the villains to secure  
his





his hands. It sometimes happens, that entire parties of travellers, consisting of several persons possessed of valuable effects, are, while journeying in imaginary security, suddenly cut off; and the lifeless and despoiled bodies being removed and interred, not a vestige of them appears. Instances have occurred, of twelve and fourteen persons being simultaneously destroyed; but such occurrences must be rare.

Occasionally, the booty obtained is considerable. Near Sadras, about eleven years ago, three *golah* peons were killed, having on them money, in different coins, to the amount of 16,000 rupees. In 1805, five persons were killed in Coimbatore, and cash to the amount of 2500 pagodas, the property of the Collector of the district, was taken. In the same year, two respectable natives proceeding on horseback from Madras to the Malabar coast, with five attendants, were all killed. In 1807, five persons, besides two others who had joined them on the road, were killed near Bangalore, and robbed of property to the amount of 1000 pagodas, belonging to an officer of Engineers. And in 1815, three persons were killed in the district of Masulipatam, and 2500 rupees taken. Very frequently, however, the property taken is but small; and such are the cruelty and cupidity of these wretches, that, on the presumption of every traveller possessing concealed treasure, or some property, however trifling,





trifling, the greatest apparent indigence does not always afford security.

The plunder was sometimes carried home; sometimes disposed of on the road. If the murdered person resided near the place of his assassination, the property was carried to a distance: if, as was more commonly the case, he was a stranger, the ruffians did not scruple to offer the fruits of their rapine in the immediate vicinity of their crime: the only precaution taken was, that the place of sale should be in advance of that where the murder was committed, and not a village where the traveller had previously been seen.

The mode of dividing the plunder is probably various. Dr. Sherwood says, that formerly, if good horses, shawls, or other valuable articles, were among the booty, they were commonly reserved for the Polygar, in payment of protection. A portion of the plunder was usually appropriated to defraying the expenses of religious ceremonies; and, sometimes, a part was also allotted for the benefit of widows and families of deceased members of the gang. The residue of the booty, being divided into several parts, was generally shared as follows;—to the leader, two shares; to the men actually concerned in perpetrating the murder, and to the person who cut the dead body, each one share and a half; and to the remainder of the gang, each one share.

According to Captain Sleeman, when there are ten

or





or more articles of the same kind, the tenth is assigned to the leader, before the general division takes place: if the nature of the property does not admit of decimation, one anna in the rupee is assessed upon its value, for the benefit of the leader. After this deduction, and the payment of a small extra allowance to the stranglers, grave-choosers, diggers, and other officers, the remainder is divided by lot, called, in the Thug dialect, *Kouree*, *Phenkua*, *Marna*, or *Dalna*. It is usual to make three allotments of the spoil, and to divide the gang into three equal parties. A cowry is then given to each party, by whom it is marked. The cowries are then placed in the hands of a man who is kept ignorant of the parties to whom they respectively belong; and the final decision is made by his placing one of the cowries upon each parcel of the plunder. The parties then take possession of the shares thus consigned to them, and divide the produce among the individuals.

The operations of the Thugs are facilitated, and their designs cloked, by a peculiar dialect: they have recourse, also, to a variety of signs, both for concealment, and for the purpose of communicating with comrades beyond the influence of speech. Drawing the back of the hand along the chin, from the throat outwards, implies that caution is requisite—that some stranger is approaching. Putting the open hand over the mouth, and drawing it gently





gently down, implies that there is no longer cause for alarm. If an advanced party of Thugs overtake any traveller whom they design to destroy, but have need of more assistance, they make certain marks on the roads, by which those of the gang who follow understand that they are required to hasten forwards. A party in advance also leaves certain marks, where a road branches off, as intimations to those who are behind. They draw their feet along the dust, in the direction they have taken; and if their friends are to follow quickly, they leave the dust piled up at the end of the line where the foot drops, or make a hole in the dust with the heel. If the road afford no dust, they leave two stones, placed one upon the other, in the line they have taken; and strew a few leaves of trees along the road. If their co-adjutors are to make haste, they make a very long line of leaves. They have many other signs, for similar purposes.

Of the number of persons who fall victims to these lawless associations, it is obvious that no estimate can be proved, deserving of the slightest confidence. The number has, without doubt, varied greatly at different periods. There is reason to believe, that from the time of the conquest of Mysore in 1799, to 1807 and 1808, the practice, in that part of India, reached its height, and that hundreds of persons were annually destroyed. In one of his reports, the Magistrate of Chittoor





observes: "I believe that some of the Phansigars have been concerned in above two hundred murders: nor will this estimate appear extravagant, if it be remembered, that murder was their profession, frequently their only means of gaining a subsistence: every man of fifty years of age has probably been actively engaged during twenty-five years of his life in murder; and, on the most moderate computation, it may be reckoned that he has made one excursion a year, and met each time with ten victims."

Francis Bartolomeo says: "During a residence of thirteen or fourteen years in India, I never heard of any traveller being robbed or murdered on the highway;"—but other travellers, whose experience was less agreeable, attest that the practice of Thuggee is not of recent introduction. Thevenot, in the following passage, evidently alludes to it:—"Though the road I have been speaking of, from Delhi to Agra, be tolerable, yet hath it many inconveniences. One may meet with tigers, panthers, and lions upon it; and one had best, also, have a care of robbers, and, above all things, not to suffer any body to come near one upon the road. The cunningest robbers in the world are in that country. They use a certain slip with a running noose, which they can cast with so much sleight about a man's neck, when they are within reach of him, that they never fail, so that they strangle him in a trice. They have another cunning trick, also, to catch travellers





travellers with. They send out a handsome woman upon the road, who, with her hair dishevelled, seems to be all in tears, sighing and complaining of some misfortunes which she pretends has befallen her. Now, as she takes the same way that the traveller goes, he easily falls into conversation with her, and, finding her beautiful, offers her his assistance, which she accepts: but he hath no sooner taken her up behind him on horseback, but she throws the snare about his neck and strangles him; or at least stuns him, until the robbers, who lie hid, come running to her assistance, and complete what she hath begun. But, besides that, there are men in those quarters so skilful in casting the snare, that they succeed as well at a distance as near at hand; and if an ox, or any other beast belonging to a caravan, run away, as sometimes it happens, they fail not to catch it by the neck."

The modern Thugs have recourse to numerous artifices to entrap their victims; but there is reason to think that the allurements of female fascination are now not often resorted to. Their customs with regard to their women, however, vary much. The Thugs, who reside in fixed habitations, rarely allow their women to accompany them. The wandering bands, who seem to retain more of the usages of their ancestors, are attended and aided by their females.

To a European reader it must appear extra-  
c 2 ordinary,





ordinary, that the constant disappearance of such numbers of natives should have excited so little interest and inquiry, as not to have led to a general knowledge of these combinations of criminals. Such ignorance, perhaps, could not have prevailed in England, where it might be supposed that the absence, if unaccounted for, of even a single person, must produce suspicion, with consequent investigation and discovery. But even in England it has recently been made evident, that numbers of persons may disappear from the scene of their ordinary avocations without producing much surprise or any alarm. In India, the probability of such disappearance is far greater; and such an event, unless occurring to a person of some consequence, would scarcely be known beyond the precincts of the place of residence, or the village of the unfortunate sufferer, nor much observed there. Many that fall victims to the Thugs are the subjects of other and distant states: many have no settled abodes. It must also be remembered, that the Thugs usually refrain from murdering the inhabitants of towns and villages near which they are halting; neither are they accustomed to murder near their own habitations; circumstances which not only prevent suspicion attaching to them as the murderers, and to the local authority as protecting and sharing the booty with them, but tend to throw it upon others, who reside near the spot to which a traveller





traveller may have been traced, and where he was last seen. Besides, a person setting out on a journey is often unable to fix any period for his return; and though he should not revisit his home at the expected time, his delay will, for a while, excite little alarm in the minds of his friends. He is supposed to be unexpectedly detained—to be ill—to have met with some ordinary accident—to have deserted his family—to have died. Should suspicion arise that he has been murdered, the act is attributed to ordinary highway robbers; and it is but seldom that minute inquiries can be instituted by his bereaved relatives. But supposing that this is done, and the progress of the missing traveller traced to a particular place, and not beyond it, still suspicion would be apt to attach to any, rather than to a few apparently inoffensive travellers—journeying either for the purpose of traffic, as is imagined, or, as is often pretended, to see their relations, or to be present at some marriage; and who, if ever noticed, have perhaps been long since forgotten. If, notwithstanding all these improbabilities, suspicion should fall upon the actual perpetrators, where could they be found?

Thus with respect to Sepoys, who, having obtained leave of absence, never rejoined their corps, the conclusion generally formed has been, that they had deserted; when, in various instances, they had fallen sacrifices to the wiles of the Thugs.

The





The same observation is particularly applicable to golah peons, charged with the conveyance of money and valuables; many of whom having disappeared, no doubt was entertained that they had absconded, and appropriated the property to their own use. Even the apprehension which an indistinct idea of danger tends to create in the minds of these and other travellers would render them only more liable to fall into the snare: less persuasion would be requisite to induce them to join a party of Thugs, prompted by the belief that they were thus providing, in the most effectual manner, for their own safety.

The profession of a Thug, like almost every thing in India, is hereditary—the fraternity, however, receiving occasional reinforcements from strangers: but these are admitted with great caution, and seldom after they have attained mature age. Rank is acquired by methods not dissimilar to those which procure the same advantage elsewhere. On Captain Sleeman's inquiring, of an approver, what gave a man the rank of Jemadar, the latter answered, that a man who has always at command the means of advancing a month or two's subsistence to a gang, will be called so;—a strong and resolute man, whose ancestors have been for many generations Thugs, will soon get the title;—or a very wise man, whose advice in difficult cases has weight with the gang;—or one who has influence over local authorities,





ties, or the native officers of courts of justice ;—or a man of handsome appearance and high bearing, who can feign the man of rank well. By such means a man is enabled to get around him a few who will consent to give him the fees and title of Jemadar ; but it requires very high and numerous qualifications to gain a man the title of Subahdar. Wealth, influence, talents, and high descent, it thus appears, have the same power among Thugs which they have elsewhere ; and, in the absence of all these, impudent pretension will answer the purpose of the adventurer who has confidence enough to assume it. In this respect, at least, the polity of the Thugs presents but a counterpart of what is passing elsewhere.

In contemplating the organization of these hordes of murderers, it is difficult to conceive how they continue to subsist. It might be hoped, that when the villains who have grown grey in the practice of assassination descend with their weight of crime to the grave, some difficulty would be found in perpetuating the succession—that the profession would decay, from the reluctance of the young and uncontaminated to enter it. The initiation, however, is progressive ; and the force of habit gradually overcomes the natural repugnance which, in every human breast, would at first withdraw the hand from the destruction of human life. The children of Thugs, during their more tender years, are, it appears,





appears, kept in ignorance of the occupation of their fathers. After a time, they are permitted to accompany them; but a veil is thrown over the darker scenes of the drama. To the novice, indeed, the expedition presents nothing but an aspect of pleasure. He is mounted on a pony; and being, by the laws of the Thugs, entitled to his share of the booty, he receives a portion of it, in presents suited to his years—the delight attending the acquisition being unalloyed by any consciousness of the means by which it has been obtained. The truth reveals itself by degrees. In a short time, the tyro becomes aware that his presents are the fruits of robbery. After a while, he has reason to suspect that robbery is aggravated by a fouler crime: at length, suspicion passes into certainty: and finally, the pupil is permitted to witness the exercise of the frightful handicraft which he is destined to pursue. The moral contamination is now complete; but it is long before the disciple is entrusted with the performance of the last atrocity. He passes through a long course of preparatory study; being first employed as a scout, next as a sexton, then as a holder of the limbs, before he is in any case thought worthy of being elevated to the dignity of a strangler.

A too precipitate disclosure of the frightful truth has sometimes produced fatal consequences. The following affecting story, related by a Thug who had become approver against his comrades, will illustrate





illustrate this; and there is reason to believe that the case is not altogether without parallel. It is admitted, indeed, that others have occurred resembling it in kind, though falling short of it in degree:—"About twelve years ago," said the narrator, "my cousin, Aman Subahdar, took out with us my cousin Kur'hora, brother of Omrow approver, a lad of fourteen, for the first time. He was mounted upon a pretty pony; and Hursooka, an adopted son of Aman's, was appointed to take charge of the boy. We fell in with five Sieks; and when we set out before daylight in the morning, Hursooka, who had been already on three expeditions, was ordered to take the bridle, and keep the boy in the rear, out of sight and hearing. The boy became alarmed and impatient, got away from Hursooka, and galloped up at the instant the '*I hirnee*,' or signal for murder, was given. He heard the screams of the men, and saw them all strangled. He was seized with a trembling, and fell from his pony: he became immediately delirious, was dreadfully alarmed at the turbans of the murdered men, and, when any one touched or spoke to him, talked wildly about the murders, screamed as if in sleep, and trembled violently. We could not get him forward; and, after burying the bodies, Aman, myself, and a few others, sat by him while the gang went on: we were very fond of him, and tried all we could to tranquillize him, but he never recovered his





his senses, and before evening he died.—I have seen many instances of feelings greatly shocked at the sight of the first murder, but never one so strong as this. Kurhora was a very fine boy; and Hursooka took his death much to heart, and turned Byragee. He is now at some temple on the banks of the Nerbudda river."

One of the most remarkable features in this narrative is the expression of affection for the unhappy boy, by a man steeped in blood and guilt. The difficulty of supposing the better affections of the heart to subsist in conjunction with the exercise of the trade of murder led Captain Sleeman to ask the individual who related the story, if the children of Thugs continued to reverence their fathers after they became acquainted with their occupation. The answer was brief and decisive, and apparently given without any feeling that the fact averred required explanation, or was calculated to excite surprise. The party interrogated calmly replied, "The same: we love them, and they love us." Such is the inconsistency of human nature!

The indiscriminate slaughter in which these miscreants might be tempted to indulge, is in some degree restrained by superstition. It is deemed unlucky to kill certain castes and classes; and their members are therefore usually respected. The most important and extended exception to the general rule of murder is that of the female sex. Thugs, who

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who have any real regard to the principles which they profess to respect, never take the lives of women. It cannot, however, be supposed that such a rule should be invariably observed by such persons as form the society of Thugs; and, in fact, it is constantly violated. "Among us," said one of the approvers interrogated by Captain Sleeman, "it is a rule never to kill a woman; but if a rich old woman is found, the gang sometimes get a man to strangle her, by giving him an extra share of the booty, and inducing him to take the responsibility upon himself. We have sometimes killed other prohibited people, particularly those of low caste, whom we ought not even to have touched."

The Thugs of Hindostan, it is said, are less scrupulous about the murder of women than those of the Deccan; and even with the former, the practice is alleged to be rather of recent origin. It has been seen, that age has had some share in determining the fate of females; and it appears, from the confessions of some of the criminals, that the possession of beauty has been allowed to operate as a protection. Feringcea, a Hindostan Thug, says: "I and my cousin Aman Sabahdar were with a gang of 150 Thugs, on an expedition through Rajpootana, about thirteen years ago, when we met a handmaid of the Peshwa Bajee Row's, on her way from Poona to Cawnpore. We intended to kill her and her followers; but we found her very beautiful;





beautiful ; and after having her, and her party, three days within our grasp, and knowing that they had a lac and a half of rupees' worth of property, in jewels and other things, with them, we let her and all her party go : we had talked to her, and felt love towards her, for she was very beautiful."—Beauty, however, does not always disarm these murderers. Another beautiful female, respecting whom the same witness was questioned, was sacrificed without remorse. Feringcea endeavoured to throw the guilt of this transaction upon the Mussulmans of the gang, and to exonerate those of his own creed from participation. "We none of us," said he, "ventured near the palanquin : the Mussulmans were the only men who approached her before the murder."—The comparative forbearance of the Hindoos, in all similar transactions, is a point that was strongly urged by many of the witnesses. Being questioned as to the murder of a female named Kalee Bebee, which had excited some interest, the account given was such as to clear the Hindoo portion of the gang from the guilt of engaging in the act, and even to represent them as actively opposing it ; but it does not appear that their conscientiousness extended to the length of finally declining all participation in the spoil, and a few superstitious ceremonies soon reconciled all differences. If the evidence of the approver is to be credited, disputes arose between the Mussulmans and





and the Hindoos, both before and after the murder. The Mussulmans insisted upon killing the lady, as she had four thousand rupees' worth of property with her: the Hindoos would not agree. She was killed, however, with all her followers, twelve in number: but it is added, that, in the first instance, the Hindoos refused to take any part of the booty—that the two parties even came to blows;—at last, the Hindoos gave in, and consented to share in all, but the clothes and ornaments which the women wore. This compromise between cupidity and superstition put an end to the dispute for a time; but when Pursaram Benhman, one of the Hindoo conspirators, returned home, Rae Sing, his brother, refused to eat, drink, or smoke with him, till he had purged himself from this great sin; and he, with two others, gave a feast that cost them a thousand rupees each. This feast, at which four or five thousand Brahmans were assembled, made all right.

Some associations pride themselves upon their purity in this respect. One of the Behar Thugs being asked if that body ever murdered women, answered, with much warmth, "Never! we should not murder a woman, if she had a lac of rupees upon her." A member of the Doab fraternity, who was present, immediately added, "Nor would the Doab Thugs, if she had two lacs upon her."

Among the privileged classes, are, washermen and poets, professors of dancing, blacksmiths and carpen-





carpenters, musicians, oil-venders, and sweepers, Ganges water-carriers if they have the water actually with them, but if their pots be empty they are subject to the general law of destruction, Madaree Fakeers, and, in some districts, Sieks. The maimed and the leprous are also spared; but perhaps the origin of the latter exemption is ascribable to the fear of contamination, rather than to humanity. The sacred cow, in the eyes of all Hindoos who have any pretensions to consistency, is a protection to its possessor: art is however sometimes resorted to, for the purpose of removing this impediment to business. A party of Thugs projected the murder of fourteen persons, including several women; but the design could not be carried into effect, because the victims had a cow with them. With some difficulty, they were persuaded to sell the cow to the Thugs; who, to induce the travellers to consent to the sale, pretended that they had vowed to make an offering of a cow at Shaphore, and were much in want of one. The cow was actually presented to a Brahman at Shaphore; and the obstacle being removed, the whole of the unsuspecting travellers, including the females, were, two or three hours afterwards, strangled. Such are the fruits of the horrible creed which overspreads and darkens so large a portion of the East!





## CHAP. II.

THE practice of Thuggee is not confined to adventurers upon land. The rivers of India are infested by bands of fresh-water pirates, having similar habits to those of the land Thugs, holding the same feeling, and differing only from them in a few trifling particulars. These ruffians go in considerable parties, and have generally several boats at the ghât at the same time. Their murders are always perpetrated in the day-time. Those who do the work of the boatmen are dressed like other boatmen; but those who are to take a part in the operations are dressed like travellers of great respectability; and there are no boats on the river kept so clean and inviting for travellers. When going up the river, they always pretend to be men of some consideration, going on pilgrimage to some sacred place, as Benares, Allahabad, &c. When going down, they pretend to be returning home from such places. They send out their Sothas, or inveiglers, well dressed, upon the high roads; who pretend to be going by water to the same places as the travellers they fall in with. On coming to the ghât, they see  
these





these nice-looking boats, with the respectably-dressed Thugs amusing themselves. They ask the Manjee (captain) of the boat to take them and the travellers on board, as he can afford to do so cheaper than others, having, apparently, his boat already engaged by others. He pretends to be pushed for room; and the Thugs pretend to be unwilling to have any more passengers on board. At last he yields to the earnest requests of the inveiglers, and the travellers are taken up. They go off into the middle of the river; those above singing and playing, and making a great noise; while the travellers are murdered inside, at the signal, given by three taps, that all is clear, and their bodies thrown into the river. The boat then goes on to some other ghât, having landed the inveiglers again upon the roads.

The peculiarities by which the river Thugs are distinguished from their fellows on shore will be best illustrated by the testimony of one of the latter class, who was consequently well qualified to observe and report on the subject. This person, who had been admitted as evidence against some votaries of Thuggee, stated, that his personal knowledge of the river Thugs was confined to a single occasion. His relation was as follows:—  
“About fourteen years ago, I had been on an expedition from Chupra to Moorshedabad. We were twenty-two Thugs, under Sewbuns Jemadar, who was a Rajpoot. Two of our gang, Khoda Buksh  
and





and Alee Yar, had often served with the river Thugs, and used to interest us by talking about their modes of proceeding. On the other side of Rajmahul we fell in with two of these Thugs. They had two bundles of clothes, and pretended to be going on a pilgrimage; and had with them five travellers, whom they had picked up on the road. Sewbuns recognised them immediately, and Alee Yar and Khoda Buksh found in them old acquaintances. They got into conversation with them; and it was agreed that Sewbuns, I, and Dhorda Kormee should go with them, and see how they did their work, while the rest of the gang went on along the bank of the river. We embarked at Rajmahul. The travellers sat on one side of the boat, and the Thugs on the other; while we were all three placed in the stern; the Thugs on our left, and the travellers on our right. Some of the Thugs, dressed as boatmen, were above deck, and others walking along the bank of the river, and pulling the boat by the goon or rope; and all, at the same time, on the look out. We came up with a gentleman's pinnace and two baggage-boats, and were obliged to stop and let them go on. The travellers seemed anxious; but were quieted by being told that the men at the rope were tired and must take some refreshment. They pulled out something, and began to eat; and when the pinnace had got on a good way, they resumed their work,





and our boat proceeded. It was now afternoon; and when a signal was given above that all was clear, the five Thugs who sat opposite the travellers sprung in upon them, and, with the aid of others, strangled them. They put the roomal round the neck from the front, while all other Thugs put it round from behind: they thus push them back, while we push them forward. Having strangled the five men, they broke their spinal bones; and then threw them out of a hole made at the side, into the river; and kept on their course; the boat being all this time pulled along by the men on the bank."

The division of the booty seems to have been characterized by a very moderate portion of good faith. The witness continued:—"The booty amounted to about two hundred rupees. We claimed and got a share for all our party; and Sewbuns declared that we were twenty-nine, while we were really only twenty-three, and got a share for that number: he cheated them out of the share of six men. We landed that night, and rejoined our gang; and operated upon the roads leading along the river Ganges till we got to the Mormakeya ghât, where there is an invalid station, about four cose the other side of Bar. Here we fell in with the same party of *Pungoos* or river Thugs, who had three travellers with them. I did not join them this time; but Sewbuns, with two other members





members of our gang, went on board, and saw them strangled."

Another witness gave testimony nearly similar. Like the former, he had enjoyed but a single opportunity of observation. He said: "I had been on one expedition with Dilawur Khan, and one with Futteh Khan; and after these, I went with Bhowur Khan and Moradun, two Lodaha Thugs, and joined Jhoulee Khan the Fair, and Gholamun. Jhoulee Khan had a man to carry his bundle, by name Nathoo; as he was to act this season with Jypaul Kaet, a Jemadar of the Pungoos or river Thugs. He acted as their *Sotha*, or inveigler, this season. We joined Jypaul at the Mormakeya ghât, where he had two boats at the different ghâts, two and three cose from each other. Jhoulee Khan brought two *Beetoos* to the boat, which Jypaul commanded in person; and Bhowur Khan and I embarked with them. As soon as we had all got on board, Jypaul said, in Rumasee, "Let the Boras (Thugs) separate themselves from the Beetoos (those not Thugs):" and we did so, leaving the two travellers together. Four men were on the bank, pulling along the boat: one was at the helm, acting at the same time as the *Bykureea* or spy, and seven of the gang were below with us and the travellers. We had got on about a cose, when the Bykureea at the helm, seeing all clear, called out '*Bhugna ko paion do*,' 'Give my sister's son pawn.' This was their





mode of giving the *I hirnee*, or signal; and the two Beetoos were strangled. After strangling them, they broke their spinal bones, by putting their knees upon their backs, and pulling up their heads and shoulders. After doing this, they pushed the bodies out of a kind of window in the vessel's side. Every boat has two of these windows, one on each side; and they put the bodies out of that towards the river. They break the spinal bones to prevent all chance of the people recovering and giving evidence against them. We generally stab the dead bodies through, on both sides, under the arm-pits; but they are afraid to cut or stab the body, lest there should be signs of blood upon the water, as the corpses pass other boats that are following them on the river. We got only sixteen gundas of pice, two brass lotahs, and the old clothes which the two men wore: it was hardly worth dividing. But coming on near Monghere, Jhoulee Khan, with whom we had landed and gone along the road near the river, inveigled another man, a Beetoo from Bengal, going to Guya on pilgrimage, who yielded sixteen gundas of rupees; and we six got fifteen of them among us; at least, Jhoulee Khan shared only fifteen with us. The traveller was disposed of in the same manner as the others, I believe; but I did not go on board this time. Jhoulee Khan and Bhowur Khan embarked with him, and brought back our share of the booty. After this affair I left them near Monghere,





as I got very little; and grew melancholy, as there were no Thugs of my own clan or district. They were all Bungoos and Loduhas."—The sentiment of this ruffian must be felt to be truly affecting!

The following report of a case of river Thuggee, drawn up by the Magistrate of Furreedpore, may be sufficient to complete the picture :—

"In July last, two men, one a Mussulman, the other a Hindoo, left Dacca together for Furreedpore, where they never arrived. Inquiries were made in both Zillahs, through the police, but without effect. It was stated that they had fifteen rupees with them, and that there were two other passengers on the same boat. In September, a man named Bholanath Chung was brought to me: he stated, that, in Magh of that year, he and several others went to Rungpore with two tobacco-merchants as passengers, strangled them with angoochas, and threw them into the river, and got forty rupees from them. His relation, Suroop Chung, he said, knew more of this, and might know something of the Dacca case. Suroop was sent for; and came and deposed that he and five others were at Dacca in a pulwar. They took two passengers on board, to bring them to Furreedpore—one a Mussulman, the other a Hindoo; took them to a Chur sand-bank about two hours' journey distance from Dacca, there strangled them with angoochas, threw the





the bodies overboard, and went back, through Dacca, to Naraigunje: got fifteen rupees, and other property, from them: two of the leaders of the gang dressed themselves up as Brahmins, and seated themselves in the boat as passengers, to inspire confidence. They afterwards added, that there were two boats, one a panchway with five men in it, besides the pulwar. These men, he afterwards reported, were in the panchway close to Furreedpore, having come for passengers at the Doorga Poojah. They were seized, four in number. At first, all told contradictory stories as to where they had been, &c.; afterwards, three confessed;—two, to having been Mulahs (sailors) of the boat on which the two missing passengers left Dacca, with other particulars; the third, to having told a false story at the request of the others. His brother was one of the party at Dacca; but being sick, had staid at home, and he had taken his place. In the boat was found a doty, recognised by the friends of the Hindoo; also a Mussulman dress and piece of cloth, recognised by the friends of the missing Mussulman; but the latter could bring no witness to swear to them. There were also found in the boat two Brahminical threads, though all the boatmen were Chandals. The Nazir and a Mohurir were sent to take up all the persons implicated in these confessions. Two others, who were taken up, confessed; and one produced from his house a lota, which





which he said had been his share of the spoil. This had before been mentioned as having been with the deceased, and was identified by three or four witnesses. The brother of one of the missing men, who had accompanied them to the boat, deposed that the panchway which was seized near Furreedpore was the same as that in which the missing men went. He also swore that he believed that two of the prisoners were two of the men he saw in the boat; the one, one of the Brahmin passengers; the other, one of the Mullahs (sailors). Suroop, who first gave information and had been promised pardon, was admitted as a witness against the others, of whom eight were made over for trial.

“In the above case, a man named Surbul Dam was named in Suroop's confession. On being taken up in the Mofussil, he denied; but when examined by me, though he denied all knowledge of the Dacca case, he confessed, that in May and June he went with a numbers of others in three boats, one a pulwar; that they first took on board, in Mymunsing (close to the borders of Furreedpore), two Tantie (weavers), on pretence of buying cloths from them; that he went on shore for a short time; and on coming back, saw the cloths, but not the Tantie. The cloths were divided among the party, and he concluded the Tantie were murdered. They went to Rungpore; and they were coming back when they fell in with a boat laden with tobacco and hemp, going





going to Seraigunje. There were five men in it. They kept with this boat for a day or two. At last, on pretence of singing *Hurry Soot*, they got the five men of the tobacco-boat to sit down with them in a circle, and then strangled them all with angoochas; one man performing the operation on each, whilst the others held their hands and feet and pressed upon their stomachs. They threw the bodies into the river; and went down the stream till evening with both boats; when they put the hemp and tobacco into their own pulwar, and sunk the boat of the men they had murdered, by breaking two holes through the bottom of it with a hatchet. They returned, and sold the tobacco and hemp at Manickgunje, in this district.—The persons implicated by this statement were all taken up: three confessed, according to the statement of Surbul Dam, but more clearly. They also said, there were only two boats, and in all ten men; which, on comparison of the statements, was evidently the true one. One of these was Bholanath, the first informer. Both he and another, Kissen Mohun, said they saw the two Tanties strangled. One other man owned having been a party to the sale of the hemp and tobacco which they brought from Rungpore: he was one of the leaders of the gang. In nearly all their houses a bundle of tobacco was found. On inquiry, the heirs of the two Tanties were discovered: they were residents in Furreed-





Furreedpore: their brothers went to a place in Mymunsing to sell some cloths, and never returned: the time of their disappearance, and places they were coming from and going to, agreed with the statements of the prisoners. They did not effect a sale of their cloths at Mymunsing, and were coming back with them. Some very fine pieces of cloth, found in the prisoners' hands, bore the same mark as that used by the deceased; but they could not be identified by oath. The heirs of the five men in the tobacco-boat were likewise found: four of them resided in Mymunsing: they hired out their boat and services to a Mahajun merchant at Seraigunje; went with a cargo of salt to Rungpore, and were coming back with tobacco and hemp when they were thus murdered. The fifth person was a man sent by the Gomashta to pilot them. Intelligence had duly been given to the police at Rungpore; and the magistrate of that district reported, that a boat, answering in description to the one described by Surbul Dam, had been found, with two holes cut through the bottom. The place where it was found agreed also with Surbul Dam's statement. The boat was sent for; and also the Rungpore Gomashta, who proved the despatch of the hemp and tobacco. The sale of it at Manickgunje was proved by the merchant who effected it: four of the prisoners were identified as parties to the sale, which was regularly entered in the books. The boat





boat was identified, both by the relations of the deceased who owned it, and by the witnesses who were admitted as King's evidence against the others. It had been repaired, but the original size of the two holes had been marked out. Two men were admitted as witnesses against the others: eight were made over for the murder of the two Tanties and the five tobacco boatmen; and one for receiving and assisting at the sale of the tobacco. In the house of one of the non-confessing prisoners, in the Dacca case, was found a brass Belu; which was recognised by a Gwala at Furreedpore, as having been with his brother when he and two others left Furreedpore for Mymunsing in January 1834: they have never since been heard of. It is regularly entered in the list of property lost, which was given in when they were declared missing. Unfortunately, no other witness to the property has yet been found."





## CHAP. III.

THE dark and cheerless night of superstition, which has long clouded the moral vision of India, has given rise to institutions and practices so horrible and fantastic, that, without the most convincing evidence, their existence could not be credited by minds trained under happier circumstances than those which prevail in the East. That giant power, which has held the human race in chains wherever the pure and unadulterated doctrines of Revelation have not penetrated, has in India revelled in the wantonness of prosperity; the foundations of delusion have been laid wide and deep; the poison of a false and brutalizing creed has been insinuated into every action of daily life; the most obvious distinctions of right and wrong have been obliterated; and men have been encouraged to believe, that, while stifling the best and strongest feelings of nature, and violating the plainest rules of social duty, they were but fulfilling their destined part in the scheme of the world, and even paying homage to those invisible forms which they were bound, both by conscience and interest, to reverence.

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The fact of the existence of the cold-blooded miscreants who in India make a trade of assassination, is sufficiently horrible : but when it is added, that their occupation is sanctified by the national religion—that the Thugs regard themselves as engaged in the especial service of one of the dark divinities of the Hindoo creed—that the instruments of murder are in their eyes holy—and that their faith in the protection of their goddess, and the perpetuity of their craft, is not to be shaken—we must be struck by the reflection, that we have opened a page in the history of man, fearful and humiliating beyond the ordinary records of iniquity.

The genius of Paganism, which has deified every vice, and thus provided a justification of the indulgence of every evil propensity, has furnished the Thugs with a patron goddess, worthy of those whom she is believed to protect. Of Kalee, the deity of destruction, they are the most devout and assiduous worshippers: in her name they practise their execrable art; and their victims are held to be immolated in her honour.

This horrible divinity they believe to have formerly co-operated more directly with her votaries the Thugs, by disposing of the bodies of those whom they destroyed. Kalee, however, chose to be secret in her operations; and the Thugs were prohibited from looking back, to see what she was about. All was well, so long as they observed





observed this rule; but the services of the goddess as a sextoness were lost through the carelessness or indiscreet curiosity of one of the association. Of the circumstances attendant on this mischance, there are different versions; and at least two are in pretty general circulation. According to one, prevalent in the Deccan, a party of Thugs, having destroyed a traveller, left the body, as usual, unburied, in perfect confidence of receiving the wonted aid from the goddess. A novice, however, unguardedly looking behind him, saw the patroness of the Thugs in the act of feasting on the corpse, one half of it hanging out of her mouth. According to another report, the person looking back was a slave; and the goddess was engaged, not in satisfying the demands of hunger, or gratifying a taste for luxury, by swallowing the murdered traveller, but in tossing the body into the air;—for what purpose does not appear. The offence to the goddess is said, also, to have been aggravated by the fact, that she was not attired with sufficient strictness to satisfy her sense of decorum. Both tales agree, in representing the goddess as highly displeased, and as visiting her displeasure upon her servants, the Thugs, by condemning them to bury their victims themselves. According to the Southern version indeed, like a wise and beneficent potentate, she tempered justice with mercy; for though she refused any longer to relieve





relieve the earth of the loathsome burdens with which her worshippers encumbered it, she was so considerate as to present her friends with one of her teeth for a pickaxe, a rib for a knife, and the hem of her lower garment for a noose. Whether or not this origin of the pickaxe be generally received, it is certain that this instrument is held by the Thugs throughout India in the highest veneration. Its fabrication is superintended with the greatest care; and it is consecrated to the holy duty to which it is destined, with many ceremonies. In the first place, a lucky day must be fixed upon; the leader of the gang then instructs a smith to make the required tool, and the process is conducted with the most profound secrecy. The door is peremptorily closed against all intrusion; the leader never quits the forge while the manufacture is going on; and the smith must engage in no other work, till his sacred task is completed. The pickaxe being made, must next be consecrated. Certain days of the week are deemed more auspicious for this purpose than the rest: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday, enjoy the distinction. Care is taken that the shadow of no living thing may fall on the axe, as this would contaminate the devoted implement, and frustrate all the pains that had been taken in its formation. A Doctor most deeply versed in the learning of the Thugs undertakes the solemn office of consecration.





cration. He sits down with his face to the West, and receives the pickaxe in a brass dish. The instrument which is to supply the want occasioned by the cessation of the goddess's personal labours is first washed in water, which is received into a pit dug for the purpose. The pickaxe then receives three further ablutions; the material employed in each being more expensive and valuable than that used in the first. The second washing is made with a mixture of sugar and water; the third with sour milk; and the fourth with ardent spirits. The pickaxe is then marked, from the head to the point, with seven spots. In performing this operation, the material used is neither very valuable nor very dignified, it being nothing but common red-lead. The brass dish, on which the pickaxe was handed to the officiating Thug, now comes into play again: the pickaxe is placed upon it, with a cocoa-nut, some cloves, white sandalwood, sugar, and a few other articles. A fire is next kindled, and the fuel must consist of dried cow-dung, and the wood of the Mango or Byr tree. All the articles deposited in the brass pan are, with the exception of the cocoa-nut, thrown into the fire; and when the flame rises, the Thug priest, holding the pickaxe with both hands, passes it seven times through the fire. The cocoa-nut is now stripped of its outer coat, and placed on the ground. The comptroller of the pickaxe, holding it





it by the point, then says, "Shall I strike?" The bystanders signifying their assent, he strikes the cocoa-nut with the butt end of the pickaxe, and breaks it, exclaiming, "All hail, mighty Davy (the goddess), great Mother of us all!" The surrounding spectators respond, "All hail, Davy! and prosper the Thugs!" This is a most interesting and exciting moment to the Thugs; for upon the hardness of the nut, the skill of the operator, and the accidental circumstances which may affect the force or direction of the blow, depend the realization of the hopes of the community. If the cocoa-nut be not severed at one blow, all the labour is thrown away; the goddess is understood to be unpropitious; another day must be selected for the repetition of the ceremonies, and all the trouble be incurred again. If, however, the nut is cleft at once, the proof of the approval of the goddess is indisputable. The whole of the shell, and some of the kernel of the nut, is thrown into the fire; the pickaxe is carefully tied up in a clean white cloth, and, being placed on the ground to the West, the assembled spectators, turning in that direction, prostrate themselves in adoration before "that which their own fingers have made"; that which the labour of the smith might have fashioned with equal facility into an object of reverence or of contempt; and which, while it receives divine honours, is destined to assist in a series of acts, at once horrible  
by





by their guilt, and disgusting by their loathsomeness.

The ceremony of prostration concluded, all present receive a portion of the cocoa-nut : the fragments are then collected, and thrown into the pit which had been previously prepared, lest, if they remained on the ground, the sacred relics might be outraged by the defiling touch of some human foot.

These ceremonies, elaborate as they are, suffice only for a single expedition. At the commencement of every fresh series of adventures, they must be repeated.

When the sacred pickaxe is thus prepared, the next point is, to place it in safe custody : it is not every Thug who can be trusted with it. The person who bears it is selected, principally, for his shrewdness, caution, and sobriety. It is, however, only when on a journey that it is entrusted to human care at all. When in camp, it is deposited in the earth, under the especial protection of the goddess. When buried, it is always placed with the point towards the direction in which the party intend to proceed ; and they have the fullest confidence, that if another course is to be preferred, the point will be found to have veered round so as to indicate the better way. Certain classes of the Thugs, when halting, throw their instrument into a well ; and the received belief is, that, when wanted, it will come up of itself, if summoned in due form.





Of course, the instructed know better ; but all *profess* implicit belief in the miraculous egress of the pickaxe from the well into which it is thrown. One of the Thugs, interrogated by Captain Sleeman, said : " We have all of us seen the sacred pickaxe spring in the morning from the well into which it had been thrown overnight, and come to the hands of the man who carried it, at his call : nay, we have seen the pickaxes of different gangs all come up of themselves, from the same well, at the same time, and go to their several bearers." On being reminded of the extraordinary feats performed by jugglers, the Thug replied, with great energy : " What ! shall not a hundred generations of Thugs be able to distinguish the tricks of man from the miracles of God ? Is there not the difference of heaven and earth between them ? Is not one a mere trick ; and the other a miracle, witnessed by hundreds assembled at the same time ?" — Captain Sleeman then said to another Thug : " Sahib Khan, you are more sober than Nasir ; have you ever seen it ?" The answer was : " On one expedition only. I was obliged to fly from Telingana when Major Parker and Captain Sheriff made their inroad upon us (Gurdee), and I went and joined the Arcot gangs. During a whole expedition that I made with them, Imam Khan and his brother carried the pickaxes ; and I heard them, repeatedly, in the morning call them from the well into which they had thrown them overnight, and saw the  
pickaxes





pickaxes come of themselves from the well, and fall into their aprons, which they held open *thus*—here he exhibited the mode.

No one acquainted with the almost superhuman dexterity of Indian jugglers will feel much surprise at these feats. Their prevalence only shews the extent to which delusion may be carried, in a country where human intellect has been long prostrated by a brutalizing superstition.

When the pickaxe is buried, no foot must touch the earth which covers it; nor must it, at any time, be approached by an unclean animal, or any object which bears contamination. After each time that it has been used for the preparation of a grave, it must be submitted to the purification of the bath.

If the pickaxe fall from the hand of the man who bears it, dismay spreads through the gang. The omen is regarded as of the most fearful description: its horrors are aggravated by the uncertainty, as to the nature of the approaching evil, and even as to the party upon whom it is to descend. The omen may indicate the death of the individual who had the care of the sacred weapon, and who, through heedlessness, or misfortune, or unavoidable fatality, suffered it to drop from his embrace: or it may forebode some dreadful reverse to the fortunes of the gang. Measures are immediately taken to frustrate the evil token; and the first step is, to deprive the unhappy pickaxe-bearer of his office.





The enterprise in hand, whatever it might be, is immediately abandoned; and the pickaxe must undergo a fresh consecration. Even these precautions are insufficient to restore things to their original state: the misfortune operates, upon the gang to whom it happens, as a sentence of excommunication from the society of all faithful Thugs. No other party will ever associate with one whose pickaxe has fallen, lest they should be involved in the evil which is apprehended to the "doomed ones."

The pickaxe affords the most solemn sanction of an oath among these murderers; and if any sanction can bind their consciences, it is, perhaps, the only one capable of effecting that purpose. Compared with it, neither the water of the Ganges weighs with the Hindoo, nor the Koran with the Mussulman. When the sacred pickaxe is not at hand, recourse is had to various expedients to remedy the want, and to give validity to the administration of an oath. A piece of cloth is made up into the form of the pickaxe, and duly consecrated: the person sworn then places his hand upon it, or holds it in both hands; and, after the administration of the oath, drinks water in which the representative of the revealed instrument has been washed. In other instances, he goes before the image of the goddess, with the emblem of the pickaxe in his hand, and there takes the oath. If  
a cloth





a cloth is not conveniently to be had, even mud, moulded into the proper form, and duly submitted to the ceremonies of consecration, will answer the purposes. "If any man swears to a falsehood upon a pickaxe properly consecrated," said the Thugs, "we will consent to be hanged if he survive the time appointed. Appoint one, two, or three days, when he swears, and we pledge ourselves that he does not live a moment beyond the time: he will die a horrid death; his head will turn round, his face towards the back; and he will writhe in torture till he dies." The infliction of this miserable fate, some, even of the most intelligent of the Thug fraternity, declared that they had often seen. The pickaxe is, in short, the standard, round which all the gloomy family of Thug superstitions rally: it is regarded as the great source of security and prosperity:—the instrument of strangulation is held in esteem; but that of burial, in infinitely more—the Thugs think of it with enthusiasm. "Do we not," said one, interrogated by Captain Sleeman, "do we not worship it every seventh day? Is it not our standard? Is its sound ever heard, when digging the grave, by any but a Thug? And can any man even swear to a falsehood upon it?"—"How could we dig graves," asked another, "with any other instrument? This is the one appointed by Davy (the goddess), and consecrated; and we should never have survived the attempt





attempt to use any other.”—“No man,” it was added, “but a Thug, who has been a strangler, and is remarkable for his cleanliness and decorum, is permitted to carry it.”

But though the pickaxe is the great symbol of their profession, and the devout object of their care, the respect in which it is held is but one of the degrading and frightful superstitions by which these murderers steel their hearts to encounter the horrors of their wretched profession.





## CHAP. IV.

THE authority for the mode of murder practised by the Thugs is traced, like all their other usages, to the tremendous goddess whom they serve. It seems, that, in remote ages, a demon infested the earth, and devoured mankind as soon as created. The proportions of this devouring monster were so gigantic, that the water did not reach his waist in the most unfathomable parts of the ocean ; and he strode over the world unrestrained, rioting in the destruction of the human race. The world was thus kept unpeopled, until the goddess of the Thugs came to the rescue. She attacked the demon, and cut him down ; but from every drop of his blood another demon arose ; and though the goddess continued to cut down these rising demons with wonderful alacrity and scientific skill, fresh broods of demons sprung from their blood, as from that of their progenitors ; and the diabolical race consequently multiplied with fearful rapidity. The never-ending labour of cutting down demons, whose number was only increased by this operation of pruning, at length fatigued and disheartened the goddess ; she found it indis-





indispensably necessary to make a change in her tactics ;—and here the tale, which is thus far universally received, becomes subject to variations. It is admitted by all Hindoos, that the demons multiplied in the manner described, until the goddess found some means of putting a stop to this “surplus population”: but there is a difference of belief as to the mode. The orthodox opinion is, that when the goddess found the drops of blood thus rapidly passing into demons—a fact which, with all her divine attributes, it seems she only learned by experience—she hit upon a very happy expedient to prevent the blood reaching the earth, where the demoniacal conversion took place. Being furnished with a tongue of extraordinary dimensions, she, after every blow, promptly and carefully licked the blood away. A “preventive check” being thus placed upon the further propagation of demons, the goddess was enabled to destroy those previously existing, at her leisure:—such is the commonly-received account of the goddess’s dexterity and address. That of the Thugs is varied, for the purpose of affording a superhuman sanction to their mode of assassination. According to Thug mythology, the goddess, when she became embarrassed by the constant reinforcements of the demon army which accrued from her labours, relinquished all personal efforts for their suppression, and formed two men from the perspiration brushed from





from her arms. To each of these men she gave a handkerchief; how fabricated, at a time when reels and looms were not, is a question open to the discussion of the learned. With these handkerchiefs, the goddess's two lieutenants were commanded to put all the demons to death, without shedding a drop of blood. It does not appear why the goddess might not thus have plied the handkerchief herself: it may be presumed that she was too much exhausted by her previous exertions. Her commands, however, were faithfully executed; and the demons were all strangled without delay.

There is some difficulty in understanding how demons so powerful succumbed thus readily to two agents, who, though sprung from an exudation of the goddess's arms, were, as appears by the sequel of the tale, merely children of mortality: but the difficulty never seems to have occurred to the Thugs, whose faith, like that of the mass of their countrymen, is of a very unscrupulous character. The story is wound up with such poetical justice as might be expected in a Hindoo legend. The champions, having vanquished all the demons, offered, like honest men, to return the handkerchiefs; but their patroness, in the spirit of a grateful goddess, desired that they would retain them, not merely as memorials of their heroism, but as the implements of a lucrative trade in which their descendants were to labour and thrive. They were not only permitted,





permitted, but commanded, to strangle men, as they had strangled demons. They forebore, indeed, to exercise this privilege for a long period : so say the Thugs. Several generations passed before Thuggee became practised as a profession. Whether this forbearance was founded on the principle according to which a sportsman suffers game to accumulate, is not stated. The privilege slept ; but though dormant, it was not lost ; and in due time it was abundantly exercised. The lapse between the grant of the patent and the use of it might tend to raise a presumption against its having been granted ; but Hindoo casuists are not accustomed to scrutinize evidence with the severity which prevails in Westminster Hall.

Thus, according to the creed of the Thugs, did their order arise ; and thus originated their mode of operation. The assistance once afforded by the goddess in removing the bodies, and the means by which this favour was forfeited, have already been noticed.

It has been mentioned, that the high office of a strangler is not attained until after a noviciate of considerable length. When the disciple has been sufficiently prepared, or at least when he believes that the conquest of natural feeling is so far complete as to enable him to perform without shrinking that which he has learned to contemplate without horror, he applies to one of the most experienced and