CHAPTER IX

The Kinds of Food expressly forbidden to Brahmins.—Occult Rites.—
The Disgusting Rite called Sakti.

There are as regards food three things which a Brahmin must avoid with the most scrupulous care: he must not eat anything that has had life or has even contained the principle of life; he must not drink intoxicating liquors; he must not touch food that has been prepared by persons of another caste. It is no greater privation to a Brahmin to abstain from eating meat, accustomed as he is from his earliest youth to go without it, and even to look upon it as abominable food, than it is for us to refrain from eating the flesh of certain domestic animals, for which, either from natural prejudice or from its unpleasant taste, we feel a strong repugnance. Thus, when a Hindu abstains from all animal food, he is only conforming to a feeling of unconquerable repulsion, the result partly of imagination and partly of long-established custom. I once met a Brahmin who, on seeing some eggs being broken and beaten up for an omelette, immediately complained of feeling unwell, and in the course of a few moments was violently sick.

The aversion which Brahmins feel for sura-pana, or the use of intoxicating beverages—an aversion to which I have several times had occasion to call attention—springs at any rate from most commendable principles. In places where Brahmins congregate in great numbers infractions of this rule of abstinence are extremely rare, and such a thing as a drunken Brahmin is unknown. They are not, however, quite so strict on this point when they live in some isolated spot, away from the watchful eyes of their gurus. A Brahmin’s house, situated at some distance from a village in Tanjore, once caught fire, and the inhabitants of the village hastened to the spot to try and snatch what they could from the flames. Amongst the things saved were a large earthen vessel of salt pork and another containing arrack, or native rum. The proprietor felt the loss of his house much less than he did this overwhelming disclosure.
He became the laughing-stock of the neighbourhood, and felt the jeers and mockery of which he was the object so keenly that he was obliged to leave the country and hide his shame elsewhere. One may well conjecture, without doing them any injustice, that there are many other Brahmins whose delinquencies have not been brought to light by accidents of this kind. These lapses from strict adherence to the law are especially frequent in towns, where illicit pleasures are easily obtainable. More than once it has come to my knowledge that certain Brahmins were in the habit of meeting in small numbers in the houses of Sudras in whom they thought they could place confidence, there to partake in the strictest privacy of feasts from which neither intoxicating liquors nor meat were excluded. Furthermore, the Brahmins became so demoralized by these debauches that they allowed their hosts to eat with them, thus shamelessly committing a threefold breach of those laws of their caste which they are most especially enjoined to keep.

These little orgies sometimes entail very unpleasant consequences. The Sudras' wives are, of course, obliged to be in the secret, and as La Fontaine says:—

Rien ne pese tant qu'un secret;  
Le porter loin est difficile aux dames.

Hindu women are by no means exceptions to this rule. A Brahmin woman whom I knew, allowed herself to be persuaded by a Sudra woman, a friend of hers, to eat part of a stew which the latter had cooked, and she even went so far as to say she thought it excellent. A short time afterwards the two friends quarrelled, and at the end of a violent altercation the Sudra woman, to punish her adversary and silence her at the same time, publicly proclaimed the sin which the other in a moment of greediness had committed. Covered with shame and confusion at this unexpected revelation, which she found it impossible to refute, the poor Brahmin woman fled from the place in despair, vowing, too late, that she would never allow herself to be caught again.

The use of intoxicating liquors is more common than the eating of forbidden food, as it is so much less liable
to detection. At the same time, it must be admitted, it is an unheard-of thing to see an intoxicated Brahmin in the public streets. The reproach of intemperance can only be levelled at a very small number of men of low reputation, who have lost all sense of shame. One could not, with any degree of justice, say that the reproach was generally applicable to Brahmins, who are in this matter beyond even the shafts of slander itself.

The duty of punishing offences of this kind devolves upon the gurus. When in the course of their peregrinations they hear that any one has misconducted himself in such a manner, they order the culprit to appear before them; and if after due investigation his delinquency is proved, he has to listen to a severe reprimand and occasionally undergo corporal punishment. Frequently also he has to pay a heavy fine; and if the offence is a very grave one, he is put out of caste. Nevertheless, for fear lest too many persons might be inculpated, or on account of the high position of a particular delinquent, or to avoid creating a scandal, or for other similar reasons, the gurus find it advisable to shut their eyes to many peccadilloes. The gurus, too, are not always impeccable in the matter of bribes, and will often find reasons for allowing a culprit to escape who has managed to ingratiate himself with them.

I was once at Dharmapuri, a small town in the Carnatic, just at the time when a Brahmin guru was visiting that district. A person of the Brahmin caste was accused before him of breaking the rules with regard to food, and even of publicly deriding them. The accusation was a very serious one, and well substantiated; so the culprit was cited to appear, and the evidence against him was heard. The guru, convinced of the guilt of the accused, had made up his mind to break his triple cord and turn him out of caste; but the accused, on hearing of this terrible determination, showed not the smallest emotion. Without displaying the least discomfiture he advanced boldly into the midst of the assembly, and prostrating

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1 This applies equally well in the present day. Yet nobody can doubt that the number of Brahmins who infringe caste-customs in food and drink is increasing year by year.—Ed.
himself before the guru, made the following speech:—

'So you have decided, you and your assessors, to break my cord! Well, that will not be a heavy loss, as for two farthings I can get another. But what is your motive for treating me with so much severity, and for dishonouring me thus publicly? Is it because I have eaten animal food? But then a guru's justice should be meted out impartially, and punishments should be awarded without respect of persons. Why am I the only one to be accused, the only one to be punished, when there are so many others who are quite as much to blame as myself, or even more so? If I turn my eyes on one side, I see two or three among my accusers who not long since partook with me of an excellent leg of mutton. If I look on the other side, I see several who have not disdained to accept the invitation of a common Sudra friend, who treated us to an admirable chicken stew; while there are others not less to blame on this score who have not dared to put in an appearance in this assembly. Have I your permission to mention their names? I am quite ready to produce witnesses, and to substantiate my accusation.'

Struck dumb by this speech, which was delivered with the utmost confidence and imperturbable assurance, the guru began to consider what the consequences of this affair would be, and how it would end if he persisted in carrying it to its proper termination; so he put a stop to all future complications by crying out, with great presence of mind:

'Who has brought this babbler here? Do you not see that he is mad? Turn him out of the assembly at once, and let me hear no more of him.'

If these slight and rare infractions of the law, which are, after all, only weaknesses inseparable from human nature, were the only sins, they would be undeniably small indeed; but occasionally one may also come across vice and wickedness in their most hideous forms. It once came to my knowledge that men calling themselves conjurers or magicians used to attend nocturnal gatherings, which were held in a deserted spot that I knew of, there to give themselves up to indescribable orgies of debauch and intemperance.

The leader of these orgies was a Vishnavite Brahmin,
and several Sudras were initiated into the mysterious iniquities which were carried on there. They drank and ate to excess everything that is forbidden to a Hindu, not excepting even the flesh of the cow, and the abominations practised on these occasions are too disgusting to be described. They always finished up with sacrifices and displays of magic, the supposed effects of which spread fear and consternation amongst the peaceable inhabitants of the whole neighbourhood, for the superstitious terrors of the Hindu are easily awakened. People were on the point of appealing to the magistrates for protection against these diabolical assemblies, when the debauchees who composed them, seeing they were about to be discovered, left the province and never dared to appear there again.

Amongst the abominable rites practised in India is one which is only too well known; it is called sakti-puja; sakti meaning strength or power. Sometimes it is the wife of Siva to whom this sacrifice is offered; sometimes they pretend that it is in honour of some invisible power. The ceremony takes place at night with more or less secrecy. The least disgusting of these orgies are those where they confine themselves to eating and drinking everything that the custom of the country forbids, and where men and women, huddled together in indiscriminate confusion, openly and shamelessly violate the commonest laws of decency and modesty.

The Namadharis, or followers of Vishnu, are the most frequent perpetrators of these disgusting sacrifices. People of all castes, from the Brahmin to the Pariah, are invited to attend. When the company are assembled, all kinds of meat, including beef, are placed before the idol of Vishnu. Ample provision is also made of arrack, toddy and opium, and any other intoxicating drug they can lay their hands on. The whole is then offered to Vishnu. Afterwards the pujari, or sacrificer, who is generally a Brahmin, first of all tastes the various kinds of meats and liquors himself,

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1 It is more correctly described as 'the power or energy of the god as represented in some of the many female forms.' It has been estimated that of the Hindus in Bengal, about three-fourths are devoted to the worship of sakti, though the forms of worship vary greatly. In Bengal the Vamacharis observe the most disgusting rites of all.—Ed.
INTOXICATION AND INDECENCY

then gives the others permission to devour the rest. Men and women thereupon begin to eat greedily, the same piece of meat passing from mouth to mouth, each person taking a bite, until it is finished. Then they start afresh on another joint, which they gnaw in the same manner, tearing the meat out of each other's mouths. When all the meat has been consumed, intoxicating liquors are passed round, every one drinking without repugnance out of the same cup. Opium and other drugs disappear in a similar fashion. They persuade themselves that under these circumstances they do not contract impurity by eating and drinking in so revolting a manner. When they are all completely intoxicated, men and women no longer keep apart, but pass the rest of the night together, giving themselves up without restraint to the grossest immorality without any risk of disagreeable consequences. A husband who sees his wife in another man's arms cannot recall her, nor has he the right to complain; for at those times every woman becomes common property. Perfect equality exists among all castes, and the Brahmin is not of higher caste than the Pariah. The celebration of these mysterious rites may differ sometimes in outward forms, but in spirit they are always equally abominable. Under certain circumstances the principal objects which form the sacrifice to sakti are a large vessel full of native rum and a full-grown girl. The latter, stark naked, remains standing in a most indecent attitude. The goddess Sakti is evoked, and is supposed to respond to the invitation to come and take up her abode in the vessel full of rum, and also in the girl's body.

A sacrifice of flowers, incense, sandalwood, coloured rice, and a lighted lamp is then offered to these two objects; and for neiveddyaa a portion of all the viands that have been prepared. This done, Brahmans, Sudras, Pariahs, both men and women, intoxicate themselves with the rum which was offered to sakti, all drinking from the same cup in turn. To exchange pieces of the food that they are in the act of eating, and to put into one's own mouth what has just been taken from another's, are under these conditions

1 I have mentioned before that to a Hindu who has been decently brought up this mode of drinking is absolutely abhorrent.—Dubsom.
regarded as acts of virtue by the fanatics. As usual, the meeting winds up with the most revolting orgy.

Without the salutary restraint of a healthy tone of morality, how can these people be expected to fight successfully against the vehemence of their passions? And then, when they give way to unbridled licence, they think to stifle remorse by investing these horrible practices with a religious element, as if sacrilege could disguise their moral turpitude. Strange to say, it is the Brahmins, and very often the women of this caste, who are frequently the most ardent promoters of these Bacchanalian orgies. However, debauches of this kind entail such heavy expenses as fortunately to prevent their frequent recurrence.

Of course it is well known that most ancient nations had their own peculiar mysterious rites, and that very few among them failed to worship profusely in some shape or other. Greece might well feel ashamed of the depravity which pervaded the cultus of a large number of her deities. Many remains still exist, proving irrefutably that the grossest excesses defiled the temples of Venus, Ceres, Bacchus, &c., while the Persian Mitra and the Egyptian Osiris were the objects of equally impure worship.

Holy Scripture tells us something of the abominations practised by the Canaanites in honour of Baal, Baal-peor, and Moloch, which brought down upon them such terrible punishments. Thus we see that, all the world over, idolatry assumed much the same forms, for ignorance and fanaticism can have but one termination.

At the same time, the Hindus, accustomed as they are to carry everything to extremes, appear to have surpassed all the other nations of the world, both ancient and modern, in the unconscionable depravity with which so many of their religious rites are impregnated.

CHAPTER X

The Various Occupations of Brahmins.

If Brahmins kept strictly to the letter of the rules of their caste, they would live in isolated places, far from the haunts of men, where their whole lives would be spent in
BRAHMINAS AS COURTiers

religious exercises. They would perform their ablutions regularly three times a day; they would offer the sacrifice called *sraiddha* to their ancestors, a ceremony which they alone have the right to perform; they would look after their households, paying particular attention to the education of their children; and they would devote all their leisure moments to reading the Vedas and other sacred writings, to acquiring knowledge, and to meditation. But the poverty of many of their number, and the avarice and ambition which are the ruling passions of each and all, preclude the possibility of such a philosophical mode of existence.

Naturally cunning, wily, double-tongued, and servile, they turn these most undesirable qualities to account by insinuating themselves everywhere; their main object, upon which they expend the greatest ingenuity, being to gain access to the courts of princes or other people of high rank. This end achieved, they quickly gain, by their hypocritical conduct, the affection and confidence of those who have received them; and very soon the best and most lucrative posts are the reward of their pressing attentions. Thus it happens that the prime ministers of Asiatic princes are almost always Brahmins. Shut up in their palaces, and plunged in voluptuous idleness, the nominal rulers rarely give a thought to anything beyond the means of increasing their enjoyments, creating fresh amusements, and giving new zest to their passions by ever-varying means. The welfare of their people and the government of their country are very secondary considerations, if not matters of indifference. Women, baths, perfumes, obscene dances, filthy songs, each in turn excite their senses. Only flatterers of the lowest type and despicable procurers are allowed to come near them, and these are always ready to applaud the dissolute vagaries of their master.

That the Brahmins, thus raised to positions of importance at the courts of these slothful and useless princes, do not forget their relatives and friends, can well be imagined. Indeed they usually divide the most lucrative of the subordinate posts among them. Thus surrounded by creatures upon whom they can rely and who can also rely upon them, a tacit collusion is established, by means of which each one
can, in his own department, enrich himself with remarkable rapidity, by carrying on unchecked a system of injustice, fraud, dishonesty, and oppression—qualities in which most individuals of this caste have been thoroughly well trained.

Better educated, more cunning, more keen-witted, with greater talents for intrigue than other Hindus, Brahmans become necessary even to the Mussulman princes themselves, who cannot govern without their assistance. The Mahomedan rulers generally make a Brahmin their secretary of state, through whose hands all the state correspondence must pass. Brahmans also frequently fill the positions of secretaries and writers to the governors of provinces and districts. Generally speaking, the Mahomedans of India are so ignorant of the first principles of public administration, and so utterly unacquainted with the simplest rules of arithmetic, that they are obliged to have recourse to the Brahmans for everything that requires enlightenment and knowledge. In return, the latter know how to copy only too faithfully the harsh and tyrannical methods of the Mahomedans. When it is a question of plundering the people or extorting money from them, they employ a thousand vexatious means, sometimes even going so far as to resort to torture. But they rarely obtain the same hold over the Mahomedan princes that they do over those of their own religion. With the former they remain at their posts until by endless peculation and extortion, either authorized or tacitly allowed, they contrive to amass large fortunes. But the moment their wealth becomes a notorious fact, that moment their disgrace is certain. They in their turn are imprisoned, tortured, and forced to disgorge the riches that they have so unjustly acquired. However, some of them, foreseeing the fate that must befall the servants of such masters, keep a sharp look-out, and place the fruit of their plunder in security, either by keeping a part of it in some secret hiding-place, or by sending it away to some country beyond the tyrant's reach.

The Brahmans have also been clever enough to work their way into favour with the great European Power that now governs India. They occupy the highest and most lucrative posts in the different administrative boards and Government offices, as well as in the judicial courts of
the various districts. In fact there is no branch of public administration in which they have not made themselves indispensable. Thus it is nearly always Brahmins who hold the posts of sub-collectors of revenue, writers, copyists, translators, treasurers, book-keepers, &c. It is especially difficult to do without their assistance in all matters connected with accounts, as they have a remarkable talent for arithmetic. I have seen some men in the course of a few minutes work out, to the last fraction, long and complicated calculations, which would have taken the best accountants in Europe hours to get through.

Furthermore, their perfect knowledge of native opinion and of the ways in which it may be guided, to say nothing of the influence which they exercise over public feeling by the prerogatives of their birth, are quite sufficient reasons to account for the readiness with which their services are accepted. In fact, the veneration and respect with which their fellow-countrymen regard them shed, in the opinion of the vulgar, a kind of reflected glory and dignity on the different Government offices in which they occupy subordinate positions. But woe to the European head of the office, who does not keep the strictest watch over the conduct of these said subordinates, or places implicit confidence in them! He will soon find himself the victim of his own negligence, with his position seriously compromised. I have known many Europeans holding most distinguished and lucrative appointments end by losing their reputation, their honour, their position, and their fortune, all because they left too much in the hands of the Brahmins under them, for whose misdeeds the Government held them responsible. In vain did these high officials exhaust all their resources against the authors of their ruin; imprisonment and punishment were equally ineffectual. Most of these peccant subordinates would rather die in irons than restore one farthing of their ill-gotten gains.

One can well imagine that when Brahmins are launched in the turmoil of public affairs they soon lose sight of the religious observances of their caste. Occupied with the

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1 The proportion of Brahmins in Government employ is still large; for it is the Brahmins who, more than any others, have availed themselves of the benefits of English education.—Ed.
government of a kingdom or a province, they have neither the time nor even the wish to give themselves up to the exercise of their interminable religious rites. As, however, they are in positions of authority and can dispense or withhold favours at their pleasure, no one dares to call attention to their negligence. It is sufficient if they conform in the more important matters. Their dignity releases them, without entailing disagreeable consequences, from the necessity of attending to minor details. Firmly convinced as they are of the truth of their favourite dictum that to fill one's belly one must play many parts, Brahmins are clever at turning their hands to many ways of earning a livelihood. Some take up medicine, and it is said with considerable success. Others become soldiers. In the Mahratta armies there are many Brahmins; but I cannot believe that a military force composed of men of this caste could ever be very formidable. Bravery and courage are foreign to their nature, and their education would not tend to foster these soldier-like qualities. Nevertheless, there have been several Brahmin generals whose military careers have not been without glory. Many Brahmins who are in trade, especially in the province of Gujerat, are considered excellent men of business. Those, however, who choose this walk in life are rather looked down upon by the rest of their caste, not so much on account of their profession as merchants or shopkeepers, but because of the very small amount of attention which they pay to their caste customs and observances. Trade in itself is not considered at all degrading to a Brahmin, and men of this caste who are engaged in it are to be met with everywhere; only there are many things which Brahmins are not allowed to sell, and which consequently they cannot include in their operations, such, for instance, as red cloths, the seeds and oil of sesameum, husked rice, liquids of every kind, salt, perfumes, fruits, vegetables, poisons, honey, butter, milk, sugar, &c.

One almost invariably finds that subordinate collectors of revenue, custom-house officers, writers, book-keepers, village schoolmasters, and astronomers are Brahmins. They are very useful as messengers, because they are never detained anywhere; and it is for this reason that many of the large merchants, living in provinces governed by
native princes, employ them as coolies or porters, and pay them very highly, because custom-house officers have orders to let everything that they carry pass through free. This calling, though arduous, is by no means the least lucrative. Those who follow it travel almost free of expense, for along every main road there are numerous hostelries called chutrams, where Brahmans alone have the right to lodge, and where they are fed gratuitously. The revenues which these establishments derive from their landed property, and the abundant alms which they receive, amply compensate the persons who manage them, and who are Brahmans also, for the expenses entailed by the hospitality which they extend to their brethren.

The great facility with which they can everywhere introduce themselves under all sorts of disguises, without exciting the smallest suspicion, and the adroitness with which they can play all sorts of parts and extricate themselves from the most difficult positions, render them peculiarly well fitted to act as spies in time of war, always supposing that you can be sure that they are not serving both parties, a circumstance which often happens without any one being the wiser. Poverty or self-interest sometimes reduces them to occupy positions which are very derogatory to their illustrious birth. Thus sometimes they are seen acting as dancing-masters to courtesans attached to the service of the temples. Others become cooks; but when they are reduced to this latter calling, and serve masters of inferior caste, those latter undertake never to touch the vessels which their cook uses in preparing the food. The cook will serve the food when it is ready, but will not remove what is left after the meal is over. What the Brahmin cook prepares and touches is pure for his master, but what the master touches is impure and would defile the cook. Some even demean themselves so far as to be washermen and water-carriers for persons of their own caste, and even undertake to perform the very meanest requirements of domestic service.

Superstition, which exercises such an important influence throughout the whole of India, also affords great resources to those in search of a means of livelihood. An illness, a fall, a law-suit, a fresh undertaking, a newly built house,
a bad omen, an unpleasant dream, and a thousand other similar things, are all occasions on which their credulous neighbours come running to them for advice, and for which they make them pay as dearly as possible. The Hindu Almanac, about the composition of which I have already spoken, has always an answer or a remedy for everything. Brahmins are never at a loss for an answer, no matter on what point they may be consulted. Clever charlatans that they are, they make their various calculations with the utmost gravity; and to give greater weight to their words they bewilder their clients with stories invented on the spur of the moment, which they tell with portentous emphasis. For, I repeat again, as arch-impostors they are absolutely unrivalled. Every Hindu is an adept at disguising the truth; but on this point the Brahmin far excels every other caste. Indeed, this vice has become so deeply engrained, that, far from being ashamed of it, they regard it on the contrary as a subject for exultation and vanity. I once had a long conversation with two of those Brahmins who gain their living at the expense of the credulous public, and they ended by agreeing with me as to the superiority of the Christian religion over the absurdities of their own theogony. 'All that you say is reasonable and true,' they repeated several times. 'But then,' I replied, 'if all that I say is reasonable and true, it follows that all that you say to the people must be false and ridiculous.' 'That also is true,' they admitted; 'but these lies comprise our livelihood. If we were to expound to the people only such truths as you have just been telling us, how should we obtain the wherewithal to fill our stomachs?'

Then again, flattery, in the art of which Brahmins are also past-masters, is also a great source of profit to them. However proud and haughty they may be, they never find any difficulty in grovelling, in the most humiliating manner, at the feet of any one from whom they think they can gain some advantage. They attach themselves like leeches to the great merchants or other rich individuals, and are never tired of playing the rôle of admirers and flatterers. They know full well that to appeal to a native's vanity is to attack him at his weakest point; and naturally they turn this knowledge to the best possible account. The
grossest flattery, verging on the absurd, is what is most pleasing to the ears of their modest patrons, and is the surest way of loosening the latter’s purse-strings. But the most inexhaustible mine of wealth to Brahmins is their religion. As chief priests they exercise the highest functions, and consequently derive almost all the profit. In certain famous temples, such as Tirupati, Rameswaram, Jaganath (Puri) and others, thousands of Brahmins live on the revenues with which these temples are endowed.

Those who cannot find means of existence in their native country go and seek their fortunes elsewhere, often journeying as much as two hundred miles from their families. Expatriation is a very small matter to them, and they never hesitate to accept it if there is anything to be gained by it.

CHAPTER XI

Religious Tolerance amongst the Brahmins.—Their Indifference with regard to their own Religion.—Their Sublime Ideas of the Deity.—
A Comparison between them and the Greek Philosophers.—The State of Christianity.—The Political Intolerance and Ignorant Presumption of Brahmins.

I have already said that the general feeling amongst Brahmins is that all the Hindu deities ought to receive an equal share of attention and worship, since they are not really antagonistic one to another. The quarrels and wars which erstwhile took place between these deities were never of long duration, and have in no wise prevented their living since then in perfect amity together. I have also remarked that in consequence of this the greater number of the Brahmins strongly disapprove of the numerous sectaries who devote themselves to the worship of one particular deity and pay little or no attention to the others, on the ground that they are inferior and subordinate to the special deity which they prefer. But are these self-same Brahmins really so devoted to the religion of their country and to the worship of these deities? Well, though this assertion may appear paradoxical, I should say that, of all Hindus, they care the least and have the smallest amount of faith in them. It is by no means uncommon
to hear them speaking of their gods in terms of the most utter contempt. When they are displeased with their idols they do not scruple to upbraid them fiercely to their faces, at the same time heaping the grossest insults upon them, with every outward gesture and sign of anger and resentment. In fact, there is absolutely no limit to the blasphemies, curses, and abuse which they hurl at them under these circumstances.

There is a well-known Hindu proverb which says, 'A temple mouse fears not the gods.' This exactly applies to the Brahmans, who enter their temples without showing the slightest sign of serious thought or respect for the divinities who are enshrined in them. Indeed, they often seem to choose these particular places to quarrel and to fight in. Even while performing their numerous religious fooleries, their behaviour shows no indication of fervour or real devotion. As a matter of fact, their religious devotion increases or diminishes in proportion to the amount of profit they expect to make out of it, and it also depends on the amount of publicity surrounding them. Those deities who do not contribute towards the welfare of their votaries here below only receive very careless and perfunctory worship.

The histories of their gods are so ridiculous and so ex-

1 Any one who is familiar with the vernaculars of India knows that they contain an immense number of terms of abuse, which are so extraordinary, and so abominably obscene, that it would be impossible to find their counterpart in any Billingsgate of Europe. However, disgusting expressions are so greatly to the taste of the Hindus, that, not content with their own well-endowed vocabulary, they carefully learn and appropriate all the bad language that they hear in their quarrels with the foreigners who live amongst them. When Hindus are angry with their gods, which is usually the case when they do not receive a favourable answer to their prayers, one may see them entering the temples with many outward expressions of rage and mortification, and exhausting their vocabulary in curses and reproaches hurled against their unhappy gods, whom they openly accuse of impotence and fraud. In their ordinary conversation they often use most irreverent expressions regarding their gods, one of the least obnoxious being, 'If I do not keep my word may the same punishment fall upon me as I should deserve if I had seduced the wife of my god.' If a person of high position has a grievance against the gods, he sometimes revenges himself by having the doors of their temples stopped up with thorns and brambles, so that no one can enter to worship or to offer sacrifices.—Dubois.
travagant that it is not surprising that the Brahmins are at heart conscious of the absurdity of worshipping such beings. There is, therefore, very little danger incurred in ridiculing the gods in the presence of Brahmins. Very often they agree with the scoffer, and even enlarge upon what he has said. Many Brahmins can repeat by heart songs and verses that treat with very scanty respect the divinities which they worship so ostentatiously in public, while their audience listen without any sign of disapproval. Brahmins have no fear of such conduct calling forth either reproof or punishment. The Sudras, who are more simple and credulous than the Brahmins, would not be so indulgent under similar circumstances, and it would be particularly imprudent to ridicule any particular god of theirs in the presence of those who are specially devoted to him.

There is another factor which must be taken into account in estimating the scanty veneration which they pay their gods, to whom nevertheless self-interest, education, custom, and respect for public opinion oblige them to display outward respect; and that is the clear and precise knowledge which most of them must have gleaned from their books of a 'God who is the Author and Creator of all things; eternal, immaterial, omnipresent, independent, in all things blessed, exempt from pain and care; the spirit of truth, the source of all justice; governor, dispensator, and regulator of all things; perfect in wisdom and knowledge; without shape or countenance, without limit, without nature, without name, without caste, without parentage; of an absolute purity which excludes all passion, all bias, all compromise.'

All these qualifications and many others which are not less characteristic are translated literally from their books, and are used by Brahmins to explain the Supreme Being, to whom they sometimes give the name of Parabrahma, Paramatma, &c. Is it credible that, knowing this, they can seriously bestow the title of gods on the almost countless number of animate and inanimate things which form the chief objects of the vulgar cult? It follows, therefore, that they ought to confine their worship to this supreme and unique Being, of whom they still retain such a sublime perception. There appears to be no doubt whatever that
their Brahmin ancestors worshipped only this one Supreme Being; but with the lapse of time they fell victims to idolatry and superstition, and, shutting their eyes to the light that they possessed, stifled the voice of conscience. Was it not for the same reason that God pronounced that condemnation of which the Apostle St. Paul speaks in the Epistle to the Romans against certain philosophers of his time, who knowingly rejected the truth? Is not this the reason why the Brahmins of to-day are given over, like those philosophers of old, to all the sins of a perverse will and to the many kinds of vice and corruption with which they are imbued, and from which other castes are more or less exempt, seeing that they possess stronger faith?

It is true that Brahmins are not the only philosophers who have been induced by purely worldly considerations to hide the greatest and most important of truths from their fellow-men. They are only following in the steps of the philosophers of ancient Greece. Even Socrates, the greatest of them all, whose ideas on the subject of the Deity were almost as perfect as those which have been given us by revelation, never dared to avow them openly: and, although he thoroughly recognized all the absurdities of paganism, he maintained the principle that every one should follow the religion of his country.

Plato, his disciple, who was so distressed that Greece and all the other countries of the world should be given over to a false and dissolute religion, and who also, like Socrates, believed in the true God, said that these were truths which should not be disclosed to the common people.

The whole world, as Bossuet says, was plunged at that time in the same error; and truth, though known to a few, remained captive and dared not appear in the light of day. Those who knew and believed in the true God thought it sufficient to worship Him in secret, and held that there was no harm in paying outward respect to idols with the rest of the world. Revelation had not yet purified their ideas on this subject. The truth was known only in one very small corner of the world. The worshippers of the true God were only to be seen in small numbers in the temple of Jerusalem.
TOLERANCE FOR OTHER RELIGIONS

But there is one essential difference between these ancient philosophers and the modern Hindus: the former were few in number, and lacked the necessary means and influence which would have enabled them to make an impression on the multitude and successfully combat the errors into which it had fallen; whereas the Brahmins, owing to their numbers and to the high estimation in which they are held by the public, could easily, if they wished, and if their interests and their vices were not opposed thereto, overthrow the entire edifice of idolatry throughout the whole of India, and substitute the knowledge and worship of the true God, of whom they already possess so perfect an idea.

Brahmins do not confine themselves to professing devotion to all the Hindu deities. Though the rules of their caste forbid their indulging in any outward signs of worship to the gods of other nations, one of the principles taught in their books and recognized by them is that, among the many different religions to be found throughout the world, and which they call Anantaveda, there is not one that should be despised and condemned. They might even entertain some feeling of respect for Mahomedanism, encumbered though it is with so much outward form and ceremony, and with the many superstitions with which the Indian Mahomedans have invested it, had not the harsh and oppressive rule of the latter, as well as their open contempt for the civil and religious institutions of the rest of the inhabitants, made their persons and their religion equally odious to the Hindus.

The Christian religion commands the approbation of Brahmins in several respects. They admire its pure and holy morality; but, at the same time, they hold that some of its precepts are beyond man’s power of fulfilment, and that its sublimely high standard of morality is only suitable for persons leading a contemplative life, who have retired from the world and are consequently sheltered from its temptations. On the other hand, as Christianity condemns most of their customs and superstitions, it has on that account become most hateful to them. The Hindu who embraces it is not considered to belong to the same nation as themselves, because his new religion forces him
to reject those customs and practices which they regard as
the link binding them all indissolubly together.

However, it must be confessed that if, in these latter
days, idolatrous Hindus have shown a greater aversion to
the Christian religion as they became better acquainted
with Europeans, the result must be attributed solely to
the bad conduct of the latter. How could the Hindus
think well of this holy religion, when they see those who
have been brought up in it, and who come from a country
where it is the only one that is publicly professed, openly
violating its precepts and often making its doctrines the
subject of sarcasm and silly jests? It is curious to note
that the Brahmin does not believe in his religion, and yet
he outwardly observes it; while the Christian believes in
his, and yet he does not outwardly observe it. What a sad
and shameful contrast!

Before the character and behaviour of Europeans became
well known to these people, it seemed possible that Chris-
tianity might take root amongst them. Little by little it
was overcoming the numberless obstacles which the pre-
judices of the country continually placed in its way. Several
missionaries, animated by a truly apostolic zeal, had pene-
trated into the interior of the country, and there, by con-
forming scrupulously to all the usages and customs of the
Brahmins—in their clothing, food, conversation, and general
conduct in life—had managed to win the attention of the
people, and by dint of perseverance had succeeded in
gaining a hearing. Their high character, talents, and
virtues, and above all their perfect disinterestedness,
obtained for them the countenance and support of even
the native princes, who, agreeably surprised at the novelty
of their teaching, took these extraordinary men under
their protection, and gave them liberty to preach their
religion and make what proselytes they could.

It is a well-known fact that Robert à Nobilibus, a nephew
of the famous Cardinal Bellarmin, and founder of the
Mission at Madura, where he died at the beginning of the
last century, converted nearly 100,000 idolaters in that
very kingdom. His contemporary, the Jesuit Brito, bap-
tized 30,000 heathens in the country of the Maravas,
where he finally gained the crown of martyrdom. The
missionaries scattered about the other provinces of the Peninsula also laboured hard, and with the greatest success, to extend Christianity amongst the Hindus. The French Mission at Pondicherry numbered 60,000 native Christians in the province of Arcot, and was daily making further progress when the conquest of the country by Europeans took place—a disastrous event as far as the advance of Christianity was concerned. Having witnessed the immoral and disorderly conduct of the Europeans who then overran the whole country, the Hindus would hear no more of a religion which appeared to have so little influence over the behaviour of those professing it, and who had been brought up in its tenets; and their prejudice against Christianity has gone on increasing steadily day by day, as the people became more familiar with Europeans, until it finally received its death-blow. For it is certainly a fact that for the last sixty years very few converts have been made in India. Those still remaining (and their number is daily diminished by apostasy) are mostly the descendants of the original converts made by the Jesuit missionaries. About eighty years ago there must have been at least 1,200,000 native Christians in the Peninsula, while now, at the very utmost, they amount to but one-half of that number.

This holy religion, which, when it was first introduced into India about 300 years ago, had only such obstacles as indifference or deep-rooted superstition to contend with, is now looked upon with unconquerable aversion. A respectable Hindu who was asked to embrace the Christian religion, would look upon the suggestion either as a joke, or else as an insult of the deepest dye. To such an extreme is this hatred now carried in some parts, that were a Hindu of good repute to be on intimate terms with Christians, he would not dare own it in public.

A Hindu who embraces Christianity nowadays must make up his mind to lose everything that makes life pleasant. He is henceforth an outcast from society. He must renounce his patrimony, his right to inherit, his father, mother, wife, children, and friends. He is abandoned and shunned by every one.

1 The law now recognizes a convert's right to his share of the family property.—Ed.
Europeans should indeed blush and take shame to themselves when they see to what depths of degradation and abasement the religion of their fathers has sunk in this country through the misconduct and bad example of their fellows.

But to return to the matter in hand: many people have attributed to narrowmindedness and intolerance the excessive care which Brahmins take to exclude strangers from their temples and religious ceremonies. For my part, I think that their only motive is to secure themselves from the approach of men who, from the way in which they live, and from the clothes which they wear, are in their eyes in a perpetual state of defilement. In the course of my travels, chance has sometimes brought me to the door, or into the enclosure, of one of their large temples, just when a crowd had assembled to witness some solemn ceremony or procession, and giving way to curiosity, I have stopped to look on at my leisure. On such occasions the Brahmins themselves have sometimes invited me to enter their temple, being satisfied as to my manner of living and conduct; an honour which, out of respect to my calling, I always felt bound to decline.

When I had to build or restore a church, it was very often from Brahmins that I obtained the site and the necessary materials; and when I did occasionally meet with opposition in the public discharge of my religious duties, it was never due to Brahmins, but to fanatical sectaries, to religious mendicants, and to other vagabonds who are always wandering about the country.

But if Brahmins cannot with any justice be accused of intolerance in the matter of religion, the same can certainly not be said in regard to their civil usages and customs. On these points they are utterly unreasonable. We have already seen many proofs of this in the preceding chapters, and what I am now about to add will form a fitting sequel. It is part of their principles to avoid and despise strangers.

1 In his *Letters on the State of Christianity in India* the Abbé goes into the whole of this question at great length; but he ascribes to Brahminical influence, rather than to Anglo-Indian immorality, the chief cause of 'the impossibility of making real converts to Christianity among the natives of India.'—Ed.
The signs of affection, friendship, and even respect which they sometimes show them are only hypocritical, their motive being entirely that of self-interest. If a European were to come and tell me that he had found amongst the Hindus a really disinterested friend, I should without hesitation predict, while pitying his simplicity and excess of confidence, that sooner or later his pretended friend would deceive and betray him.

Being fully persuaded of the superlative merits of their own manners and customs, the Hindus think those of other people barbarous and detestable, and quite incompatible with real civilization. This ridiculous pride and these absurd prejudices have always been so deeply ingrained in them, that not one of the great dynastic changes that have taken place in India in modern times has been able to effect the smallest change in their mode of thinking and acting. Though they have had to submit to various conquerors who have proved themselves to be their superiors in courage and bravery, yet, in spite of this, they have always considered themselves infinitely their superiors in the matter of civilization.

The Mahomedans, who can tolerate no laws, no customs, and no religion but their own, used every advantage which conquest gave them in a vain attempt to force their religion on the people who had succumbed to them almost without resistance. But these same Hindus, who did not dare to complain when they saw their wives, their children, and everything they held most dear carried off by these fierce conquerors, their country devastated by fire and sword, their temples destroyed, their idols demolished; these same Hindus, I say, only displayed some sparks of energy when it became a question of changing their customs for those of their oppressors. Ten centuries of Mahomedan rule, during which time the conquerors have tried alternately cajolery and violence in order to establish their own faith and their own customs amongst the conquered, have not sufficed to shake the steadfast constancy of the native inhabitants. Bribe of dignities and honours, and the fear of annoyance and loss of position, have had but a slight effect on them, and that confined to a few Brahmins. Indeed, the dominant race has had to yield, and has even
been forced to adopt some of the religious and civil practices of the conquered people.

It is true that the tyrannical way in which the Mahomedans have always governed this mild and gentle people was not calculated to conciliate them; but perhaps the time is not far distant when the Hindus may see themselves delivered from the iron yoke which has weighed so long upon them. As a rule they care little for the troubles and ills of this life, but it would be difficult for them to forget all the miseries that their inhuman masters have heaped upon them.

The Brahmins in particular cherish an undying hatred against the Mahomedans. The reason of this is that the latter think so lightly of the pretensions of these so-called gods of the earth; and, above all, the Mahomedans do not scruple to display hearty contempt for their ceremonies and customs generally. Besides, the haughty Mussulmans can vie with them in pride and insolence. Yet there is this difference: the arrogance of a Mussulman is based only on the political authority with which he is invested, or on the eminence of the rank that he occupies; whereas the Brahmin’s superiority is inherent in himself, and it remains intact, no matter what his condition in life may be. Rich or poor, unfortunate or prosperous, he always goes on the principle engrained in him that he is the most noble, the most excellent, and the most perfect of all created beings, that all the rest of mankind are infinitely beneath him, and that there is nothing in the world so sublime or so admirable as his customs and practices.

With regard to any special exhibitions of wisdom, particularly in the province of learning, it would be impossible to persuade Brahmins that there are men outside their caste who are capable of disputing the first place with them. As for the industrial or aesthetic arts, they look upon them as beneath their attention. Probably the gross ignorance of the greater number of the Mahomedan natives of India, who are not even capable of drawing up their own almanac, may have helped to contribute to the good opinion that Brahmins have of themselves; but, on the other hand, if the Mahomedans had any honesty of feeling at all, would they not drop some of this ridiculous boasting,
considering the immense and incontestable superiority that the many Europeans who live in this country have over them? The Brahmins, on the other hand, far from accepting this superiority, scornfully repudiate anything that they hear in regard to the ingenious contrivances and useful discoveries which have made such giant strides in Europe of late years. Nothing that has not been discovered by Brahmins, and nothing that is not to be found in their books, would be considered worthy of one moment's attention on their part. You may often meet with men of the Brahmin caste who, from some interested motive or other, have learnt European languages and understand them thoroughly, but you never find in their hands a book written in one of these languages, and no one could ever persuade them that such a book contained anything useful which they did not already know, or which was not to be found in one of their books. No doubt frank and friendly relations between them and educated Europeans may in time overcome this absurd and inexplicable perverseness; but nothing leads one to hope that they will ever seek to establish such relations.¹

How, indeed, could a Brahmin or any other Hindu have any real feelings of friendship or esteem for Europeans so long as the latter continue to eat the flesh of the sacred cow, which a Hindu considers a much more heinous offence than eating human flesh, so long as he sees them with Pariahs as domestic servants, and so long as he knows that they have immoral relations with women of that despised caste? He, it must be remembered, considers himself defiled and obliged to purify himself by bathing if so much as the shadow of one of these Pariahs is thrown across him. How, indeed, could he feel well disposed towards Europeans when he sees them give way without shame or remorse to drunkenness, which to him is the most disgusting of vices, and which, were he to be but once publicly convicted of it, would bring upon him the most serious consequences? How can he respect Europeans when he sees their wives on terms of the most intimate familiarity with their husbands, being equally intemperate, and eating,

¹ The spread of English education during the last sixty years has certainly brought about an improvement in this direction.—Ed.
drinking, laughing, and joking with other men, and, above all, dancing with them: he, in whose presence a wife dare not even sit, and to whom it is inconceivable that any woman, unless she be a concubine or a prostitute, could even think of indulging in such pastimes? How, again, could he mix with Europeans when he sees their clothing, which in shape alone seems to him to savour of indecency by showing too much of the human form, and of which so many articles, such as shoes, boots, gloves, are made from the skins of animals: he, who cannot understand how any decent man could handle, wear, or even touch these remains of dead animals without shuddering with disgust?

CHAPTER XII

The Morality of Brahmins.—Their Deceit and Dissimulation.—Their Want of Filial Devotion.—Their Incontinence.—Causes of their Depravity.—Unnatural Offences.—Outward Decency.—The Chastity of their Women.—Brahmin Methods of Revenge.—Brahmin Selfishness.

But are the Brahmins, who are so easily shocked at the sins and vices of others—are they themselves exempt from all human weaknesses? Are their morals irreproachable? Oh, far from it! My pen would refuse to describe all their wrong-doings; but, so far as is possible, I will try to give a clear and impartial sketch of them.

I think that we may take as their greatest vices the untrustworthiness, deceit, and double-dealing which I have so often had occasion to mention, and which are common to all Hindus. It is quite impossible to fathom their minds and discover what they really mean; more impossible, indeed, than with any other race. He would indeed be a fool who relied on their promises, protestations, or oaths, if it were to their interest to break them. All the same, I do not think that these vices are innate in them. It must be remembered that they have always been until quite recently under the yoke of masters who had recourse to all sorts of artifices to oppress and despoil them. The timid Hindu could think of no better expedient with which to defend himself than to meet ruse with ruse, dissimulation
with dissimulation, and fraud with fraud. The prolonged use of weapons for which excuse may be found in their natural desire to resist the oppression of their rulers, ended by becoming a habit which it is now impossible for them to get rid of. An almost unconquerable propensity to theft is also to be noticed amongst the Hindus. They never let slip an opportunity of stealing, unless they think they are likely to be found out. With them honesty is always secondary to their own personal interest. The natural sentiments of filial respect and devotion, the foundation of all other virtues and the first link in the social chain, exercise very little influence over a Brahmin’s children. The outward show of love and respect that they occasionally make is purely formal, and means nothing.

Young children will obey their father, because they fear punishment if they do not; but they will overwhelm their mother with abuse, and will insult her grossly, even going so far at times as to strike her. When they grow older they fail to respect even their father, and it often happens that he is obliged to give way to his sons, who have made themselves masters of the house. Strange to say, nowhere are parents fonder of their children than they are in India; but this fondness usually degenerates into weakness. If the children are good, they are extravagantly praised; if they are naughty, their parents show the utmost ingenuity in finding excuses for them. The mild punishments that their naughtiness or disobedience brings down upon them invariably err on the side of leniency. The parents do not dare to whip them or scold them sharply, or even inflict any punishment that they would be likely to feel. The father and mother content themselves with making feeble remonstrances about their bad behaviour, and if these produce no effect, they leave them to grow up in their evil ways. The few sensible parents who show more firmness and severity with their children are met with a show of temper. Sons do not hesitate to resist the parental authority, and threaten to escape it by running away and living elsewhere. This threat rarely fails to produce the desired effect; the parents’ severity melts away and they become passive witnesses of the disorderly conduct of their sons, who, encouraged by this first victory, end by
becoming absolute masters of the house. One must, however, do them the justice to say that, after having thus gained the mastery over their parents, they take great care of them, as a general rule, and see that they want for nothing in their old age. But I fancy that in acting thus they are moved less by filial affection than by considerations of what the world will say. In the case of such spoilt children, subjected as they are from their earliest youth to influences which prematurely develop the latent germs of passion and vice, the knowledge of evil always comes before the first dawning of reason. At the time of their lives when, according to the laws of nature, the passions should remain unawakened, it is not at all unusual to find children of both sexes familiar with words and actions which are revolting to modesty. The instincts which are excited at an early age by the nudity in which they remain till they are seven or eight years old, the licentious conversation that they are always hearing around them, the lewd songs and obscene verses that their parents delight in teaching them as soon as they begin to talk, the disgusting expressions which they learn and use to the delight of those who hear them, and who applaud such expressions as witticisms; these are the foundations on which the young children's education is laid, and such are the earliest impressions which they receive.

Of course it is unnecessary to say that, as they get older, incontinence and all its attendant vices increase at the same time. It really seems as if most of the religious and civil institutions of India were only invented for the purpose of awakening and exciting passions towards which they have already such a strong natural tendency. The shameless stories about their deities, the frequent recurrence of special feast-days which are celebrated everywhere, the allegorical meaning of so many of their everyday customs and usages, the public and private buildings which are to be met with everywhere bearing on their walls some disgusting obscenity, the many religious services in which the principal part is played by prostitutes, who often make even the temples themselves the scene of their abominable debauchery; all these things seem to be calculated to excite the lewd imagination of the inhabitants of
this tropical country and give them a strong impetus towards libertinism.

In order to prevent the consequences of this precocious sensuality, parents must hasten to marry their children as early as possible. Yet marriage under these circumstances does not always prove a very powerful restraint. Nothing is more common than for a married man to keep one or more concubines away from his home, in a separate establishment, according as his pecuniary circumstances permit. This state of affairs is particularly common in large towns, where it is so much easier to keep it a secret from the legitimate wife, and thus avoid the domestic quarrels and dissensions which are the natural consequences. Nevertheless, even in the country, the jealousy of a wife is rarely a hindrance to a husband's profligacy. She may try in vain to bring him back by remonstrances and threats; in vain she may leave her home and take refuge with her parents. Her faithless husband recalls her and maybe swears to behave better in future. But she is soon deceived again! She soon finds herself deserted once more; and finally she must perforce resign herself to seeing, hearing, and suffering everything without making any further complaint.

And after all, is it surprising that libertinism and all its consequences prevail in a country where the passions have so many incentives and such ample opportunities of satisfaction? Look at the crowd of widows in the prime of life who are forbidden to remarry, and who are only too ready to yield to the temptations by which they are assailed. Modesty and virtue place no restrictions on them; their only fear is that their misconduct may be found out. Consequently, abortion is their invariable resource to prevent such a contingency, and they practise it without the slightest scruple or remorse. There is not a woman amongst them who does not know how to bring it about. This odious crime, so revolting to all natural feeling, is of no importance in the eyes of the Hindus. According to their view, to destroy a being that has never seen the light is a lesser evil than that a woman should be dishonoured. The crimes of these unnatural mothers do not always, however, go unpunished; many of them fall victims to
the violent remedies which they employ to get rid of their shame. But should these remedies fail in having the desired effect, and the women be no longer able to conceal their condition, they give out that they are going to make a pilgrimage to Benares, which is a very favourite form of devotion amongst Brahmins of both sexes. Then having chosen a discreet companion in whom they can confide, they start on their journey; but the supposed pilgrimage comes to an end in a neighbouring village, at the house of some relative or friend, who helps them to live in seclusion until such time as the child shall be born. They then hand over the result of their misconduct to any one who will take charge of it, and return to the bosom of their family.

Besides these sources of depravity which are common to all castes, there are a great many others peculiar to the Brahmins. Many of them possess abominable books in which the most filthy and disgusting forms of debauchery are systematically described and taught. These books also treat of such matters as the art of giving variety to sensual pleasures, the decoction of beverages calculated to excite the passions, or renew them when exhausted. They also contain recipes for philtres, which are supposed to have the property of inspiring unholy love. The courtesans of the country often have recourse to these potions in the hope of retaining the affections of those whom they have enslaved, mixing them secretly in the food of their victims. I am told that the ingredients of which these potions are composed would inspire the greatest libertine with disgust and horror for his mistress if it ever came to his knowledge.

To have any connexion with a courtesan, or with an unmarried person, is not considered a form of wickedness in the eyes of the Brahmins. These men, who look upon the violation of any trivial custom as a heinous sin, see no harm in the most outrageous and licentious excesses. It was principally for their use that the dancers and prostitutes who are attached to the service of the temples were originally entertained, and they may often be heard to intone the following scandalous line:

_Vasya darisanam punyam papa nasanam!_
which means, 'To have intercourse with a prostitute is a virtue which takes away sin.'

Adultery on the part of a woman, though it is considered shameful and is condemned in Brahminical law, is punished with much less severity in their caste than in many others. So long as it is kept a secret it is regarded as a matter of very small importance. It is the publicity of it which is the sin. If it becomes known the husbands are the first to contradict any gossip that may be current in order to avoid any scandal or disagreeable consequences.

However, the shame and dishonour which are the inevitable consequences of sins of this nature, and which are also reflected on the families of the culprits, serve as a check to a great many and keep them in the path of virtue. Those who succumb to an irresistible temptation are generally clever enough to invent expedients to hide their weakness from spiteful eyes. But woe to those who have been so imprudent or so careless as to fail to hide their misdeeds. There is no insult that charitable persons of their own sex will not heap upon them, and if the least quarrel arises amongst them this would be the first thing brought up against them. Their confusion under these circumstances proves a warning to others to be more circumspect, or, at any rate, to save appearances at all costs.

But the depravity of the Hindus does not end here. There are depths of wickedness a thousand times more horrible to which the greater number of them are not ashamed to descend.

In Europe, where the Christian religion has inspired a salutary horror for certain unnatural offences, one would find it difficult to believe the stories which show to what lengths these disgusting vices are carried by the greater number of heathens and Mahomedans, to whom they have become a sort of second nature. We all know how greatly the Arabs and their neighbouring tribes are addicted to them. Kaempfer says that in Japan there are public establishments for this purpose which are tolerated by Government; and very much the same thing is done in China.

1 The real translation is, 'Looking upon a prostitute,' &c. This line, it may be mentioned, is not a quotation from any book of Hindu religion, but is often quoted falsely as such.—Ed.
The facility with which the Hindu can gratify his passions in a natural manner in a country where courtesans abound renders these disgusting practices less common; but it by no means prevents them altogether. In the larger towns in India there are generally houses to be found given over to this odious form of vice. One sometimes meets in the streets the degraded beings who adopt this infamous profession. They dress like women, let their hair grow in the same way, pluck out the hair on their faces, and copy the walk, gestures, manner of speaking, tone of voice, demeanour, and affectations of prostitutes. Other secret crimes are also carried on in India, and especially among the Mahomedans; but decency will not allow me to speak of them. They are the same as those which are mentioned in the Bible (Leviticus xviii and xx), and which brought down such terrible punishments on the inhabitants of Canaan who had been guilty of them.

Being hardly able to believe in the possibility of such abominable wickedness, I asked a Brahmin one day whether there was any truth in what I had heard. Far from denying the stories, he smilingly confirmed them; nor did he appear to be even shocked at such iniquity. Indeed he seemed to be quite amused at the confusion and embarrassment that I felt in asking him such questions. At last I said to him: 'How is it possible for one to believe that such depraved tastes exist, degrading men as they do to a far lower level than the beasts of the field, in a country where the union of the two sexes is so easy?' 'On that point there is no accounting for tastes,' he replied, bursting out into a laugh. Disgusted with this reply, and filled with contempt for the man who was not ashamed to speak thus, I turned on my heel and left him without another word.

From the earliest ages these unnatural offences have been common in the East amongst heathen nations. In the laws that God gave the Israelites, He warns them to be on their guard against these detestable vices, which were known to be very prevalent amongst the inhabitants of the countries they were going to take possession of, and which were one of the chief reasons for their total extermination.

If the Christian religion had done nothing more than
render these iniquities revolting and execrable, that alone
would be sufficient to ensure our love and respect for it.

It may seem incredible, after what I have just said, when I add that there is no country in the world where
greater attention is paid to what may be described as
outward propriety. What we call love-making is utterly
unknown amongst the Hindus. The playful sallies, the
silly jokes, the perpetual compliments, and the eager and
unlimited display of attention in which our youths are so
profuse would be looked upon as insults by any Hindu
lady, even the least chaste, that is, if they were offered
to her in public. Even if a husband indulged in any
familiarities with his own wife it would be considered
ridiculous and in bad taste. To inquire after a man's
wife, too, is an unpardonable breach of good manners;
and when one is visiting a friend one must be careful
never to speak to the ladies of the house. ¹

Thus it is that here below mankind seems incapable of
preserving the happy medium. For our part we exceed
in one direction by giving way to undue familiarity with
persons of the opposite sex; while the Hindus for their
part err on the side of reserve. The extreme suscepti-
bility of the latter in this respect is due to the opinion
they hold that no mark of affection between man and
woman can be either innocent or disinterested. If a Euro-
pean lady is seen taking a gentleman's arm, even though
he may profess the profoundest respect for her, nothing
would persuade a Hindu that she was not his mistress.

These strict principles of etiquette are instilled into the
mind of a Hindu woman from her early youth, and, owing
to the severity with which lapses from them are treated
in some castes, indiscretions are far less frequent than one
would imagine to be the case, considering how early the
licentious habits of Hindu men are formed. Whatever may
be said to the contrary, Hindu women are naturally chaste.
To cite a few examples of unseemly conduct, a few lapses
attributable to human frailty, is no proof of their want of
chastity as a body; just as it is no proof to cite the shame-
less conduct of those poor wretches, prostitutes by birth

¹ In the case of relatives and intimate friends no such objection is
taken.—Ed.
and profession, who follow the armies and live in con-
cubinage with Europeans. I would even go so far as to
say that Hindu women are more virtuous than the women
of many other more civilized countries. Their tempera-
ment is outwardly calm and equable, and though a pas-
sionate fire may smoulder underneath, without the igniting
spark it will remain quiescent. Is this dormant coldness
of disposition to be attributed to the secluded way in which
they are brought up, or to the reserved demeanour that is
taught them from their infancy, or to the unbridgeable gulf
that is fixed between them and their male relatives, with
whom the least familiarity is not permissible; or, what is
not very likely, can it be put down to climatic influence?
I cannot say. But whoever studies their character and
conduct from this particular standpoint as impartially and
disinterestedly as I have done, will, I feel sure, be con-
strained to render the same tribute to their chastity.

Having thus spoken of the special power which sexual
passion exercises in India, a power which unfortunately
is only too strongly felt in other quarters of the globe,
I will now say a few words on two other passions which
are equally violent, and to which the Hindu is particularly
susceptible, namely, the resentment of injury and the
desire for revenge. The Brahmins are particularly ran-
corous. The bitter feeling caused by an injury or affront
never leaves them. Feuds are perpetuated in families and
become hereditary, and a perfect reconciliation is never
effected. Self-interest sometimes brings two enemies
together, but they only dissemble for the time being,
and never conquer their feeling of hatred. It is not un-
usual to see a son or a grandson revenging wrongs done
fifty years before to father or grandfather. Furthermore
such vengeance takes a peculiar form. Duels seem to
them foolish, and they rarely have recourse to assassina-
tion or violence. Timid and weak-minded as they are,
they do not like to commit themselves to bold or mur-
derous devices. Their favourite weapons are spells and
enchantments. They think that by reciting maledictory
mantrams, or calling to their aid the diabolical arts of
some wicked magician, they will surely cause their enemy
to be attacked by some incurable malady. To get up
a quarrel and then overwhelm each other with the grossest insults is a common mode of revenge, and one in which Brahmins excel. But their most pernicious weapon, and one which they are especially clever at using, is slander. Sooner or later, by crooked ways or underhand intrigues, they contrive to deal their enemies some fatal blow by this means.

Murder and suicide occur occasionally amongst the Hindus, though such crimes are regarded by them with greater horror than by any other people. Poison is generally the means employed when a murder is committed. It is usually women who are guilty of suicide. Driven to despair by the ill-treatment of a brutal husband, or by the annoyances of a spiteful mother-in-law, or by any of those domestic worries which are so common in a Hindu household, they lay criminal hands on themselves and destroy the life which has become unbearable.

Intense selfishness is also a common characteristic of a Brahmin. Brought up in the idea that nothing is too good for him, and that he owes nothing in return to any one, he models the whole of his life on this principle. He would unhesitatingly sacrifice the public good, or his country itself, if it served his own interests; and he would stoop to treason, ingratitude, or any deed, however black, if it promoted his own welfare. He makes it a point of duty not only to hold himself aloof from all other human beings, but also to despise and hate from the bottom of his heart every one who happens not to be born of the same caste as himself. And further, he thinks himself absolved from any feelings of gratitude, pity, or consideration towards them. If he occasionally shows any kindness, it is only to some one of his own caste. As for the rest of mankind, he has been taught from his earliest youth to look upon them all as infinitely beneath him. According to the principles in which he has been brought up, he ought even to treat them with contempt, hatred, and harshness, as beings created solely to serve him and minister to his wants without there being any necessity for him to make the smallest return. Such are the Brahmins!

1 It must be admitted that the Abbé paints the Brahmins in darker colours than, as a body, they deserve.—Ed.
CHAPTER XIII

The Outward Appearance of Brahmins and other Hindus.—Their Physical Defects.—Remarks on the Kakrektes or Albinoes, as described by Naturalists, who are not allowed Burial after Death. —Other Hindus to whom the same Honour is denied.—Exhumation of Corpses.—The Feeble Physique of the Hindus.—The same Feebleness and Deterioration to be observed throughout the Animal and Vegetable Kingdoms.—Weakness of the Mental Faculties of Hindus.—The Language of the Brahmins.—Their Costume.—Their Houses.

Having given a sketch of the moral character of the Brahmins, I will now say a few words about their physical appearance. Many of the characteristics of this kind that I am to mention do not, however, specially pertain to them, but are common to Hindus of other castes. Faces and figures vary, as they do in every other caste; but there are certain physical deformities common enough in Europe which are much more rarely seen in India. Thus, for instance, one seldom meets persons who are hump-backed or lame, unless they have become so by accident. If a child is born with any bodily defect, it is attributed to the evil influence of two unlucky constellations which must have been in conjunction at the time of birth, or to some eclipse of the sun or moon that took place at that moment. On the other hand, blindness is very common. No doubt the chief cause of this is to be found in the habit that poor people have of going about in nature’s garb, with their heads exposed to the burning rays of the sun; and it is doubtless in the hope of preventing, as far as possible, the terrible scourge of ophthalmia that they so frequently anoint their heads with castor oil or oil of sesamum.

The Hindus, like every other race, have certain physical characteristics which are peculiar to themselves. Except for their colour, however, they seem to me to be more like Europeans, especially in their physiognomy, than any other Asiatic race. Generally speaking, they have glossy black hair, narrow foreheads, and dark, or occasionally grey\(^1\), eyes.

\(^1\) They do not at all admire the blue eyes of Europeans. They consider them a deformity, and call them ‘cats’ eyes.’—Dubois.
Their stomachs are flat, and they rarely carry much flesh. Their legs are usually slightly bowed the wrong way and a little crooked, the result no doubt of their habit of squatting on the ground with their legs crossed under them like our tailors. Neither have they any calves, which are considered anything but a beauty. Men who work in the fields or who are always exposed to the sun are quite as black in colour as the inhabitants of Kaffraria or Guinea; but the complexion of those who, like the Brahmins, spend their days under cover, or lead a sedentary life, is many degrees lighter. A very dark Brahmin and a fair Pariah are looked upon as monstrosities. Hence no doubt the proverb 'Beware of a black Brahmin or a fair Pariah!' A Brahmin is generally the colour of brass, or perhaps of weak coffee. This is considered the most correct shade; and the women who are the colour of light gingerbread are most admired. I have seen Brahmins, and particularly Brahmin women, who were not as dark as the inhabitants of Southern Europe. Furthermore the palms of the hands and the soles of the feet of Hindus of both sexes are almost as white as our own 1.

On the mountains and in the dense jungles of the Malabar coast there are some savage tribes who are much lighter in colour. In Coorg there is a tribe known as the Malai-Kondiaru who in outward appearance closely resemble Spaniards and Portuguese. The cause of this phenomenon is no doubt due partly to the climatic influences of the country they live in, and partly to their habit of always living in dense forests where the rays of the sun cannot penetrate.

You may sometimes meet a few, but very few, individuals whose skin is even fairer than that of a European, and with hair of the same colour. Of course this extreme fairness is unnatural, and makes them very repulsive to look at. In fact, these unfortunate beings are objects of horror to every one, and even their parents desert them. They are looked upon as lepers 2.

1 They share this characteristic with the Negroes.—DUBOIS.
2 Learned physicians have thought that these men really are lepers, and that this whiteness is produced by some malady which dries up the skin. They also think that black people would be much more subject
They are called *Kakrelaks*¹ as a term of reproach. This peculiarity does not prevent some of them from living to a great age. They cannot bear the light, neither can they look fixedly at anything so long as the sun is up. During the day they close their eyelids, leaving only a slit to look through; but as soon as night comes on they open wide their large pink eyes, and are able to go about quite easily, seeing as well as other people.

The question has been raised as to whether these degenerate individuals can produce children like themselves, and afflicted with nyctalopia. Such a child has never come under my observation; but I once baptized the child of a female *Kakrelak*, who owed its birth to a rash European soldier, though this circumstance does not afford any proof on the subject.²

These unfortunate wretches are denied decent burial after death, and are cast into ditches. This custom arises from a native superstition which does not allow any person who has died while suffering from a cutaneous disease to be buried. The Hindus believe that were this done a
to this affliction if it were not for their habit of anointing themselves frequently with oil or some other fatty substance. At the same time it should be observed that these human anomalies are to be met with all over the world. Thus you find the *Bedas* in Ceylon, wild creatures with white skins and red hair. There are *Kakrelaks* in all the American Islands; then again there are the *Dondos* or albinoes of Southern Africa (*Aethiopes albicans*). Lastly, these colourless people are particularly numerous in the Isthmus of Darien.—Dubois.

¹ The *kakrelaks* are horrible insects, disgustingly dirty, which give forth a loathsome odour. They are of the same species as our bugs, but much larger. These unpleasant and destructive insects shun the day and its light. They remain hidden in holes or crannies in walls, and come out at night to devour all the food they can find and to disturb sleepers.—Dubois.

² This fact disposes at any rate of the opinion which some have held that these people cannot bear children. It remains to be seen whether there would be any issue, supposing both parents were albinoes. The white Negroes of Africa are believed never to be able to produce children; but the *Kakrelaks* in Asia are supposed to be prolific, and their progeny are said to be of the same colour as the rest of the nation. Anyhow, no one has been able to discover for certain if albinoes have been born from other than Negroes or dark-coloured parents; and we may conclude that these ill-favoured children are not a special variety of the human species, any more than are the Cretins in the Canton of Valais.—Dubois.
drought or some other public calamity would befall the whole country.

Burial is also refused, at least in several provinces, to persons who die of wounds or eruptive diseases, such as small-pox or measles, &c.\textsuperscript{1} Also to those whose bodies have white marks on them; to pregnant women who die before child-birth\textsuperscript{2}; and above all to the many who fall victims to tigers. The tragic fate of these last is in a manner consecrated by those heaps of stones which the traveller sometimes comes across in his journeys, and which, on the very spot where they died, cover the remains of those who have perished so deplorably\textsuperscript{3}.

In consequence of this absurd superstition, when the country has been a long time without rain, the inhabitants think the drought is to be attributed to the fact that some one must have surreptitiously infringed this unwritten law. Accordingly the magistrates give immediate orders that all bodies that have been buried in the course of the year shall be exhumed, and become food for the birds of prey. I myself once had great difficulty in preventing a Christian cemetery being violated and the remains of the dead disturbed in this manner. Fortunately, at the critical moment, rain came down in torrents, and so the profanation of the dead was avoided. Otherwise I should have been forced to yield to the clamour of a senseless mob.

But to return to the subject in hand, which has been rather lost sight of during this long digression.

All Hindus, and particularly Brahmins, have weak constitutions, and in this respect they are greatly inferior to

\textsuperscript{1} Brahmins who die of small-pox are burnt in the usual way, at any rate in South India. The Sudras invariably bury such corpses.—Ed.

\textsuperscript{2} It is usual amongst Brahmins to take the foetus from the body of a dead pregnant woman, and the latter is burned separately.—Ed.

\textsuperscript{3} The bodies even of criminals and suicides were not deprived of burial by the Jews; yet there are examples in Holy Scripture which bear some resemblance to this Hindu custom. Thus Achan, after he had been stoned, was buried under a heap of stones (Joshua vii. 25, 26), and Absalom’s case is mentioned in 2 Samuel xviii. 17. The king of Ai was treated in the same way (Joshua viii. 29). Finally, Jeremiah prophesies that the wicked Jehoiakim, son of Josiah, should have ‘the burial of an ass’ (Jeremiah xxii. 19).—DUBOIS.
Europeans. They have not the strength, vigour, or activity of the latter. One European workman would, under any circumstances, do at least as much as two natives. This constitutional weakness, which is partly inherent, is greatly increased by the hardships and privations that they are condemned to bear all their lives.

The climate, which is the chief cause of the degeneration of the human race in these countries, exercises a no less fatal influence in the animal and vegetable kingdoms. Green stuff, roots, and fruits are for the most part insipid and tasteless, and do not possess half the nutritive value of those grown in Europe. A very few may be cited as exceptions to this rule. The vegetable products of India included in our list of groceries are pungent enough to destroy the membrane of one's throat. Again, the indigenous flowers, with two or three exceptions, have no scent. Lastly, the trees and shrubs to be found in the forests or in uncultivated places are generally covered with thorns and prickles. The elephant and tiger are strong and vigorous enough, but all the other animals, whether wild or domesticated, share in the universal debilitation. What we call butcher's meat has very little succulence in it, and there is nothing in the flavour of the game that would tempt the least fastidious European palate. Vainly would one search for a good hare or partridge. One is inclined to think that nature here has reduced the nutritive value of all animals and vegetables in proportion to the weakness of the human beings whose food they are to be.

But as a cruel compensation, nature is prodigal with creatures that are hurtful, and with many things that are useless, to man. The forests and jungles are inhabited by elephants, tigers, and other wild animals which are deadly foes to man and his flocks and herds. The country is overrun with snakes and other deadly reptiles, while birds of prey may be seen everywhere in large numbers. Every kind of irritating, destructive, and abominable insect swarms and multiplies in a manner that is equally surprising and annoying. Even poisonous plants are by no means uncommon, and their hurtful properties show no signs of deterioration.
It is true that the four elements seem to conspire together for the purpose of weakening everything that matures or vegetates in this portion of the globe. The soil itself is generally light, sandy, and wanting in substance; it requires a great deal of skilled labour to make it fertile. The air is almost everywhere unhealthy, damp, and enervating; the water in the wells and tanks is usually brackish and unpleasant to the taste: indeed, the excessive heat of the sun dries up everything, animal and vegetable. The mental faculties of the Hindus appear to be as feeble as their physique. I should say that no other nation in the world could boast of as many idiots and imbeciles. There are, of course, very many sensible, capable persons amongst the Hindus, who possess marked abilities and talents, and who by education have developed the gifts with which nature has endowed them; but during the three hundred years or so that Europeans have been established in the country no Hindu, so far as I know, has ever been found to possess really transcendent genius.

Their want of courage almost amounts to absolute cowardice. Neither have they that strength of character which resists temptation and leaves men unshaken by threats or seductive promises, content to pursue the course that reason dictates. Flatter them adroitly and take them on their weak side, and there is nothing you cannot get out of them.

The prudent forethought which prompts men to take heed to their future as well as to their present wants seems almost an unknown quality among the majority of Hindus. They take no thought for the morrow, and all they care about is to gratify their vanity and their extravagant whims for the moment. They are so taken up with the pleasures and enjoyments of the present that they never think of looking beyond to the possible misery and privations that may await them in the future.

This want of forethought is in a great measure responsible for those reverses of fortune which so frequently happen to them, and by which they pass from the greatest wealth and luxury to the bitterest poverty. It is true they bear these sudden transitions from comfort to misery with the most marvellous resignation; but then this resignation is
not the outcome of principle or of dignified patience—it is
due rather to their apathetic temperament, which makes
them incapable of feeling any strong emotion. They enjoy
their good fortune mechanically and without thought, and
they take their losses with the same calm imperturbability.¹

I prefer to think that the ingratitude with which they
are so often and so justly accused may be attributed to
this phlegmatic disposition, and not to wilful wrong-
headedness. Nowhere is a kindness so soon forgotten as
among Hindus. Gratitude—which is a feeling that springs
up spontaneously in all true hearts, which is a duty that
bare justice prescribes, and which is a natural result of
benefactions received—is a virtue to which the Hindu shuts
his heart entirely.

But let us leave this picture, which does not represent
a very pleasing side to their character, and let us return
to the consideration of their physical peculiarities. It is
easy to recognize a Brahmin by a sort of swagger and free-
dom in his gait and behaviour. Unconsciously, and
apparently unaffectedly, he shows by his tone and manner
the superiority that his birth, rank, and education have
given him. Brahmins have also a peculiar way of talking
and expressing themselves. They never make use of the
common or vulgar expressions of other castes. Their
language is generally concise, refined, and elegant; and
they enrich their vocabulary with many Sanskrit words.
They have also peculiar modes of expression which the
Sudras never use; and their conversation is always inter-
spersed with pedantic proverbs and allegories. Their
idioms are so numerous and varied, that though you may
think you know their language well, it often happens that
you cannot understand them when they are talking famili-
arily amongst themselves. In speaking and writing they
make use of endless polite and flattering terms, often very
aptly; but they carry the practice ad nauseam. Their
compliments are always exaggerated and high-flown. They
think nothing of placing those whom they wish to flatter
above the level of their deities; indeed, that is a very
usual beginning to a congratulatory speech.

¹ This imperturbability might more correctly be attributed to the
prevailing belief in the doctrine of fatalism.—Ed.
ARTICLES OF CLOTHING

If the language of the Brahmins is rich in gracious and flattering expressions, it is even more so in terms of abuse and coarse, indecent invective. Though they pride themselves on their courtesy and knowledge of the world, when they lose their tempers they are no better than our lowest rag-pickers; and an incredible quantity of disgusting and obscene language pours from their mouths on such occasions.

Their clothing is of the most simple description. It is as nearly as possible just what it was in the earliest ages. Two pieces of cotton cloth without hem or stitch, one 10 or 12 feet long, the other 14 or 16, and 3 or 4 feet wide, are their only garments. With the first piece they cover their shoulders, with the second they gird their loins. Of the latter, one end is passed between their thighs and is tucked behind into the portion which goes round their bodies, while the other end forms a drapery in front, and hangs with a certain careless grace to their feet. Their loin-cloths are generally ornamented with a border of silk of a different colour from the rest of the cloth itself. This costume is very suitable for persons who, like them, are most particular about keeping themselves always in a state of purity and cleanliness, for, as one may imagine, it does not cost much to wash their cloths often. Many have also a kind of large sheet, with which they cover themselves up at night, or when the mornings are cold. Since European piece-goods have been procurable all over the country, those who have been able to afford them have bought cloths of brilliant scarlet, which are a source of great pride and pleasure to them. It appears that formerly the Hindus went about with bare heads, and their bodies naked to the waist; and even at the present day the natives on the Malabar coast go about in this fashion. So also do a great many others who live in the dense forests where the same customs have prevailed from time immemorial, and where no revolutionary changes have penetrated. Nowadays most Hindus wear a turban, an article of dress which they have copied from the Mahomedans. It is made of fine thin muslin, often as much as 60 or 70 feet long, but at most only 2 feet in width. They twist it artistically round their heads, but the manner of arranging it varies in different
provinces and with different castes. Men who are in service with either Europeans or Mahomedans wear a long coat of fine muslin or calico, very full in the skirt, and made in a peculiar way. This also is a foreign fashion recently copied from the Mahomedans. Brahmins and Mahomedans may be distinguished from each other by the fact that the former fasten their coats on the left side, and the latter on the right. Both generally wear over this garment a belt, made of some fine material, and wound several times round the waist.

All Brahmins, rich or poor, dress alike; but the rich usually wear finer and more expensive materials.

Most Hindus wear more or less expensive ornaments either in the middle or the upper part of the ears. These ornaments vary in size and pattern according to locality and caste. But I shall have occasion to speak of this kind of adornment later on.

The simplicity of their houses equals that of their costume. These are generally thatched with straw and have mud walls, particularly in the country. The houses in the towns are better built; but they are all arranged on the same plan, and are all equally simple. The interior resembles a little cloister, with a gallery round it, while in the centre there is a court of varying size. From this you enter the tiny, dark, windowless rooms, into which light and air can only penetrate by means of a door about 4 feet high by 3 feet wide. These little dens are absolutely uninhabitable during the hot weather. The kitchen is always placed in the furthest and darkest corner of the house, so as to be entirely beyond the reach of strangers' eyes. I have already explained the motive of this arrangement. The hearth is invariably placed on the south-west side, which they call 'the fire-god's quarter,' because the Hindus believe that there this deity resides.

As the men are not allowed to pay visits to the women of the family, who are always occupied with their domestic affairs and remain shut up in a part of the house to which outsiders, as a rule, are not admitted, large open seats or raised platforms are constructed both inside and outside the principal entrance door, on which the men sit cross-legged, while they talk about business, discuss religion,
POLITICAL BUILDINGS

politics, or science, receive visits, and in fact kill time as best they can.

Besides the private houses, one or more public buildings are generally to be found in all villages of any size. These consist usually of a shed or long room, open down the whole length of one side. They are what Europeans call _choultries_, and they correspond to the _caravanserais_ of other Eastern nations. These rest-houses, which are usually large and convenient, not only serve as a shelter for travellers, but are also used as council chambers, where the headmen assemble to consider the public affairs of the village, settle law-suits, put an end to quarrels, and pacify disputants. They are also used for the celebration of religious rites in places where there are no temples.

All the villages are built very irregularly, without any plan or symmetry. The houses are crowded closely together; the streets are very narrow, and excessively dirty, with the exception of the street in the larger villages where the market is held, which is kept cleaner, and in which a certain amount of order is maintained. A few steps from the entrance door of each house is a large ditch into which all the manure from the stable and the refuse from the house are thrown. During the rains these sewage pits become full of water and form cesspools, which give off the most disgusting effluvia. But this unpleasant arrangement, which is the same in all the villages, does not appear to affect the inhabitants in any way.

All the houses being covered with thatch and crowded together, when a fire breaks out—a by no means rare occurrence—a whole village is often burned down in less than half an hour.

Though in the larger towns the houses are tiled and not thatched, there is no more symmetry in their arrangement than in the villages, and the streets are so narrow that two persons can scarcely walk abreast. In the middle of each street there usually runs a sewer, which receives all the rubbish and filth from the houses. This forms a permanent open drain, and gives off a pestilential smell, which none but a Hindu could endure for a moment.
CHAPTER XIV

Rules of Etiquette amongst Brahmans and other Hindus.—Modes of Greeting.

It is unnecessary, and it would be tedious, to give a detailed list of the numberless rules governing Hindu etiquette. If I cite a few it will give a general idea of the rest.

Hindus have several ways of greeting each other. In some provinces they put the right hand on the heart; in others they simply stretch it out to the acquaintance they are meeting, for they never greet a person whom they do not know, unless he be of very high rank. When two Hindu acquaintances meet, they generally say a few meaningless words to each other, such as, 'You—So-and-so—you here? That's all right!' 'And I—So-and-so—here I am.' Then each goes on his way.

They have also borrowed the salaam from the Mahomedans; but this they never use except to strangers. The salaam consists in touching the forehead with the right hand, and bowing at the same time, with more or less emphasis, according to the rank of the person they are greeting. In the case of a person of very high rank they sometimes touch the ground with both hands and then raise them to their foreheads, or else they come close to him and touch his feet three times.

Hindus who do not belong to the Brahmin caste greet Brahmans by performing namaskara, which consists in joining both hands, touching the forehead, and then putting them above the head. This mode of salutation, which is only offered to a superior, is accompanied by these two words, 'Saranam, ayya!' which means 'Respectful greeting, my lord'; upon which the Brahmin extends his right hand, partially open, as if he expects to receive something from the person who is paying him this mark of respect, and gravely answers with this one word, 'Asir-vadam!' which answers to the Latin 'Benefaxit tibi Deus!' or to our 'God bless you!' It is a mysterious compound expression, made up of three words which convey good
wishes. Only Brahmins and gurus have the right to give the asirvadam or to pronounce the sacred word over those who treat them with respect or give them presents. Some persons, when saluting a Brahmin, content themselves with raising their clasped hands as far as their chest.

Another very respectful manner of greeting is to extend both hands towards the feet of him whom you wish to honour, or to seize his knees while you throw yourself at his feet. This is a very common mode of greeting between a son and a father, or between a younger and an elder brother, on meeting after a long separation. The same humble attitude is also adopted when asking for pardon or for a favour; and only when the object is attained does the postulant relax his hold on the feet of the person whom he is addressing.

But of all the modes of salutation the most solemn and the most reverential is the sashtanga, or prostration of the six members, of which mention has already been made elsewhere.1 When a Hindu is about to make a ceremonious visit to members of his family who live at a distance, he makes a halt when he gets near the place and sends someone to warn his relatives that he is coming. The relatives then start at once to fetch him, and conduct him to their home, often with much ceremony, and accompanied by music. It is not customary either to shake hands or to kiss each other on these occasions. A man who publicly kisses a woman, even if she be his wife, commits the grossest breach of social decorum. A brother would not think of taking such a liberty with a sister, or a son with his mother. Only on a visit of condolence do they make a pretence of doing so to the person to whom the visit is paid; and this form of salute, in which the lips do not really touch the face, is only permissible between persons of the same sex.

Women bow respectfully to men without speaking or looking at them. Children salute their parents in the same manner and stand upright before them, with their arms

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1 See Chapter III.

It has already been pointed out in a note to p. 42 that the Abbé is wrong in translating sashtanga as 'six members' instead of 'eight members.'—Ed.
crossed on their chests. Whenever relatives or very great friends meet after a long separation, they clasp each other in their arms and take hold of each other's chin, shedding tears of joy.

Hindus who visit or meet each other after a long absence have, like ourselves, a set of commonplace phrases which they make use of for want of anything better. But in most cases the ideas they express are diametrically opposed to ours. Thus, for instance, if we Europeans were speaking to a friend or acquaintance, we should think he would be pleased if we congratulated him on his appearance of good health, his increased stoutness, or his good complexion, &c. If we think him altered for the worse, we take care not to let him see that we notice it, for fear it might pain him.

A Hindu, on the contrary, when he meets a friend, no matter how strong and well he may be looking, never fails to offer him the following greeting: 'How sadly you have altered since I last saw you! How thin and worn you look! I fear you must be very ill,' and other equally consoling remarks. It would offend a Hindu deeply if you were to say he was looking well on first meeting him. Any one who was so ill advised as to make so indiscreet a remark would certainly be suspected of feeling jealous, envious, and regretful at the signs of health which were the theme of his unfortunate compliments.

In the same way, you must never congratulate a Hindu on his good luck; you must not say that he has pretty children, a lovely house, beautiful gardens, fine flocks and herds, or that everything that he undertakes turns out well, or that he is happy or lucky, &c.; he would be sure to think that envy prompted compliments of this kind. Long ago, before I knew anything about Hindu etiquette, I was walking one day at the edge of a large tank or lake, where some men were fishing with nets. I stood still to watch them, and seeing that they landed a quantity of fish each time the nets were let down, I thought I might congratulate them on their good luck. But my civility had a most unlocked-for result, for these worthy people gathered up their nets and their fish without a word, and looking at me very indignantly, promptly went off, grumbling to each other under their breath: 'What have we done
to this Feringhi guru that he comes here and is so jealous of us?'

Just as we French and English do, but contrary to the Spanish and Portuguese custom, the Hindus, in quitting an apartment with a visitor, always allow him to walk first. The object is to avoid turning one's back upon a guest, and he, in turn, in order not to appear wanting in politeness, walks sideways until both have passed the threshold. When leaving the presence of a prince or any great personage, it is customary, for the same reason, to walk backwards until one is out of his presence; and this is also why a servant, when accompanying his master on foot or on horseback, never walks in front of him.

It is considered good manners in India to blow your nose with your fingers; and there is nothing impolite in audibly getting rid of flatulency. Persons of all ranks, indeed, seem to rather encourage this habit, as according to them it is a sure sign of a good digestion. It is certainly an original, if somewhat disgusting spectacle to a European, to see a large number of Brahmins coming away from a feast indulging in a sort of competition as to who shall give vent to the loudest eructations, calling out at the same time, with emphatic gravity, 'Narayana!' as if to thank Vishnu for his favours.

After sneezing a Hindu never fails to exclaim 'Rama! Rama!' and no doubt there is some superstition attached to this pious ejaculation. Again, when a Brahmin yawns, he snaps his fingers to the right and left to scare away evil spirits and giants.

To tread on any one's foot, even by accident, demands an immediate apology. This is done by stretching out both hands towards the feet of the offended person. A box on the ear is not considered a graver affront than a

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1 One knows that amongst the old heathen nations a sneeze was supposed to contain a great mystery. Old writers mention many facts which prove what superstitious deductions credulous persons drew from it. The custom of uttering a prayer or good wish on behalf of a person who has sneezed has existed from time immemorial. The Greeks said to such a person Ἐξαποιήσατε; the Romans, 'Salve.' Though with us the fashion of saying, 'May your wishes be granted!' or 'God bless you!' has rather gone out, politeness demands that at least you should make a bow.—Dubois.
blow given with the fist, or a kick with the bare foot; but a blow on the head, should it knock off the turban, is a very gross insult. By far the greatest indignity of all, however, is to be struck with one of the shoes or sandals that Hindus wear. Whoever submitted to such an insult without insisting on receiving satisfaction, would be excluded from his caste. The mere threat of such an insult is often sufficient to provoke a criminal prosecution.

It is a mark of respect when women turn their backs on men whom they hold in high esteem. At any rate, they must turn away their faces or cover them with their saris. Again, when they leave the house, propriety requires them to proceed on their way without paying any attention to the passers-by; and if they see a man they are expected to bow their heads and look in the opposite direction. There are a good many, however, who are not always quite so modest.

Any one who sees a person of high rank coming towards him, must go off the road, if he is on foot, so as to leave the way perfectly free, and if he is on horseback or in a palanquin he must get down and remain standing until the great person has passed and is some distance off. When speaking to a superior, politeness demands that an inferior should put his right hand before his mouth to prevent any particle of his breath or saliva reaching and defiling him. If an inferior meets a superior out of doors he must take off his shoes before greeting him. A Hindu, moreover, must never enter his own house, much less a stranger’s, with leather shoes on his feet.

In several of the Southern Provinces the Sudras are in the habit of taking off the cloth which covers the upper part of their bodies, winding it round their waists, and standing with arms crossed on their chest while speaking to a superior. The women of certain castes do the same in the presence of their husbands, or of any man to whom they wish to show respect. Their rules of propriety oblige them to appear before men stripped to the waist; and to omit to do so would show a great want of good breeding.

When Brahmns are talking to a man of another caste, or to a European from whom they have nothing to hope or to fear, they stand with their hands behind their backs
—a position which signifies contempt for their interlocutor, and which they are always very pleased to assume, to show the sense of their own superiority. When they pay a visit, no matter what may be the rank or dignity of their host, they never wait till they are asked to take a seat, but do so the instant they enter the room. People of all castes, when visiting a superior, must wait until they are dismissed before they can take leave.

There are several ceremonious visits which must be paid, such as visits of condolence, visits at pongul, and several others of which I shall speak later on. The feast of pongul and the following days are mostly celebrated by presents which near relatives make to each other, and which consist of new earthen vessels on which certain designs are traced in lime, also ground rice, fruit, sugar, saffron, &c. Such gifts are conveyed with much solemnity and accompanied by instruments of music. These little attentions are indispensable in the case of certain individuals. For instance, a mother must not neglect giving presents to her married daughter; otherwise the mother-in-law would resent the omission to her dying day.

With them letters of condolence on occasions of mourning can never take the place of a visit, as they so often do with us. Some member of the family must go in person to wail and lament, and perform the other ridiculous ceremonies that are customary on such occasions, even though a journey of fifty miles or more has to be made.

When a Hindu visits a person of importance for the first time he must not omit to take presents with him, which he will offer as a mark of respect, and to show that he comes with friendly intentions. It is generally considered a lack of good manners to appear with empty hands before any one of superior position, or from whom a favour is expected. Those whose means do not permit of their offering presents of great value may bring such things as sugar, bananas, cocoanuts, betel, &c.

In conclusion, it must be admitted that the laws of etiquette and social politeness are much more clearly laid down, and much better observed by all classes of Hindus, even by the lowest, than they are by people of corresponding social position in Europe.
CHAPTER XV

The Ornaments worn by Hindus.—The Different Marks with which they adorn their Bodies.

Every Hindu, even including those who have made a profession of penitence and have renounced the world, wears earrings. The sannyasis or penitents, who are supposed to have given up the three things which most naturally tend to excite man's cupidity—that is to say, women, honours, and riches—wear copper earrings in token of humility. But generally such ornaments are made of gold, and are of different shapes, though most frequently oval. Occasionally these pendants are so large that one can easily pass one's hand through them. Some are made of copper wire, round which gold wire is so twisted as to cover the copper completely. Those who are fairly well off wear them with a large pearl or precious stone in the centre.

These ear ornaments, which are sometimes of enormous size, are another proof of the Hindu's strong attachment to his old customs. All writers, both sacred and profane, bear witness to the fact that similar ornaments have been worn from time immemorial. On grand occasions, such as marriage feasts, they put four or five pairs into their ears, and at the end or in the centre of each of these is added another small ornament set with some precious stone. In some parts of the country a gold ring is also attached to the cartilage which divides the nostrils. Poor people, Pariahs included, who cannot afford to buy such valuable ornaments, wear some small inexpensive trinket in their ears. But, no matter what their caste or circumstances, fashion decrees that no one shall be without this species of adornment.

Rich Hindus wear round their necks gold chains or strings of pearls with large medallions set with diamonds which reach to their chests; and you often see them wearing gold finger-rings set with precious stones of great value. They also frequently wear round their waists a girdle made of gold or silver thread woven with much taste and skill, and carry massive gold bracelets on their
arms, which sometimes weigh as much as a pound each. Married men wear silver rings on their toes. Many, again, tie above their elbows little hollow tubes of gold or silver containing magical mantrams, which they wear as charms to avert ill luck.

They have many other baubles of the same kind. Even the private parts of the children have their own particular decorations. Little girls wear a gold or silver shield or cod-piece on which is graven some indecent picture; while a boy's ornament, also of gold or silver, is an exact copy of that member which it is meant to decorate.

Then there is the custom of painting the forehead and other parts of the body with different figures and emblems in various colours, a custom unknown elsewhere, but which appears to have been common enough among ancient nations. The simplest of all and the most common is the one called pottu, which consists of a small circular mark about an inch in diameter, placed in the centre of the forehead. It is generally yellow, but sometimes red or black in colour, and the paint is mixed with a sweet-smelling paste made by rubbing sandalwood on a damp stone. Instead of the pottu, some paint two or three horizontal lines across their foreheads with the same mixture, and others a perpendicular line from the top of the forehead to the nose. Some Brahmins and some of the Hindus of Northern India apply this paste to their cheeks rather effectively. Others use it to decorate the neck, breast, belly, and arms with different designs, while others again smear their bodies all over with the mixture.

1 Brahmin men never wear such rings.—Ed.

2 The variety and number of ornaments is almost bewildering; but they all have their proper names and shapes. Indian artisans do not need to rack their brains to invent novelties. There are no changing fashions, either in dress or in ornaments. A woman can wear what once belonged to her grandmother, or to one removed very many degrees further back, for the matter of that, either clothes or jewels; and this without any incongruity, or exciting remark. There is a perpetual recurrence of old patterns, improved, it may be, but the design will be the same. Of course it is in jewels for females that the variety occurs most.—Padfield.

It is a common belief among Hindus that there must always be at least a speck of gold on one's person, in order to ensure personal ceremonial purity.—Ed.
Vishnavite Brahmins, as well as those of other castes who are particularly devoted to the worship of Vishnu, paint their foreheads with the emblem namam, which gives their faces a most extraordinary, and sometimes even ferocious appearance. The most enthusiastic devotees of this sect paint the same design on their shoulders, arms, breast, and belly; and the Bairagis, a sect who go about stark naked, often draw it on their hinder parts.

The worshippers of Siva cover their foreheads and various parts of their bodies with the ashes of cow-dung, or with ashes taken from the places where the dead are burned. Some of them smear themselves all over from head to foot; others content themselves with smearing broad bars across the arms, chest, and belly.

Many Hindus who do not belong to any sect in particular smear their foreheads with ashes. Brahmins, with the exception of a very few who belong to some special sect, do not follow this custom, though sometimes, after they have performed their morning ablutions, they draw a little horizontal line with ashes across their foreheads.

The Hindus also display on their bodies many other marks and devices of different colours and designs, which vary according to the different castes, sects, and provinces. It would be difficult to explain the origin and meaning of the greater number of these symbols; those who wear them are often themselves ignorant of their meaning. Some, the pottu amongst the number, appear to have been invented solely for ornament, but there is no doubt that, as a rule, some superstitious meaning is attached to them. Thus the ashes of cow-dung are used in memory of the long penance of Siva and of several other holy personages, who always covered themselves with these ashes in token of humility.

Anyway, the Hindu code of good breeding requires that the forehead shall be ornamented with a mark of some sort. To keep it quite bare is a sign of mourning. It is also a sign that the daily ablutions have not been performed, that a person is still in a state of impurity, or that

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1 See Chapter IX.
2 Ashes taken from burning-grounds are not usually employed nowadays.—Ed.
he is still fasting. If one meets an acquaintance after noon with his forehead still bare, one always asks if it is because he has not yet broken his fast. It would be rude to appear before decent people with no mark whatever on the forehead.

Women attach much less importance than men to this kind of decoration. As a rule, they are satisfied with making the little round pottu mark on the forehead in red, yellow, or black, or else a simple horizontal or perpendicular line in red. But they have another kind of decoration of which they are very fond. It consists in painting the face, neck, arms, legs, and every part of the body that is visible with a deep yellow cosmetic of saffron. Brahmin women imagine that they thereby greatly enhance their beauty, since it makes their skin appear less dusky. Love of admiration no doubt has taught them that this paint gives them an additional charm in the eyes of Hindus, but it produces quite the contrary effect on Europeans, who think them hideous and revolting when thus besmeared.

No doubt all these daubings appear very ridiculous in our eyes, and it is difficult to believe that it can render any one more attractive, at least according to our way of thinking. But amongst the many artificial means of adornment which caprice and fashion have forced upon us there are several which excite just as much ridicule amongst the Hindus. Thus, for instance, in the days when it was the custom to powder the hair, they could not understand how a young man with common sense could bring himself to appear as if he had the white head of an old man. As to wigs, Hindus are absolutely horrified at seeing a European, holding some important position, with his head dressed out in hair which may have been taken from a leper, or a corpse, or at best from a Pariah or prostitute. To defile one's head with anything so unclean and abominable is regarded by the Hindu as most horrible! It would be no great hardship to expose a bald head to free contact with the air in such a warm climate, but were they all doomed to severe cold, nothing would ever persuade the Hindus to adopt the fashion of wearing wigs. And so we laugh at them, and they at us. And this is the way of the world.

Vae tibi! vae nigrae! dicebat cacabus ollae
CHAPTER XVI

Brahmin Wives.—The Education of Women.—Ceremonies which take place when they arrive at a Marriagable Age, and during Pregnancy.—The Low Estimation in which Women are held in Private Life.—The Respect that is paid to them in Public.—Their Clothing and Ornaments.

The social condition of the Brahmanis, or wives of Brahmins, differs very little from that of the women of other castes, and I shall have little to say about it. This interesting half of the human race, which exercises such enormous power in other parts of the world, and often decides the fate of empires, occupies in India a position hardly better than that of slaves. Their only vocation in life being to minister to man's physical pleasures and wants, they are considered incapable of developing any of those higher mental qualities which would make them more worthy of consideration and also more capable of playing a useful part in life. Their intellect is thought to be of such a very low order, that when a man has done anything particularly foolish or thoughtless his friends say he has no more sense than a woman. And the women themselves, when they are reproved for any serious fault and find it difficult to make a good excuse, always end by saying, 'After all, I am only a woman!' This is always their last word, and one to which there is no possible retort. One of the principal precepts taught in Hindu books, and one that is everywhere recognized as true, is that women should be kept in a state of dependence and subjection all their lives, and under no circumstances should they be allowed to become their own mistresses. A woman must obey her parents as long as she is unmarried, and her husband and mother-in-law afterwards. Even when she becomes a widow she is not free, for her own sons become her masters and have the right to order her about!

As a natural consequence of these views, female education is altogether neglected. A young girl's mind remains totally uncultivated, though many of them have good abilities. In fact, of what use would learning or accomplishments be to women who are still in such a state of
domestic degradation and servitude? All that a Hindu woman need know is how to grind and boil rice and look after her household affairs, which are neither numerous nor difficult to manage.

Courtesans, whose business in life is to dance in the temples and at public ceremonies, and prostitutes are the only women who are allowed to learn to read, sing, or dance. It would be thought a disgrace to a respectable woman to learn to read; and even if she had learnt she would be ashamed to own it. As for dancing, it is left absolutely to courtesans; and even they never dance with men. Respectable women sometimes amuse themselves by singing when they are alone, looking after their household duties, and also on the occasions of weddings or other family festivities; but they would never dare to sing in public or before strangers.

Such feminine occupations as knitting or needlework are quite unknown to them; and moreover any talents that they might develop in this direction would be wasted, as their clothing consists of one long piece of coloured calico, without any join or seam in it, though most of them know how to card and spin cotton, and very few houses are without one or more spinning-wheels?

I have already described what takes place when a young girl, who has been married in her early childhood, arrives at the age when she is fit to live with her husband (Chapter VI). These festivities are called the consummation of the marriage.

The young woman herself cannot appear, because she is, for the first time in her life, in a state of uncleanness, and for several days she is obliged to remain in a separate part of the house. But after she has gone through the usual rites of purification she returns to the family, and numberless other ceremonies are performed over her, amongst others several which are supposed to counteract the effects of witchcraft or the evil eye. She is then conducted with much pomp to her husband’s house.

1 Many Hindu women and girls now do needlework of some kind, and it is taught in most of the girls’ schools. The old-fashioned mothers-in-law complain that this new departure has proved detrimental to the performance of the more ordinary household duties.—Ed.
The Sudras, and even the Pariahs, have grand festivities when their daughters, though still unmarried, arrive at a marriageable age. The event is announced to the public with all the outward show that accompanies the most solemn ceremonies. A pandal is erected; toranams or strings of mango-leaves are hung in front of the entrance door of the house; feasts are given; much music resounds. In fact, it is a kind of advertisement or invitation to young men in want of a wife.

When a Brahmin's wife becomes pregnant there are endless ceremonies to be performed, some indeed for each separate month. In any caste it would be considered a disgrace to the woman, and in a less degree to her parents, if her first child were born anywhere but under the paternal roof. Her mother accordingly comes and fetches her about the seventh month of her pregnancy, and she is not allowed to return to her own home till her health is entirely re-established. When she departs her mother is supposed to give her a new piece of cotton cloth and some more or less valuable ornaments according to her means and her caste. But in no case would the woman, to whatever caste she might belong, return from her parents' to her husband's house unless her mother-in-law or some equally near relation came to fetch her. Her husband has to conform to this custom when his wife chooses to leave him and takes refuge under the paternal roof, sometimes for a mere whim, or for some very trifling cause. But in any case, even when the fault is all on her side, the husband must go and fetch her back.

These domestic quarrels and separations occur frequently, and are generally the fault of the mother-in-law, who looks upon her son's wife as a slave that has been bought and paid for. The elder woman, indeed, lives in constant dread of her daughter-in-law obtaining too much ascendancy over the husband, and by this means contriving her own emancipation; and accordingly seizes every opportunity of breeding discord between them. This fear is, as a rule, perfectly uncalled for; for the men themselves show very little inclination to be ruled by their wives, and condescend to very little of what we call conjugal tenderness in their relations with them.
The women, on the other hand, are so thoroughly accustomed to harsh and domineering treatment from their husbands that they would be quite annoyed if the husbands adopted a more familiar tone. I once knew a native lady who complained bitterly that her husband sometimes affected to be very devoted to her in public and allowed himself such little familiarities as are looked upon by us as marks of affection. ‘Such behaviour,’ said she, ‘covers me with shame and confusion. I dare not show myself anywhere. Did any one ever see such bad manners amongst people of our caste? Has he become a Feringhi (European), and does he take me for one of their vile women?’

As a rule a husband addresses his wife in terms which show how little he thinks of her. Servant, slave, &c., and other equally flattering appellations, fall quite naturally from his lips.

A woman, on the other hand, never addresses her husband except in terms of the greatest humility. She speaks to him as my master, my lord, and even sometimes my god. In her awe of him she does not venture to call him by his name; and should she forget herself in this way in a moment of anger, she would be thought a very low class of person, and would lay herself open to personal chastisement from her offended spouse. She must be just as particular in speaking of him to any one else: indeed, the Hindus are very careful never to put a woman under the necessity of mentioning her husband by name. If by chance a European, who is unacquainted with this point of etiquette, obliges her to do so, he will see her blush and hide her face behind her sari and turn away without answering, smiling at the same time with contemptuous pity at such ignorance.

Politeness also forbids you to address a person of higher rank by his name.

But if women enjoy very little consideration in private life, they are in some degree compensated by the respect

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1 It may be noted that at marriage feasts, &c., the males and females keep apart; and furthermore the usual personal invitations to such feasts are invariably conveyed to men by men, and to women by women.

—Ed.
which is paid to them in public. They do not, it is true, receive those insipid compliments which we have agreed to consider polite; but then, on the other hand, they are safe from the risk of insult. A Hindu woman can go anywhere alone, even in the most crowded places, and she need never fear the impertinent looks and jokes of idle loungers. This appears to me to be really remarkable in a country where the moral depravity of the inhabitants is carried to such lengths. A house inhabited solely by women is a sanctuary which the most shameless libertine would not dream of violating. To touch a respectable woman even with the end of your finger would be considered highly indecorous, and a man who meets a female acquaintance in the street does not venture to stop and speak to her.

When travelling the men walk in front and the women follow some distance behind. You very rarely see the men address a word to their humble followers. If they come to a river which has to be forded the women tuck up their cloths above the hips, and in this naked state they approach near enough to their travelling companions to permit of the latter stretching out a helping hand behind them to help them to withstand the force of the current; but never would you see any one under these circumstances commit an indiscretion like that which caused Orpheus to lose his Eurydice.

I have often spent the night in one of the common resthouses, where the men and women lodging there were lying all huddled together anyhow and almost side by side; but I have never known or heard of any one disturbing the tranquillity of the night by indecent act or word. Should any person be so ill-advised as to attempt anything of the sort, the whole room would be up in arms against him in a moment, and prompt chastisement would follow the offence.

A woman’s costume consists of a simple piece of cotton cloth, made all in one piece, and woven expressly for the purpose. It is from 30 to 40 feet long, and rather more than 4 feet wide. All sorts and kinds are made, in every shade and at every price, and they always have a border of a contrasting colour. The women wind part of this cloth two or three times round their waists, and it forms a sort of narrow petticoat which falls to the feet in front;
it does not come so far down behind, as one of the ends of
the cloth is tucked in at the waist after passing between
the legs, which are thus left bare as far as, or even above,
the calf. This arrangement is peculiar to Brahmin women;
those of other castes arrange their draperies with more
decency and modesty. The other end of the cloth covers
the shoulders, head, and chest. Thus the clothing for both
sexes is made without seams or sewing—an undeniable
convenience, considering how often they have to bathe
themselves and wash their garments; for Brahmin women
have to observe the same rules of purification as the men,
and are equally zealous in the performance of this duty.
The custom of women veiling their faces has never been
practised in India, though it has been in use among many
other Asiatic nations from time immemorial. Here the
women always go about with their faces uncovered, and in
some parts of the country they also expose the upper half
of their bodies.

Quiet and retired as is the life of a Hindu woman, it
cannot be said to be one of complete and rigorous seclusion.
Though all friendly intercourse with men is forbidden to
them, still they may talk to those who come to the house
as friends or acquaintances without fear of unpleasant
consequences. Eunuchs—those deplorable victims of
Oriental jealousy—are unknown in India, and the natives
never dream of putting the virtue of their women under
the care of these miserable beings. They are not to be
found even in the palace of a prince, where women are
always guarded and waited on by women.

In several parts of India young girls and married women
wear a sort of little bodice under their cloth, which covers
the breast, shoulders, and arms as far as the elbows; but
this, I am told, is a modern innovation, and borrowed from
the Mahomedans.

I have reason to believe that the custom of leaving all
the upper part of the body uncovered as far as the waist
was formerly common to both sexes in the southern parts
of India. It still prevails on the Malabar coast, and in
the neighbouring provinces.

1 This custom still prevails in Malabar and Travancore, but it is
gradually dying out amongst the educated classes.—Ed.
The custom of tattooing the arms of young girls with indelible designs of figures or flowers is very general. I have already described how this tattooing is done. When their skin is not very dark they generally ornament their faces in the same way, by putting three or four spots on the cheeks and chin. These marks produce very much the same effect as the black patches which were once the fashion with European ladies. I have already mentioned the habit which the beauties of India and Brahmin ladies observe of painting all the visible parts of their bodies with yellow saffron, and also of darkening their eyelids with antimony.

In order to make their hair more glossy and silky they frequently oil it. They part it exactly in the middle, and then roll it up behind into a sort of chignon, which is fastened behind the left ear. To make this chignon larger they often insert some tow, or else some cotton wool specially prepared for the purpose. Hindu women generally possess beautiful black hair, which is soft and straight. It is very rarely to be seen of any other colour. They are much given to wearing sweet-smelling flowers in their hair, and also ornaments of gold, none of any other metal being permissible, though they sometimes use a silver buckle to fasten the hair together at the back.

Silver ornaments may be worn on the arms, but are more frequently used to decorate the feet and ankles. Some of their anklets are actual fetters, weighing as much as two or three pounds. There are special rings made for each toe, often entirely covering them.

Bracelets are sometimes made hollow, and are more than an inch in diameter. They are of different patterns, according to the country in which they are made and the caste of the person who wears them. They are worn either above the elbow or round the wrist, and are made of gold or silver, as the means of the wearer will allow. Quite poor women wear copper bracelets, and some have more than half their fore-arms covered with glass bangles.

Neck ornaments consist of gold or silver chains, or strings

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1 It is remarkable that gold ornaments are never worn by Hindus on the feet, the reason being that it is a sacred metal, and would be thereby defiled.—Ed.
of large gold beads, pearls, or coral. In fact, beads of all kinds and of greater or less value are much in demand. Some women wear necklaces more than an inch wide, set with rubies, emeralds, and other precious stones. But to enumerate all the different kinds of ornaments worn by Hindu ladies would take a very long time. To give a single instance, I could mention eighteen or twenty different kinds of ornaments that are used for the ears alone.

Even the nose is considered a suitable object for decoration. The right nostril and the division between the two nostrils are sometimes weighted with an ornament that hangs down as far as the under lip. When the wearers are at meals, they are obliged to hold up this pendant with one hand, while feeding themselves with the other. At first this strange ornament, which varies with different castes, has a hideous effect in the eyes of Europeans, but after a time, when one becomes accustomed to it, it gradually seems less unbecoming, and at last one ends by thinking it quite an ornament to the face.

It is no uncommon sight to see a woman decked out in all her jewels drawing water, grinding rice, cooking food, and attending to all the menial domestic occupations, from which even the wives of Brahmins do not consider themselves exempt.

It is, of course, needless to remark that all this extravagant display is very often obtained only at the sacrifice of other more useful and necessary requirements in their homes.

When a girl marries, everything that she receives from her future father-in-law, or that she takes away with her from her old home, is most clearly and distinctly set down, item by item, in a kind of legal document. All these things are her own personal property, which she takes care to claim when she becomes a widow.

CHAPTER XVII

Rules of Conduct for Married Women.

Nothing serves so well to illustrate the attitude and behaviour of Hindus towards their wives as the rules of
conduct which are prescribed for the latter in the *Padma- 
purana*, one of their most valued books: rules which I will 
translate literally. They are reputed to be the work of 
the famous penitent Vaishta, who recommends their 
observance by every faithful wife. I cannot say that I 
altogether approve of them; some of them appear to me 
absurd; others there are which, from a social point of 
view, are harmful; all of them evidently have for their 
object the reduction of this interesting 'better half' of 
the human race to the lowest state of subjection. It is 
not to be wondered at, therefore, if we find many foolish 
examples of Hindu superstition, which is a necessary 
element in every institution of the country. Order and 
continuity are not so conspicuous as one might desire 
in the ideas of the great penitent Vasihta; but I give 
a passage closely following the original, as a specimen of 
the style of writing that prevails among the Hindus:—

'Give ear to me attentively, great King of Dilipa! I will 
expound to thee how a wife attached to her husband and 
devoted to her duties ought to behave.

'There is no other god on earth for a woman than her 
husband. The most excellent of all the good works that 
she can do is to seek to please him by manifesting perfect 
obedience to him. Therein should lie her sole rule of 
life.

'Be her husband deformed, aged, infirm, offensive in 
his manners; let him also be choleric, debauched, immoral, 
a drunkard, a gambler; let him frequent places of ill- 
repute, live in open sin with other women, have no affec-
tion whatever for his home; let him rave like a lunatic; 
let him live without honour; let him be blind, deaf, dumb, 
or crippled; in a word, let his defects be what they may, 
let his wickedness be what it may, a wife should always 
look upon him as her god, should lavish on him all her 
attention and care, paying no heed whatsoever to his 
character and giving him no cause whatsoever for dis-
pleasure.

'A woman is made to obey at every stage of her exist-
ence. As daughter, it is to her father and mother she 
owes submission; as wife, to her husband, to her father-
in-law, and to her mother-in-law; as widow, to her sons.
At no period of her life can she consider herself her own mistress.

"She must always be attentive and diligent in all her domestic duties; she should be ever watchful over her temper, never covetous of the goods of others, never quarrelsome with her neighbours, never neglectful of work without her husband's permission, and always calm in her conduct and deportment.

"Should she see anything which she is desirous of possessing, she must not seek to acquire it without the consent of her husband. If her husband receives the visit of a stranger, she shall retire with bent head and shall continue her work without paying the least attention to him. She must concentrate her thoughts on her husband only, and must never look another man in the face. In acting thus, she will win the praise of everybody.

"Should any man make proposals to her, and endeavour to seduce her by offering her rich clothes or jewels of great value, by the gods! let her take good care not to lend an ear to him, let her hasten to flee from him.

"If her husband laugh, she must laugh; if he be sad, she must be sad; if he weep, she must weep; if he ask questions, she must answer. Thus will she give proofs of her good disposition.

"She must take heed not to remark that another man is young, handsome, or well proportioned, and, above all, she must not speak to him. Such modest demeanour will secure for her the reputation of a faithful spouse.

"It shall even be the same with her who, seeing before her the most beautiful gods, shall regard them disdainfully and as though they were not worthy of comparison with her husband.

"A wife must eat only after her husband has had his fill. If the latter fast, she shall fast too; if he touch not food, she also shall not touch it; if he be in affliction, she shall be so too; if he be cheerful, she shall share his joy. A good wife should be less devoted to her sons, or to her grandsons, or to her jewels than to her husband. She must, on the death of her husband, allow herself to be burnt alive on the same funeral pyre; then everybody will praise her virtue.
She cannot lavish too much affection on her father-in-law, her mother-in-law, and her husband; and should she perceive that they are squandering all the family substance in extravagance, she would be wrong to complain and still more wrong to oppose them.

She should always be ready to perform the various duties of her house, and to perform them diligently.

Let her bathe every day, rubbing saffron on her body. Let her attire be clean, her eyelids tinged with antimony, and her forehead marked with red pigment. Let her hair be well combed and adorned. Thus shall she be like unto the goddess Lakshmi.

Before her husband let her words fall softly and sweetly from her mouth; and let her devote herself to pleasing him every day more and more.

She must be careful to sweep her house every day, to smooth the floor with a layer of cow-dung, and to decorate it with white tracery. She must keep the cooking vessels clean, and must be ready with the meals at the proper hours.

If her husband be gone out to fetch supplies of wood, leaves, or flowers to perform the sandhya, or for any other purpose, she shall watch for the moment of his return and shall go to meet him. She shall go before him into the house, shall hand him a stool to sit down upon, and shall serve up the food prepared to his taste.

She shall inform him in time of what is wanted in the house, and shall manage with care what he brings home.

Prudent in her conversation, she must be careful, in conversing with gurus, sannyasis, strangers, servants, and other persons, to adopt a tone suitable to the position of each.

In exercising in her house the authority given to her by her husband, she must do so gently and intelligently.

She must, as in duty bound, use for the expenses of her household all the money with which her husband entrusts her, not taking any of it surreptitiously for herself or for her parents, or even, without her husband’s permission, for works of charity.

She must never meddle with the affairs of others, nor lend ear to stories of the good luck or misfortune which has befallen others.
Never let her yield to anger or malice. Let her abstain from all food that is not to her husband's taste. Let her not oil her head when her husband does not oil his own.

If her husband go away anywhere and ask her to accompany him, let her follow him; if he tell her to remain at home, let her not leave the house during his absence. Until his return she shall not bathe, or anoint her head with oil, or clean her teeth, or pare her nails; she shall eat but once a day, shall not lie down on a bed, or wear new clothes, or adorn her forehead with any of the ordinary marks.

A woman during her menstrual period shall retire for three days to a place apart. During this time, she shall not look at anybody, not even at her children, or at the light of the sun. On the fourth day she shall bathe, observing the proper rites for such occasions which were established before the Kali-yuga.

A woman, when she is pregnant, must conform to all the rites prescribed for such occasions. She must then avoid the company of women of doubtful virtue and of those who have lost all their children; she must drive away from her mind all sad thoughts; she must be careful not to gaze at terrifying objects, or to listen to sad stories, or to eat anything indigestible. By observing these rules, she will have beautiful children; by neglecting them she will risk a miscarriage.

A wife, during the absence of her husband, should strictly conform to his parting counsels. She should be heedless of her attire, and should not devote herself, under the plea of devotion to the gods, to any special acts of piety.

If a husband keep two wives, the one should not amuse herself at the expense of the other, be it for good or for evil; neither should the one talk about the beauty or the

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1 These restrictions are not observed nowadays.—Ed.
2 The hermit Vasiśtha here describes these practices. I will explain them in Appendix IV.—DUBOIS.
3 Nowadays a woman in this condition is not forbidden communication with her children.—Ed.
4 It may be added that a cocoanut is never broken in the presence of a pregnant woman.—Ed.
ugliness of the children of the other. They must live on good terms, and must avoid addressing unpleasant and offensive remarks to each other.

‘In the presence of her husband, a wife must not look about her, but must keep her eyes fixed on him, in readiness to receive his orders. When he speaks, she must not interrupt him, nor speak to anybody else; when he calls her, she must leave everything and run to him.

‘If he sing, she must be in ecstasy; if he dance, she must look at him with delight; if he speak of learned things, she must listen to him with admiration. In his presence indeed she ought always to be cheerful, and never show signs of sadness or discontent.

‘Let her carefully avoid creating domestic squabbles on the subject of her parents, or on account of another woman whom her husband may wish to keep, or on account of any unpleasant remark which may have been addressed to her. To leave the house for reasons such as these would expose her to public ridicule, and would give cause for much evil speaking.

‘If her husband flies into a passion, threatens her, abuses her grossly, even beats her unjustly, she shall answer him meekly, shall lay hold of his hands, kiss them, and beg his pardon, instead of uttering loud cries and running away from the house.

‘She must not say to her husband: “Thou hast hurt me, thou hast beaten me unjustly; I will no more speak to thee; hereafter the relations between ourselves will be no other than those between a father and his daughter, or a brother and his sister. I shall no more have anything to do with thy affairs; I will no longer have anything in common with thee.” Such words ought never to fall from her lips.

‘If any of her relatives or friends invite her to their house on the occasion of some feast or ceremony, she shall not go there without the permission of her husband, and unless accompanied by some elderly woman. She shall remain there for as short a time as possible, and on her return she shall render a faithful account to her husband of all that she has seen or heard; she shall then resume her domestic duties.
While her husband is absent, she shall sleep with one of her female relatives, and not alone. She shall make constant inquiries after the health of her husband. She shall send constant messages to him to return as soon as possible, and shall offer up prayers to the gods for him.

Let all her words and actions give public proof that she looks upon her husband as her god. Honoured by everybody, she shall thus enjoy the reputation of a faithful and virtuous spouse.

If, in the event of her husband dying, she resolves to die with him, glorious and happy will she be in the world to which her husband will lead her after his death. But whether she dies before or with her husband, or whether she survives him, a virtuous wife may rest assured that all sorts of blessings will await her in the other world.

A wife can enjoy no true happiness unless she attains it through her husband; it is he who gives her children; it is he who provides her with clothes and jewels; it is he who supplies her with flowers, sandalwood, saffron, and all good things.

It is also through his wife that a husband enjoys the pleasures of this world; that is a maxim taught in all our learned books. It is through his wife that he does good works, that he acquires riches and honour, and that he succeeds in his enterprises. A man without a wife is an imperfect being.'

These rules of conduct may seem extremely severe, yet they are faithfully observed, especially among the Brahmins.

Among certain sects of the Vishnavite Brahmins a peculiar custom exists. A daughter-in-law is never allowed to speak to her mother-in-law. When she wishes to communicate anything to her, she does it by signs; and when the mother-in-law gives orders to the daughter-in-law, the latter answers by an inclination of the head, thereby indicating that she has understood the orders given her. She, however, at times manages to make up for this enforced silence by having recourse to spirited and expressive gestures: so much so, that her dumb repartees often cause her mother-in-law to boil with rage.
CHAPTER XVIII

Mourning.—The Condition of Widowhood.—The General Contempt for Widows.—Remarriages forbidden.

The happiest death for a woman is that which overtakes her while she is still in a wedded state. Such a death is looked upon as the reward of goodness extending back for many generations; on the other hand, the greatest misfortune that can befall a wife is to survive her husband.

Should the husband die first, as soon as he breathes his last the widow attires herself in her best clothes and bedecks herself with all her jewels. Then, with all the signs of the deepest grief, she throws herself on his body, embracing it and uttering loud cries. She holds the corpse tightly clasped in her arms until her parents, generally silent spectators of this scene, are satisfied that this first demonstration of grief is sufficient, when they restrain her from these sad embraces. She yields to their efforts with great reluctance, and with repeated pretences of escaping out of their hands and rushing once again to the lifeless remains of her husband. Then, finding her attempts useless, she rolls on the ground like one possessed, strikes her breast violently, tears out her hair, and manifests many other signs of the deepest despair. Now, are these noisy professions of grief and affliction to be attributed to an excess of conjugal affection, to real sorrow? The answer will appear rather perplexing, when we remark that it is the general custom to act in this manner, and that all these demonstrations are previously arranged as a part of the ceremonies of mourning.

After the first outbursts of grief, she rises, and, assuming a more composed look, approaches her husband’s body. Then in one continuous strain, which would be hardly possible under real affliction, she apostrophizes her husband in a long series of questions, of which I give a summary as follows:

1 Children are even consoled with the thought, when their mothers die in a wedded state.—Ed.

* This is the last occasion on which she is allowed to wear ornaments of any kind.—Ed.
‘Why hast thou forsaken me? What wrong have I done thee, that thou shouldst thus leave me in the prime of my life? Had I not for thee all the fondness of a faithful wife? Have I not always been virtuous and pure? Have I not borne thee handsome children? Who will bring them up? Who will take care of them hereafter? Was I not diligent in all the duties of the household? Did I not sweep the house every day, and did I not make the floor smooth and clean? Did I not ornament the floor with white tracery? Did I not cook good food for thee? Didst thou find grit in the rice that I prepared for thee? Did I not serve up to thee food such as thou lovedst, well seasoned with garlic, mustard, pepper, cinnamon, and other spices? Did I not forestall thee in all thy wants and wishes? What didst thou lack whilst I was with thee? Who will take care of me hereafter?’

And so on. At the end of each sentence uttered in a plaintive chanting tone, she pauses to give free vent to her sobs and shrieks, which are also uttered in a kind of rhythm. The women that stand around join her in her laments, chanting in chorus with her. Afterwards, she addresses the gods, hurling against them torrents of blasphemies and imprecations. She accuses them openly of injustice in thus depriving her of her protector. This scene lasts till her eloquence becomes exhausted, or till her lungs are wearied out and she is no longer capable of giving utterance to her laments. She then retires to take rest for a while, and to prepare some new phrases against the time when the body is being prepared for the funeral pyre.

The more vehement the expression of a woman’s grief, the more eloquent and demonstrative her phrases, the more apparently genuine her contortions on such occasions, so much the more is she esteemed a woman of intelligence and education. The young women who are present pay the most minute attention to all that she says or does; and if they observe anything particularly striking in her flights of rhetoric, in her attitudes, or in any of her efforts to excite the attention of the spectators, they carefully treasure it in their memory, to be made use of should a similar misfortune ever happen to themselves. If a wife
who was really afflicted by the loss of her husband confined herself to shedding real tears and uttering real sobs, she would only be thoroughly despised and considered an idiot. The parents of a young widow once complained to me of her stupidity as follows: 'So foolish is she that, on the death of her husband, she did not utter a single word; she did nothing but cry, without saying anything.'

In several parts of India, as formerly among the Greeks and Romans, professional women mourners may be hired. When called in to attend the obsequies, these women arrive with dishevelled hair and only half clothed, wearing their scanty garments in a disordered fashion. Collecting in a group round the deceased, they commence by setting up in unison the most doleful cries, at the same time beating their breasts in measured time. They weep, sob, and shriek in turns. Then addressing themselves to the deceased, each in succession eulogizes his virtues and good qualities. Anon they apostrophize him, vehemently re-monstrating with him for quitting life so soon. Finally, they point out to him, in the plainest possible terms, that he could not have committed a more foolish act. In discharging these duties, which are a curious mixture of tragedy and comedy, they take turn and turn about, and their affected sorrow lasts until the corpse is removed. As soon as the obsequies are over, they receive their wages, and their faces, which were so lugubrious a few moments before, once more assume their wonted calmness.

Widows, who in the learned tongue are called *vidhava*, a word akin to the Latin *vidua*, are held in much less respect than other women; and when they happen to have no children, they are generally looked upon with the utmost scorn. The very fact of meeting a widow is calculated to bring ill-luck. They are called *moonda*, a reproachful term which means 'shorn-head,' because every widow is supposed to have her hair cut off. This rule, however, is not everywhere followed, especially among the Sudras.²

¹ The Hebrews also, on the death of friends and relatives, made a great parade of all the external signs of sorrow. They cried, rent their garments, beat their breasts, tore out their hair or beards, or else had them cut, and even inflicted cuts on their bodies. See Leviticus xix. 28, xxi. 5; Jeremiah xvi. 6, &c.—Dunois.

² And also among the Tengalai Vaishnava Brahmins.—Ed.
When women quarrel, this opprobrious term, *moonda*, is generally the first abusive word that passes.

A widow has to be in mourning till her death. The signs of mourning are as follows:—She is expected to have her head shorn once a month; she is not allowed to chew betel; she is no longer permitted to wear jewels, with the exception of one very plain ornament round her neck; she must wear coloured clothes no longer, only pure white ones; she must not put saffron on her face or body, or mark her forehead. Furthermore, she is forbidden to take part in any amusement or to attend family festivities, such as marriage feasts, the ceremony of *upanayana*, and others; for her very presence would be considered an evil omen.

A very few days after the death of her husband, a widow’s house is invaded by female friends and relatives, who begin by eating a meal prepared for them. After this they surround the widow and exhort her to bear her miserable lot with fortitude. One after another they take her in their arms, shed tears with her, and end by pushing her violently to the ground. They next join together in lamenting her widowhood, and finally make her sit on a small stool. Then, one of her nearest female relatives, having previously muttered some religious formulae, cuts the thread of the *tali*, the gold ornament which every married woman in India wears round her neck. The barber is called in, and her head is clean shaved. This double ceremony sinks her instantly into the despised and hated class of widows. During the whole time that these curious and mournful rites are being performed, the unfortunate victim is making the whole house resound with her cries of woe, cursing her sad lot a thousand times.

The thread of the *tali* must be cut, not untied. This practice has given rise to a very common curse; two women when quarrelling never forget to say to each other: ‘May you have your *tali* cut!’ which means, ‘May you become a widow!’

The signs of sorrow manifested by a Hindu lady who

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1. She must, however, smear her forehead with sacred ashes if she is a widow of the Saiva sect, and mark her forehead with red powder if a Vaishnava.—Ed.

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loses her husband are of so exaggerated a description that one cannot help doubting their perfect sincerity; yet it is impossible that any Hindu widow could face the sad future awaiting her with tearless eyes. Doomed to perpetual widowhood, cast out of society, stamped with the seal of contumely, she has no consolation whatever, except maybe the recollection of hardships that she has had to endure during her married life.

I do not refer here to those unfortunate girls of five or six years of age, who, married to Brahmins of over sixty, very often become widows before they attain the age of puberty. Fortunately their youth and inexperience prevent their brooding over the sad condition in which they have been placed by such inhuman and iniquitous prejudices. But think of the numberless young widows in the prime of life and strength. How do they bear up against this cruel expulsion from the society of their fellow-creatures? The answer is, Better than one would be inclined to believe. The fact is, they must perforce be resigned to their fate; and however despised a widow may be, there is this consolation, that one who remarries is a hundred times more so, for she is shunned absolutely by every honest and respectable person. Thus there are few widows who would not look upon proposals to remarry as a downright insult, though in this respect they are seldom put to the test. Even an old gouty Brahmin, as poor as Iaros, would feel indignant at the very suggestion of marrying a widow, though she were rich and endowed with all the charms of youth and beauty.

One result of this prejudice, which is firmly and irrevocably established in India, is that the country abounds with widows, especially among the Brahmins. Among this caste shorn-heads are to be seen everywhere. Of course a certain corruption of morals is the inevitable result of such a state of things, but it is not pushed to such an extent as might be expected. The natural modesty of Hindu women, the way in which they are brought up, their ordinary chaste and circumspect demeanour, the calmness of their passions: all these go a great way towards providing as it were strong barriers against the attacks of the licentious, who, whatever may be said to the contrary
by ill-informed writers, do not succeed in winning over women of the better class so easily as in many other countries where the lawful union of the two sexes is not beset with so many obstacles.

Besides, even if we refuse to believe that young widows possess in themselves sufficient strength of will to resist seduction, there are many other obstacles beyond their own control, which also serve as so many bulwarks to their modesty. Chief among such obstacles must be reckoned the diligent watchfulness exercised over them by their parents; the severity of the convenances which forbid any kind of familiar intercourse between men and women; the very heavy punishments which follow even the most trivial lapses; and, finally, the mere disgrace, which in India, above all countries of the world, entails the most tremendous penalties on the person detected in an indiscretion.

CHAPTER XIX

The Custom which at times obliges Widows to allow themselves to be burnt alive on the Funeral Pyre of their Deceased Husbands.

Although the ancient and barbarous custom which imposes the duty on widows of sacrificing themselves voluntarily on the funeral pyre of their husbands has not been expressly abolished, it is much more rare nowadays than formerly, especially in the southern parts of the Peninsula. In the North of India and in the provinces bordering on the Ganges, however, women are only too frequently seen offering themselves as victims of this horrid superstition, and, either through motives of vanity or through a spirit of blind enthusiasm, giving themselves up to a death which is as cruel as it is foolish.

The Mahomedan rulers never tolerated this horrible practice in the provinces subject to them; but, notwithstanding their prohibition, wretched fanatics have more

1 The social reformers of the present day are doing all that they can to encourage the remarriage of virgin widows, those unhappy girls who, married before they come of age, become widows before cohabitation with their husbands is possible. So far, however, the success which these reformers have met with is extremely small, and those who brave caste custom in this respect are invariably outcasted.—Ed.
than once succeeded in bribing the subordinate representatives of authority to give permission to commit the deed in violation of the laws of humanity and common sense.

The great European Power which nowadays exercises its sway all over the country has tried, by all possible means of persuasion, to put an end altogether to this barbarous custom; but its efforts have been only partially successful, and, generally speaking, it has been obliged to shut its eyes to this dreadful practice, since any attempt to remedy it by force would have exposed it to dangerous opposition.

Nobody is a greater admirer than myself of the wise spirit that animates this enlightened and liberal Government in manifesting to its Hindu subjects such a full and perfect tolerance in the practice of their civil and religious usages; and nobody is more fully alive than I am to the dangers and difficulties that an open defiance of these prejudices, which are looked upon as sacred and inviolable, would give rise to. But does the abominable custom in question form part of Hindu institutions? Are there any rules which prescribe its observance by certain castes? All the information which I have been able to gather on the subject tends to make me believe that there are no such rules. The infamous practice, although encouraged by the impostors who regulate religious worship, is nowhere prescribed in an imperative manner in the Hindu books. It is left entirely to the free will and pleasure of the victims who thus sacrifice themselves. No blame and no discredit are attached nowadays to the wife whose own honest judgement suggests that she ought not to be in such a hurry to rejoin in the other world the husband who so often made her wretched in this. It would be quite possible, therefore, by the display of firmness, combined with prudence, to strike, without any considerable danger, at the very root of this shocking practice. Certainly it reflects discredit on the Government which tolerates it and manifests no great indignation with regard to it.

1 During recent years, owing to the number of these abominable sacrifices being on the increase, especially in the Bengal Presidency and in the districts bordering on the Ganges, the Government has
A PROOF OF WIFELEY DEVOTION

It was principally in the noble caste of Rajahs that the sutee originated. It was looked upon as a highly honourable proof of wifely attachment and love, which enhanced the glory of the families of these wretched victims of blind zeal. Should a widow, by reason of a natural fondness for life or through lack of courage, endeavour to avoid the honour of being burnt alive on the funeral pyre of her deceased husband, she was considered to be offering a gross insult to his memory.

I was once able to thoroughly convince myself of the influence which this false point of honour still exercises over the minds of fanatical Hindus, and at the same time to discern that this act of devotion to which these wretched thought fit to interfere to check this inconceivable mania by adopting at least persuasive measures. It has, therefore, directed the different magistrates scattered about the country to examine very minutely all the circumstances attending the custom of sutee (this is the name by which these barbarous sacrifices are known), and never to sanction it except after exhausting all the means to oppose it which prudence may suggest to them. No woman can, therefore, now devote herself to a death of this kind without the sanction of the magistracy. When such permission is sought, the magistrates cause the victim to appear before them and question her carefully to assure themselves that her resolution is entirely voluntary, and that no outside influence has been brought to bear upon her. They then try by every possible exhortation and counsel to induce her to give up her horrible design. But should the widow remain firm in her resolution, they leave her mistress of her own fate. The Protestant missionaries, when they first arrived in the country, expressed a just horror of these abominable sacrifices, and strove to diminish their number; but being ill acquainted with the character of the Hindus and with their devoted attachment to custom, they used brusque and violent measures which only resulted in augmenting the evil. I have seen the lists of widows who had sacrificed themselves on the funeral pyre of their husbands from 1810 (the period at which the missionaries commenced their labours) up to the year 1820; and I have remarked that the number of these victims progressively increased every year during that space of time. In 1817 there were 708 sutees in the Bengal Presidency. It is true that this insane practice is much more in vogue on the banks of the Ganges than anywhere else. In the southern parts of the Peninsula of India sutees are seldom seen. I am convinced that in the Madras Presidency, which numbers at least thirty millions of inhabitants, not thirty widows allow themselves to be thus burnt during a year.—Dubois.

Sutees is now, of course, absolutely abolished. Its prohibition by law was effected during the Governor-Generalship of Lord William Bentinck (1825-1835), at the instance of the great Rajah Ram Mohun Roy.—Ed.
victims sacrificed themselves is not always the result of their own free will and resolution. The poligar or prince of Cangoondy in the Carnatic having died, neither entreaties nor threats were spared to induce his widow to allow herself to be burnt alive with him. It was urged that this honourable custom had been observed for a long time past in the family, and that it would be a great pity, indeed, to allow it to fall into disuse. The funeral ceremonies were delayed from day to day in the hope that the widow would at last make up her mind to prefer a glorious death to a remnant of life spent in contempt and opprobrium. It was a fruitless attempt! The obstinate princess turned a deaf ear to all the pressing entreaties of her relatives; and ultimately the deceased was obliged to depart alone to the other world.

It must, however, be confessed that some widows commit this folly readily enough, spurred on as they are by the thought of the wretchedness of widowhood, by vanity, by the hope of acquiring notoriety, perhaps also by a genuine feeling of enthusiasm. It should be remembered that they are awarded boundless honours, and are even deified after death. Vows are made and prayers addressed to them, and their intercession is sought in times of sickness and adversity. Such remnants of their bodies as have not been entirely consumed by the fire are most devoutly gathered together, and on the spot where they have sacrificed themselves small monumental pyramids are erected to transmit to posterity the memory of these brave victims of conjugal affection—a tribute all the more conspicuous, because the erection of tombs is almost unknown among the Hindus. In a word, women who have had the courage to deliver themselves so heroically to the flames are numbered among the divinities, and crowds of devotees may be seen coming in from all sides to offer them sacrifices and to invoke their protection.

To these inducements of vain and empty glory—sufficient of themselves to make a deep impression on a feeble mind—must be added the entreaties of relatives, who, if they

1 In some old Hindu houses, even to this day, may be seen, impressed with turmeric paste on the walls, the marks of the hands of women who underwent satiæe.—Ed.
perceive the slightest inclination on the part of the widow to offer up her life, spare no means in order to convince her and force her to a final determination. At times they go so far as to administer drugs, which so far deprive her of her senses that under their influence she yields to their wishes. This inhuman and abominable method of wheedling a consent out of the unhappy woman is in their opinion justified, because her tragic end would bring great honour and glory to the whole of their family.

Some authors have maintained that this detestable practice originated primarily either from the jealousy of husbands, or rather, perhaps, from their fear that their discontented wives might seek to get rid of them by poison. As for myself, I have been unable, either in the writings of Hindu authors, or in my free and familiar intercourse with many persons well versed in the manners and customs of the country, to discover any justification for either of these two theories. And surely the lot of a wife, even when she is doomed to suffer wrong at the hands of a cruel and immoral husband, is far preferable to that of a widow, to whom all hope of a re-marriage under happier conditions is forbidden. It is hardly likely, indeed, that Hindu women would go to the length of committing a crime which must render their lot much worse than before! At the same time I am by no means inclined to attribute these voluntary sacrifices to an excess of conjugal affection. We should, for instance, be greatly mistaken were we to allow ourselves to be deceived by the noisy lamentations which wives are accustomed to raise on the death of their husbands, and which are no more than rank hypocrisy. During the long period of my stay in India, I do not recall two Hindu marriages characterized by a union of hearts and displaying true and mutual attachment.

When a woman, after mature deliberation, has once declared that she desires to be burnt alive with her deceased

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1 It is impossible to regard the conclusion here drawn as anything but greatly exaggerated. The influence of women, ignorant and uneducated as they are, is in many Hindu households exceedingly strong, and it is an error to picture them as the mere slaves of the men, though the ascendancy of the latter is still a marked feature of Hindu sociology. —Ed.
husband, her decision is considered irrevocable. She cannot afterwards retract; and should she refuse to proceed of her own free will to the funeral pyre, she would be dragged to it by force. The Brahmins who regulate all the proceedings of the tragedy, and also her relatives, come by turns to congratulate her on her heroic decision and on the immortal glory which she is about to acquire by such a death—a death which will exalt her to the dignity of the gods. All possible means which fanaticism and superstition can suggest are brought to bear upon her in order to keep up her courage, to exalt her enthusiasm, and to excite her imagination. When, at last, the fatal hour draws nigh, the victim is adorned with rare elegance: she is clothed in her richest apparel, is bedecked with all her jewels, and is thus led to the funeral pyre.

It is impossible for me to describe the finishing scenes of this dreadful ceremony without feelings of distress. But, in the meantime, I must solicit the indulgence of my readers for a short digression which is not wholly disconnected with my subject. When a husband has several lawful wives, as often happens in the caste of the Rajahs, the wives sometimes dispute as to who shall have the honour of accompanying their common husband to the funeral pyre, and the Brahmins who preside at the ceremony determine which shall have the preference. Here is an instance to the point extracted from the Mahābhārata, one of their most esteemed books:—

‘King Pandu had retired into the jungles with his two wives, there to devote himself to acts of penance. At the same time a curse was imposed upon him, which doomed him to instant death should he dare to have intercourse with either of them. The passion which he felt for the younger of his wives, who was extremely beautiful, overcame all fear of death; and, in spite of the fact that for several days she continued to represent to him the dire results that must necessarily follow his incontinency, he yielded at last to the violence of his love; and immediately the curse fell upon him. After his death, it was necessary to decide which of his two wives should follow him to the funeral pyre, and there arose a sharp altercation between them as to who should enjoy this honour.'
WIDOWS WITH CHILDREN EXEMPTED

The elder of the two spoke first, and addressing the assembly of Brahmans who had gathered together for the purpose, she urged that the fact of her being the first wife placed her above the second. She should, therefore, be given the preference. Besides, she urged, her companion had children who were still young, and who required their mother's personal care and attention for their bringing up.

The second wife admitted the seniority of the first; but she maintained that she alone, having been the immediate cause of the sad death of their common husband in allowing him to defy the curse which doomed him to perish, was thereby entitled to the honour of being burnt with him. "As regards the bringing up of my children," she added, addressing the other wife, "are they not yours just as much as they are mine? Do not they too call you mother? And by your age and experience are you not better fitted than I to attend to their bringing up?"

In spite of the eloquence of the younger wife, it was, at last, unanimously agreed by the judges that the first wife should have the preference—a decision at which the latter lady was greatly delighted.

Most Sudras, as well as Hindus of the Siva sect, bury their dead instead of burning them, and there are several instances of wives having been buried alive with their deceased husbands. But the ceremonies in either case are nearly the same.

I will relate here two incidents which took place at no great distance from the place where I was living, and which will give a good idea of what these deplorable scenes of mad fanaticism are like:

In 1794, in a village of the Tanjore district called Pudupettah, there died a man of some importance belonging to the Komatty (Vaisya) caste. His wife, aged about thirty years, announced her intention of accompanying her

1 The custom of _suttee_ does not require widows who have young children to burn themselves with the body of their husbands; they are even forbidden to do so. Does this exception proceed from a feeling of humanity? By no manner of means! It is actuated merely by the fear that a large number of orphans would become a burden to the community.—Durois.
deceased husband to the funeral pyre. The news having rapidly spread abroad, a large concourse of people flocked together from all quarters to witness the spectacle. When everything was ready for the ceremony, and the widow had been richly clothed and adorned, the bearers stepped forward to remove the body of the deceased, which was placed in a sort of shrine, ornamented with costly stuffs, garlands of flowers, green foliage, &c., the corpse being seated in it with crossed legs, covered with jewels and clothed in the richest attire, and the mouth filled with betel. Immediately after the funeral car followed the widow, borne in a richly decorated palanquin. On the way to the burning-ground she was escorted by an immense crowd of eager sight-seers, lifting their hands towards her in token of admiration, and rending the air with cries of joy. She was looked upon as already translated to the paradise of Indra, and they seemed to envy her happy lot.

While the funeral procession moved slowly along, the spectators, especially the women, tried to draw near to her to congratulate her on her good fortune, at the same time expecting that, in virtue of the gift of prescience which such a meritorious attachment must confer upon her, she would be pleased to predict the happy things that might befall them here below. With gracious and amiable mien she declared to one that she would long enjoy the favours of fortune; to another, that she would be the mother of numerous children who would prosper in the world; to a third, that she would live long and happily with a husband who would love and cherish her; to a fourth, that her family was destined to attain much honour and dignity; and so forth. She then distributed among them leaves of betel; and the extraordinary eagerness with which these were received clearly proved that great value was attached to them as relics. Beaming with joy, these women then withdrew, each in the full hope that the promised blessings of wealth and happiness would be showered on her and hers.

During the whole procession, which was a very long one, the widow preserved a calm demeanour. Her looks were serene, even smiling; but when she reached the fatal place

1 Several travellers have said, and I am inclined to believe it, that
where she was to yield up her life in so ghastly a manner, it was observed that her firmness suddenly gave way. Plunged, as it were, in gloomy thought, she seemed to pay no attention whatever to what was passing around her. Her looks became wildly fixed upon the pile. Her face grew deadly pale. Her very limbs were in a convulsive tremor. Her drawn features and haggard face betrayed the fright that had seized her, while a sudden weakening of her senses betokened that she was ready to faint away.

The Brahmins who conducted the ceremony, and also her near relatives, ran quickly to her, endeavouring to keep up her courage and to revive her drooping spirits. All was of no effect. The unfortunate woman, bewildered and distracted, turned a deaf ear to all their exhortations and preserved a deep silence.

She was then made to leave the palanquin, and as she was scarcely able to walk, her people helped her to drag herself to a pond near the pyre. She plunged into the water with all her clothes and ornaments on, and was immediately afterwards led to the pyre, on which the body of her husband was already laid. The pyre was surrounded by Brahmins, each with a lighted torch in one hand and a bowl of ghee in the other. Her relatives and friends, several of whom were armed with muskets, swords, and other weapons, stood closely round in a double line, and seemed to await impatiently the end of this shocking tragedy. This armed force, they told me, was intended not only to intimidate the unhappy victim in case the terror of her approaching death might induce her to run away, but also to overawe any persons who might be moved by a natural feeling of compassion and sympathy, and so tempted to prevent the accomplishment of the homicidal sacrifice.

At length, the purohita Brahmin gave the fatal signal. The poor widow was instantly divested of all her jewels, and dragged, more dead than alive, to the pyre. There she

they force upon these wretched victims of superstition a kind of drink, which confuses the mind and prevents them from forming a correct notion of the dreadful torture to which they are being led. This beverage, they say, consists of a decoction of saffron. It is known that dried saffron pistsis (Crocus sativus), taken in large quantities, cause violent and convulsive laughter, sometimes terminating in death.—Dobson.
was obliged, according to custom, to walk three times round the pile, two of her nearest relatives supporting her by the arms. She accomplished the first round with tottering steps; during the second her strength wholly forsook her, and she fainted away in the arms of her conductors, who were obliged to complete the ceremony by dragging her through the third round. Then, at last, senseless and unconscious, she was cast upon the corpse of her husband. At that moment the air resounded with noisy acclamations. The Brahmins, emptying the contents of their vessels on the dry wood, applied their torches, and in the twinkling of an eye the whole pile was ablaze. Three times was the unfortunate woman called by her name. But, alas! she made no answer.

The last king of Tanjore, who died in 1801, left behind him four lawful wives. The Brahmins decided that two of these should be burnt with the body of their husband, and selected the couple that should have the preference. It would have been an everlasting shame to them and the grossest insult to the memory of the deceased had they hesitated to accept this singular honour. Being fully convinced, moreover, that no means would be spared to induce them to sacrifice themselves either willingly or unwillingly, they made a virtue of necessity and seemed perfectly ready to yield to the terrible lot which awaited them.

The necessary preparations for the obsequies were completed in a single day.

Three or four leagues from the royal residence a square pit of no great depth, and about 12 to 15 feet square, was excavated. Within it was erected a pyramid of sandalwood, resting on a kind of scaffolding of the same wood. The posts which supported it were so arranged that they could easily be removed, and would thereby cause the whole structure to collapse suddenly. At the four corners of the pit were placed huge brass jars filled with ghee, to be thrown on the wood in order to hasten combustion.

The following was the order of the procession as it wended its way to the pyre. It was headed by a large force of armed soldiers. Then followed a crowd of musicians, chiefly trumpeters, who made the air ring with the dismal sound of their instruments. Next came the king's body
borne in a splendid open palanquin, accompanied by his guru, his principal officers, and his nearest relatives, who were all on foot and wore no turbans in token of mourning. Among them was also a large number of Brahmins. Then came the two victims, each borne on a richly decorated palanquin. They were loaded, rather than decked, with jewels. Several ranks of soldiers surrounded them to preserve order and to keep back the great crowds that flocked in from every side. The two queens were accompanied by some of their favourite women, with whom they occasionally conversed. Then followed relatives of both sexes, to whom the victims had made valuable presents before leaving the palace. An innumerable multitude of Brahmins and persons of all castes followed in the rear.

On reaching the spot where their untimely fate awaited them, the victims were required to perform the ablutions and other ceremonies proper on such occasions; and they went through the whole of them without hesitation and without the least sign of fear. When, however, it came to walking round the pile, it was observed that their features underwent a sudden change. Their strength seemed well-nigh to forsake them in spite of their obvious efforts to suppress their natural feelings. During this interval the body of the king had been placed on the top of the pyramid of sandalwood. The two queens, still wearing their rich attire and ornaments, were next compelled to ascend the pile. Lying down beside the body of the deceased prince, one on the right and the other on the left, they joined hands across the corpse. The officiating Brahmins then recited in a loud tone several mantrams, sprinkled the pile with their tirtam or holy water, and emptied the jars of ghee over the wood, setting fire to it at the same moment. This was done on one side by the nearest relative of the king, on another by his guru, on others by leading Brahmins. The flames quickly spread, and the props being removed, the whole structure collapsed, and in its fall must have crushed to death the two unfortunate victims. Thereupon all the spectators shouted aloud for joy. The unhappy women's relatives standing around the pile then called to them several times by name, and it is said that, issuing from amidst the flames, the word Yen? (What?)
was heard distinctly pronounced. A ridiculous illusion, no doubt, of minds blinded by fanaticism; for it could never be believed that the unfortunate victims were at that moment in a condition to hear and to speak.

Two days after, when the fire was completely extinguished, they removed from amidst the ashes the remnants of the bones that had not been entirely consumed, and put them into copper urns, which were carefully sealed with the signet of the new king. Some time afterwards, thirty Brahmins were selected to carry these relics to Kasi (Benares) and to throw them into the sacred waters of the Ganges. It was arranged that, on their return from that holy city, they should receive valuable presents, upon producing authenticated certificates to the effect that they had really accomplished the journey, and had faithfully executed the task entrusted to them. A portion of the bones was, however, reserved for the following purpose:—they were reduced to powder, mixed with some boiled rice, and eaten by twelve Brahmins. This revolting and unnatural act had for its object the expiation of the sins of the deceased—sins which, according to the popular opinion, were transmitted to the bodies of the persons who ate the ashes, and were tempted by money to overcome their repugnance for such disgusting food. At the same time, it is believed that the filthy lucre thus earned can never be attended with much advantage to the recipients. Amidst the ashes, too, were picked up small pieces of melted gold, the remains of the ornaments worn by the princesses.

Presents were given to the Brahmins who presided at the obsequies, and to those who had honoured the ceremonies with their presence. To the king’s guru was given an elephant. The three palanquins which had served to carry the corpse of the king and the two victims to the pile were given away to the three leading Brahmins. The presents distributed among the other Brahmins consisted of cloths and of money amounting to nearly twenty-five thousand rupees. Several bags of small coin were also scattered among the crowds on the roadside as the funeral procession was on its way to the pyre. Finally, twelve houses were built and presented to the twelve Brahmins who had the courage to swallow the powdered bones of
the deceased, and by that means to take upon themselves all their sins.

A few days after the funeral the new king made a pilgrimage to a temple a few leagues distant from his capital. He there took a bath in a sacred tank, and was thus purified of all the uncleanness that he had contracted during the various ceremonies of mourning. On this occasion also presents were given to the Brahmins and to the poor of other castes.

On the spot where the deceased king and his two unhappy companions had been consumed a circular mausoleum was erected, about 12 feet in diameter, surmounted by a dome. The reigning prince visits it from time to time, prostrates himself humbly before the tombs, and offers sacrifices to the manes of his predecessor and to those of his worthy and saintly spouses.

Crowds of devotees also repair thither to offer up vows and sacrifices to the new divinities, and to implore their help and protection in the various troubles of life.

In the year 1802 I heard accounts of a great number of so-called miracles performed through their intercession.

It is only after long and serious reflection on the many eccentricities and inconsistencies of the human mind that one can look without astonishment upon the deplorable scenes of which a few of the main features have just been described. It is indeed unaccountable how these Brahmins, who are so scrupulous and attach so much importance to the life of the most insignificant insect, and whose feelings are excited to pity and indignation at the very sight of a cow being slaughtered, can, with such savage cold-bloodedness and wicked satisfaction, look upon so many weak and innocent human beings, incited by hypocritical and barbarous inducements, being led with affected resignation to a punishment so cruel and undeserved. I leave to others the task of explaining these inconceivable contradictions, if, that is to say, it is possible to assign any reasons for such superstitious fanatism, whose characteristic feature is to suppress all natural and rational sentiment.