

AN EARNEST  
APPEAL TO BRITISH HUMANITY,

IN BEHALF OF

**HINDOO WIDOWS:**

IN WHICH

THE ABOLITION OF THE BARBAROUS RITE

OF

**Burning Alive**

IS

PROVED TO BE BOTH SAFE AND PRACTICABLE.



BY THE

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RECTOR OF BURTON, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE; AND VICAR OF BIDDENHAM,  
BEDFORDSHIRE.

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*SECOND EDITION.*

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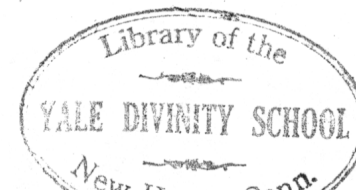
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# AN EARNEST APPEAL, &c. &c.

## CHAPTER I.

*Burning of Hindoo Widows—Extent of the Practice—Prevalence near the Seat of Supreme Government—Atrociousness of the Rite—Violation of Human and Divine Laws—Regulations adopted to restrain it—their Insufficiency—Necessity of ulterior measures.*

A POWERFUL impression has been excited in the public mind, by official returns laid before Parliament in the years 1823 and 1824, of the number of Hindoo Widows annually perishing on the funeral pile in British India. The atrociousness of the rite, the extent to which it is practised, its prevalence in those parts where the British Power is most established, and its open exhibition under the very eyes of the Supreme Government, have awakened reflections painful to humanity, and injurious to the character and honour of the British Nation.

The above official documents consist of two portions; the first containing a statement of immolations from the year 1815 to 1818, inclusive, and embracing a variety of important and interesting observations, from which we shall have occasion to make several extracts. The second, is a further series of returns, from the year 1818 to 1821 (the latest period during which information has been received); and altogether illustrating the progress of the rite for seven years successively.

The subjoined Return for the year 1818\* exhibits the extent of the practice in the Presidency of Bengal, where the rite is most prevalent.

### IMMOLATIONS DURING THE YEAR 1818.

ZILLAS AND CITIES. CALCUTTA DIVISION.		ZILLAS AND CITIES. MOORSHEDABAD DIVISION.	
	No. of Suttees †.		No. of Suttees.
Burdwan.....	132	Beerbhoom.....	4
Cuttack.....	11	Bhaugulpore.....	—
Hooghly.....	141	Ditto, Joint at Monghyr.....	—
Jessore.....	23	Dinagepore.....	—
Jungle Mehals.....	61	Ditto, Joint at Maldah.....	1
Midnapore.....	22	Moorshedabad City.....	6
Nuddea.....	80	Purnea.....	1
Suburbs of Calcutta.....	43	Rajshahye.....	2
24 Pergunnahs.....	31	Rungpore.....	15
		Ditto, Joint.....	1
	Total... 544		Total... 30

\* See "Papers relating to Hindoo Widows," 1821. Page 211.  
† The term used to denote the unhappy victims, and sometimes applied to the ceremony itself, or act of immolation.

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## DACCA DIVISION.

	No. of Suttees.
Backergunge .....	1
Chittagong .....	3
Dacca City .....	25
Dacca Jelalpoore.....	5
Momensing .....	1
Sylhet .....	1
Tipperah .....	22
Total...	58

## BAREILLY DIVISION.

Agrah .....	1
Allighur .....	2
Bareilly .....	—
Cawnpore .....	5
Etawah .....	3
Furruckabad .....	—
Moradabad .....	1
Merut .....	—
Seharunpoore.....	1
Total...	13

## PATNA DIVISION.

	No. of Suttees.
Behar .....	2
Patna City .....	3
Ramghur .....	4
Sarun .....	23
Shahabad .....	25
Tirhoot .....	—
Joint ditto, at Monghyr .....	—
Total...	57

## BENARES DIVISION.

Allahabad .....	3
Joint ditto, at Futteeepore....	1
Bundlécund .....	11
Joint, at Calpee .....	4
Benares City .....	15
Goruckpore .....	50
Joint ditto, at Azimghur....	2
Jaunpore .....	3
Joint ditto, at Ghazeepore ...	43
Mirzapore .....	5
Total...	137

Total, Six Divisions, 839.

(Signed) W. DORIN, Register.

The mind recoils with horror at this document of blood, and every circumstance attending the transaction is calculated to excite the same impression. The death of the husband involves that of the wife. It is not enough that the children have to mourn the loss of one parent: they are doomed to sustain the full weight of domestic calamity, and to lose the only remaining hope of maternal tenderness and love. Within twenty-four hours of the decease of the husband, that is to say, in the first moments of impassioned grief, when the powers of sober judgment are suspended, and the heart resigns itself to the dominion of its sorrows, is the unhappy widow led to the funeral pile; the eldest son being selected to apply the torch, to light up the flame destined to destroy the living mother with the body of the departed father. Thus an act of matricide is committed, and the child becomes the executioner of the parent that gave him birth; while the shrieks of the expiring victim are lost in the shouts and acclamations of the surrounding multitude.

This scene, let it be remembered, occurs not in a remote corner of Hindoostan, where the eye of authority penetrates with difficulty; but principally in Bengal, and in that portion which is the seat of Supreme Government—where Christianity is professed—and where laws becoming the character of a civil community, and of an enlightened nation, are presumed to be administered. By a reference to the above document, it appears, that *considerably more than half of the total amount of Suttees occur in the Calcutta*

*Division; and that in the year 1818 not less than forty-three immolations are recorded as having taken place in the very suburbs of Calcutta itself!* The dignity of Government is insulted by a spectacle so avowedly in opposition to all the provisions of Civil Law and Justice; while the honour of Religion is compromised, by the want of a more visible impression on the surrounding idolatry and superstition. In whatever point of view we contemplate the practice, it calls for the most unqualified reprobation. It violates whatever is strong in natural affection, endearing in humanity, or authoritative in law; while it is a flagrant breach of the laws and commandments of God\*.

We may here justly demand, On whom does the moral guilt of this act principally attach? On the unhappy sufferers, who are the victims of a popular delusion, and unconscious of the law which they transgress; or on those who, possessing an uncontrolled power over the actions and lives of the natives, permit this deed of murder from year to year, while they profess a religion that solemnly denounces it?

What measures, then, it will be asked, has the British Government in India taken, in vindication of its own character, towards the suppression or mitigation of this practice?

It appears, that in the year 1805, the attention of Government was first awakened to this subject. It was not, however, till the year 1815 †, that certain Regulations were generally issued; the object of which was, not to suppress the practice (a measure indispensably required by humanity, and by the highest considerations of duty), but to adopt an intermediate course, *by restricting the rite within the limits prescribed by the Shaster*, and prohibiting some of those numerous violations of their own law which were but too prevalent on these occasions. The use of stupefying and intoxicating drugs, the employment of any compulsory means, the undue influence of relatives, the binding down the victim with bamboos, or detaining her by force in her attempt to escape; these, with a few other abuses, were peremptorily forbidden ‡. The rite itself, however, was left undisturbed; but it was confidently anticipated that these prohibitions would have a powerful effect in restraining the practice, and might ultimately lead to its entire prevention ||.

The praise of humane and benevolent intentions cannot be

\* The passing through the fire unto Moloch is justly applicable to this rite. It has therefore been called "the Moloch of the East." It is never mentioned in Scripture, but in language of the severest reprehension, and as being visited with the most signal judgments. See Levit. xviii. 21; Deut. xviii. 10—12; 2 Kings, xvii. 17, 18; Ps. cvi. 37, 38, 40.

† Papers &c. p. 41, 67.

‡ Papers &c. p. 28, 31.

|| Papers &c. p. 28.

withheld from this measure. In other respects, the Regulations seem liable to very powerful objections.

In the first place, they merit the charge of being only a *half measure*; and all half measures are proverbially unwise in policy, and inefficient in operation. The Regulations aimed at cutting off the abuses; but the Great Abuse itself, the inhuman practice, they left untouched. They did more—they *legalized it, by allowing its performance when in conformity with the Shaster\**; and thus exhibited a *Christian Government in the painful character of giving its public sanction to an act of superstition, under one of its most atrocious forms*†. The consequence has been, the rapid growth of the very practice which the Regulations were designed to check; as is painfully illustrated by the following comparative statement:

IMMOLATIONS IN THE PRESIDENCY OF BENGAL.

		Number.
In the year	1815	- - 378
	1816	- - 442
	1817	- - 707
	1818	- - 839
	1819	- - 650
	1820	- - 597
	1821	- - 654

We are thus presented with the appalling fact of a progressive increase of immolations since the year 1815 (the period when the Regulations were first generally adopted), till they attained almost double their original amount; thereby verifying the remark of one of the Public Functionaries in India, that "it can scarcely be a matter of astonishment, that the number of sacrifices should be doubled, when the sanction of the Ruling Power is added to the recommendation of the Shaster‡."

But, afflicting as is such a result, it is the tolerating, under any form, a practice marked by the loss and expenditure of human life, that constitutes the most objectionable feature in this proceeding. There should be no compromise with an act of blood. To

\* Papers &c. p. 31.

† "The police-officers are ordered to interfere, for the purpose of ascertaining that the ceremony is performed in conformity with the rules of the Shasters; and, in that event, to allow its completion. This is granting the authority of Government for burning Widows."—See Remark of a Magistrate. Papers &c. p. 236.

‡ Papers &c. p. 236.

In this conclusion, the Governor-General in Council himself concurs; and is "reluctantly led to express his apprehension, that the greater confidence with which the people perform this rite, *under the sanction of Government, as implied or avowed in the Circular Orders* already in force, combined with the excitement of religious bigotry, may have tended to augment, rather than to diminish the frequency of these sacrifices."—See Papers &c. 242.

tolerate it, is to participate in its guilt. It appears, too, by a reference to their sacred books, on the testimony of their own Pundits\*, that there existed no declared authority for this rite; and that in the various instances already enumerated, there was a most positive infraction of their own law;—while it was no less evident that, the rights of Nature and of Humanity were grossly violated, and the great principles of Civil Law and Justice fearlessly invaded. What an admirable opportunity was thus afforded for throwing the shield of Humanity around these unhappy sufferers, and prohibiting the further continuance of this barbarous rite! Instead of adopting this conduct, so worthy of a humane people, and of a Christian community, the Government, by the want of a more decisive exercise of authority, have aggravated the evil which they designed to undermine, and have thus imposed on themselves the necessity, either of putting in force some ulterior measure, or of allowing it to be proclaimed that they have entered into an unequal contest with the Natives, in which Pagan Superstition has obtained a signal triumph over British Law and British Christianity.

## CHAPTER II.

*Objections to a more efficient mode of proceeding, considered—Practice, whether founded on Law—Amenable to the Civil Power—How far voluntary—Authority of a Treaty, when subversive of Justice, Morality, and Religion—Testimony of Locke.*

WE are now arrived at the main object of the present undertaking; which is to inquire, What are the objections that are assumed to be of such magnitude, as to prevent the adoption of those prompt and efficacious measures, which might at once remove this foul opprobrium from the British character?

Of these we will notice the most prominent.

It is alleged,

First, That the Immolation of Widows on the funeral pile is a religious rite, founded on the express authority of Hindoo Law.

This assertion is now fully disproved by the declaration of their own Pundits, to whose decision Government had referred the inquiry. From their numerous sacred writings, not a single passage is to be adduced, *enjoining* the performance of this rite. Munoo, the most ancient of their Legislators, does not even allude to it; thereby proving that the practice was either unknown in the early days of Indian legislation, or not sanctioned by his approval. The first supposition is fatal to its high antiquity; the latter, to its authority. The Shaster, which is comparatively modern, recommends, but does not command, its observance. The Vedasta

\* The Interpreters of their Law.

positively prohibits it\*. In others, there is the greatest diversity of opinion on the subject; and a life of piety and austerity is deemed the most suitable and praiseworthy†.

It is admitted that the act must be voluntary‡. Now, if it be voluntary, how can it be a law? If it were a law, it would cease to be voluntary; it would be peremptory, and binding as well as universal in its obligation: instead of which, in some parts of India, in the Western Provinces, it is of very rare occurrence; in particular districts, it has altogether ceased§; and even in Bengal, where it is most prevalent, not more than one in a hundred undergo the ceremony: and it is justly observed, that a law, regularly disobeyed by ninety-nine out of a hundred of those to whom it is given, and this without punishment or blame, is totally unworthy of the name of law||.

The practice, then, does not originate in law, but the law is the consequence of the practice. Supposing, however, that it were admitted to be a religious rite, of long-established usage, and founded on express injunctions of their law; still no pretext of religion, no antiquity of usage, no alleged authority of law, can ever justify the violation of those fundamental principles by which civil society is held together, nor can they supersede the obligations of moral duty. But this rite possesses no such claims\*\*. Its real origin and prevalence is to be sought (with a few exceptions) in the interested motives of relatives; of which a stronger instance cannot be furnished, than the fact that fifty-seven civil suits, involving property amounting to four lacs of rupees, were pending, in the year 1819, in the Calcutta Court of Circuit, in which Hindoo Widow Ladies were parties††. A further exciting cause may be found in the avarice of Bramins, who are in the habit of receiving from wealthy families not less than two hundred rupees on these occasions‡‡; while the mass of the people are actuated by no higher view than the love of amusement (barbarous as it is in such a form), and the attraction attending a public exhibition and a show|||.

\* Papers &c. p. 124.

† Such is the testimony of Mutoonjoy, Pundit of the Supreme Court. "The Shasters exhibit a great variety of opinions, but no difference prevails with regard to the propriety of leading a life of austerity."—Papers &c. p. 124.

‡ "These acts are not necessary, but merely voluntary."—Papers &c. p. 120.

§ Papers &c. 264.

|| See Essays, p. 60, on the Habits, Character, and Moral Improvement of the Hindoos; 7s. 6d.: Kingsbury, London.

The writer cannot allude to this work, originally published by the Serampore Missionaries in India, without strongly recommending it to the reader, as replete with sound argument, useful information, and interesting observations, on the subjects to which it refers.

\*\* Papers &c. 228. Essays &c. p. 63.

†† Papers &c. 243. ‡‡ Essays &c. p. 22. ||| Papers &c. p. 227.

These facts will prepare us for the consideration of the next objection; viz.

Secondly, That the sacrifice is voluntary.

That they were not so formerly, in the great majority of instances, is evident from the prohibition of all intoxicating drugs\*.

What security have we now for the voluntary performance of the act? The issuing of the Regulations, it will be said, which require it to be voluntary, and the appointment of the Darogah, or police-officer, whose duty it is to enforce their observance, are an ample security. But what Regulations can prevent the secret, yet powerful influence, by which the Widow becomes the prey of selfish Relatives and rapacious Bramins? And what assurance have we that the Darogah himself faithfully discharges his appointed duty? The following testimony of the acting Superintendent of Police will aid us in this inquiry: "It is the opinion of the Magistrate of a District, in which Suttee is particularly frequent (and I entirely concur with him), that *few are now reported, in which the Darogah has not been paid, either for speedy attendance to prevent the additional horror of the state of the corpse, or for permitting an illegal sacrifice*†."

We may add something like an admission of great neglect from the Court of Nizamut Adawlut itself. "The Court cannot avoid remarking, that, *as, out of twenty-five cases of Suttee, which occurred in the district of Shahabad in the year 1818, previous notice of not one appears, according to the report, to have reached the Police-officers (or to have been acknowledged by them); this circumstance argues, either a want of ordinary vigilance, or a wilful neglect of duty on the part of those Police-officers*‡."

Sacrifices, thus surreptitiously performed, cannot lay much claim to the character of voluntary.

Let us next examine those cases more entitled to be considered voluntary; and inquire whether the circumstances, under which the consent is obtained, do not invalidate their freeness.

"The free consent," observes an intelligent Magistrate, "alleged in palliation of the sacrifice, appears to me inadmissible; that is, no fair judgment can be passed upon a person *non compos mentis*, assenting to the performance of this act: for can a person be called actually in a sound state of reason, and of mind, under the agitation of grief? and would a person's deposition, under this state of mind, be received in a court of justice, in a case where life and death were at stake? Can the performance of this ceremony be in truth called a voluntary act?"

Without pursuing the argument further, we are justified in observing, that no boldness of assertion can ever convince an unprejudiced mind that women like to be burnt. Individual instances of

\* See page 3.

† Papers &c. p. 229.

‡ Papers &c. p. 225.

fanatic zeal may occur; this is not denied; but all are not heroines—all do not aspire to the honours of martyrdom. We are compelled to believe of the great majority of victims, comprising, perhaps, a proportion of not less than 90 in 100, that their death is accomplished under circumstances where a moral agency has not been freely exercised, and where we cannot but indulge forebodings of the most melancholy kind. Not to interpose, therefore, is to become an accomplice in the deed itself; it is to incur the guilt of blood; and to be responsible both to God and man for every one of the lives, which an act of humane and seasonable prevention might have rescued from destruction.

Thirdly, It is asserted, that the Natives are entitled, by a solemn Treaty, to the free enjoyment of all their rites and superstitions.

And is India, then, to be delivered up to a state of interminable darkness and superstition, and the authority of a treaty to be pleaded for disregarding all the dictates of humanity, and all the obligations of moral duty? Are acts of atrocity to be committed, incompatible with the peace and safety of society; and the faith of a treaty to be urged, to sanction the perpetration of the grossest crimes? Are we to fulfil one duty, by neglecting a greater? Has a treaty no limitations\*? Is its authority superior to the authority of law, of humanity, of morality, and of religion? To adopt the language of a man, whose name gives importance to whatever he has uttered with respect to India †, “Are we bound for ever to preserve all the enormities of the Hindoo System? Have we become the guardians of every monstrous principle and practice which it contains? Are we pledged to support, for all generations, by the authority of our Government, and the power of our arms, the miseries which ignorance and knavery have so long entailed upon a large portion of the human race? Is *this* the part which a free, a humane, and an enlightened nation—a nation itself professing principles diametrically opposite to those in question—has engaged to act *towards its own subjects*? It would be too absurd and extravagant to maintain that any engagement of this kind exists—that Great Britain is under any engagement, direct or implied, to uphold

\* That the Treaty has these limitations, is clearly admitted, in the following language: “The (Court of) Nizamut Adawlut is aware, that it is one of the fundamental maxims of the British Government, to consult the religious opinions, customs, and prejudices of the Natives, in all cases in which it has been practicable, *consistently with the principles of morality, reason, and humanity.*”—See Papers &c. p. 24. Is, then, the atrocious practice of Widows burning alive on the funeral pile consistent “with the principles of morality, reason, and humanity?” If it is utterly at variance with these principles, what becomes of the argument founded on the supposed authority of a treaty?

† The late Charles Grant, Esq. for many years one of the Directors of the East-India Company. The best testimony to his high character and great services is the decision of the Court of Directors, awarding a public monument to his memory.

errors and usages, grossly and fundamentally subversive of the first principles of reason, morality, and religion\*.”

To these just and enlightened sentiments, we may add the following apposite and strong testimony from Locke. “The post of a Magistrate,” says this celebrated writer, “is to take care that the commonwealth receive no prejudice; and that there be no injury done to any man in life and estate.” “You will say, if some congregations have a mind to sacrifice Infants, or practise *any other such heinous enormities, is the Magistrate obliged to tolerate them, because they are committed in a religious assembly?* I answer, No;—*these things are not lawful in the ordinary course of life, nor in any private house; and, therefore, neither are they so in the worship of God* †.”

### CHAPTER III.

*Alleged Danger of Interference—Vellore Meeting—Argument of Policy—Limitations to its use—How far uniformly adhered to.*

WE now proceed to the final and prominent objection, which is considered as presenting the strongest difficulties, and that into which the discussion ultimately resolves itself. The Immolation of Widows, it is said, is not to be argued as an abstract question of humanity, or of moral and religious duty, nor yet of law: on all these grounds it is admitted to be indefensible. The proper and only legitimate view, we are told, is its bearings, as a subject of high national policy; and whether any act of interference with the superstitions and established usages of India, is not fraught with imminent risk to the interests of our Eastern Empire †.

\* See “Observations on the State of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain,” by Charles Grant, Esq. 1792.

Upwards of thirty years have elapsed since the above work was written. How painful the conviction, that the same remarks are still applicable!

† See Locke, Vol. ii. pp. 368, 370.

‡ In confirmation of this reasoning, the Mutiny of Vellore is usually quoted, as furnishing a painful yet instructive example of the danger of innovations. The misconceptions that prevail on this subject make it desirable to state the real nature of the transaction. It has often been asserted, that the mutiny arose from an attempt to interfere with the religious opinions of the Natives. On the contrary, it has been ascertained to have originated in an order issued to the Sepoys, by the commanding officer, to lay aside their turbans, and other peculiar marks of their dress, which formed the distinctive character of their caste. To this innovation they refused to submit. The most compulsory measures were immediately adopted—nearly a whole regiment was broken—the petty officers were reduced to the ranks—nineteen of the ringleaders were tried and condemned—two received nine hundred lashes, while the soldiers were compelled to tread their turbans under their feet. It was in consequence of this signal severity, that the men proceeded to extremities, and massacred some of their own officers.

We may, perhaps, be allowed for a moment to inquire, How far the policy, which is acknowledged to be in avowed opposition to every principle of moral and religious duty, is a policy that rests on a very creditable or sound foundation? and, Whether true policy will not always be proved to be that which is most in accordance with enlightened views and sentiments? We may also surely demand, Whether Governments are not amenable to the same moral sanctions and Divine laws to which every individual is unquestionably subject? and, if a departure from these principles is both criminal and dangerous in the latter case, whether an exemption from their authority and penal consequences can be successfully pleaded, by an appeal to national policy? What, too, we may further ask, is national policy, for the most part, taken in its general acceptation, but a persuasion that the wisdom of man is more efficient in the regulation of human affairs than a compliance with the wisdom from above, and that the world is governed by secondary causes; while all History, both sacred and profane, testifies the operation of a first and supreme Great Cause, which exercises its controul over the destinies both of men and nations? In these remarks, we would not be misunderstood as advocating a religious zeal, that pursues its ends without regard to time, place, and circumstances. True religion, while it is "a spirit of power," is no less characterized as being "of a sound mind." What we would earnestly impress, and proclaim, as an important rule of conduct, is, that while *religion without policy* is the religion of a zealot, and dangerous, because misdirected in its course, *the policy that is without religion* deserves no better title than that of *practical infidelity*: and that it is only in proportion as public counsels are administered on the foundation of the Divine commands, that either public virtue can be effectually maintained in the State, or morality, happiness, and prosperity, be diffused among the people.

But, while motives of policy are thus urged, and the mutiny at Vellore is held up as a beacon to deter future innovators, we may justly demand, *How far has the British Government uniformly adhered to the principle of non-interference, in its various relations with the Natives of Hindoostan?*

To this inquiry, a regard to truth compels us to reply, that,

In commenting on this event, it may be observed, that there is no resemblance between the circumstances of the case, and the proposed measure of abolishing Female Immolations. The Vellore Mutiny was a *military question*; in which military feeling and prejudice were assailed in the rudest manner, among men who carried the means of redress about their persons, and which they were roused to use by successive acts of the severest provocation. The present measure is of a totally distinct and opposite nature. The *motives*, as well as the *act* of interference, are liable to no injurious suspicion, originate in no selfish purpose, are attended with no circumstances of severity; but are characterized, throughout, by a laudable and merciful desire to put an end to a barbarous practice, and to spare the unjustifiable waste of human life.

whatever may be the policy or pledges of Great Britain, the instances of interference are palpable and numerous;—instances, too, not of minor interest, but extending to revenue, the tenure of land, the administration of law, and the services and ministers of religion; in a word, affecting the most important branches of their Civil and Ecclesiastical economy.

#### CHAPTER IV.

*Innovations, relating to—Collection of Tribute—Tenure of Land—Administration of Law—Treatment of Native Princes—Popular Worship—Inviolability of Bramins.*

WE have now to detail various instances of Interference with the Laws and Usages of our Eastern Empire: some originating in motives that do honour to the paternal character of our Government; others partaking of a more questionable nature; but all of them furnishing the strongest evidence, that, whenever an adequate cause was supposed to exist, we have not been deterred from our object by the alleged danger of interference.

A considerable Innovation has occurred—

First, In the Collection of the Tribute.

The revenue from this source, during the Mohammedan Government, was subject to no definite standard, but dependent on the arbitrary will of the governors, and supposed ability of the governed. The assessment is now determined by fixed rules and principles, in which the claims of both parties are equitably and impartially considered; and industry is left to reap its own fruits, without the terror of fresh imposts and additional exactions.

Secondly, In the Tenure of Land.

Under the former Governments, the Natives had no hereditary property in their estates: every thing was subject to the caprice and ambition of the conquerors. On the payment of a suitable acknowledgment, the property of the soil is now vested in the landholders, with the power of transmitting the inheritance to their successors.

If these instances are considered to be too beneficial in their tendency to provoke opposition, we will next advert to experiments of a more daring kind, where a direct collision of feeling might have been anticipated; viz.

Thirdly, In the Administration of Public Law.

On this subject, Sir William Jones had asserted, that, such were the prejudices of the Hindoos, their law was never likely to undergo any modification or improvement. A sentiment so strongly expressed by the celebrated Compiler of "the Digest of Hindoo and Mohammedan Law," will enable us to appreciate the bold and laudable zeal which has surmounted the difficulty. The Moham-

medan Law, which has long been in use in criminal cases, has undergone at our hands very important modifications; while the Hindoo Law has experienced the same treatment, whenever the ends of justice were thought to be more beneficially answered. This change, too, has been accomplished, in some instances, *against the express declarations of the Shaster*; such as putting down the *koor*, and the sitting in *dhurna*, both of which are now totally abolished.

Fourthly, In the treatment of their Native Princes.

Of these, many have been deposed, and their Provinces become appendages to the British Empire. Others have been rendered tributary, their Capitals and Garrisons occupied, and their Government administered through the agency and influence of British Residents\*. Nor have we at any time refrained from measures of very strong coercion, whenever the security of our interests, or the extension of our Empire, have been thought to supply a just and necessary occasion.

But if we wish for an evidence of the most decided and hazardous Interference, we may appeal to the enterprising act, which has not scrupled to assail even the rights and privileges of religious worship, and to convert Idolatry itself into a means of augmenting the Public Revenue. This is evinced,

Fifthly, In the controul assumed over the Temple and Worship of Juggernaut.

The Temple and Idol of Juggernaut, the Moloch of the East, are but too well known to every reader. Two hundred thousand Pilgrims, annually resorting from various parts of India, attest the extent of his worship; while the plains that are whitened with human bones, and vultures seen hovering over the dying and the dead, exhibit the famine and death that are the dire consequences. By a Regulation issued from the Bengal Government, April the 3d, 1806, the whole management, internal and external, of this Temple, with all its abominations, was vested in the hands of Government, with the appointment of the Priests, and the expense and support of the worship; while, in order to render the whole system a profitable source of income to the State, a tax was imposed on the Pilgrims, without the payment of which none were permitted the right of worship.

This was indeed a bold attempt to interfere with their religious

\* This is at present the case with the Peishwah, the late head of the Mahratta Confederacy.—See Col. Fitzclarence's Journal; and Sir John Malcolm's "Central India."

† Christian Researches, p. 133.

‡ The annual sum disbursed for this purpose, by the Bengal Government, is stated, from an official document, to amount to 8702*l*.—See Christian Researches, p. 143.

§ Christian Researches, p. 144.

privileges; and it might be presumed, that if the Natives are as inflammable as they are represented to be, a very adequate cause of provocation was thus afforded. But further acts of encroachment were committed. On the 28th of April, 1809, a new Regulation was issued; by one clause of which, no less than *seventeen descriptions of persons are enumerated of low degree, who were prohibited entering the Temple*. By this Order, the exercise of a public act of worship, to which peculiar importance is attached, was denied to a most numerous class of people; and a right withheld, which is generally considered inalienable by all nations!! It is important to add, that no resistance has ever been made to these signal acts of interference and aggression.

If these encroachments on the liberty of public worship prove how little the plea of Non-interference is to be urged, we shall be confirmed in this impression by a statement of the measures adopted,

Sixthly, In regard to their Bramins.

The sanctity of a Bramin is considered to be so eminently great, that he is contemplated as belonging to a superior order of beings. The reverence shewn to their persons is, consequently, carried to an almost incredible extent.

We may judge of their high pretensions, by the following extracts from Munoo\*:

"The very birth of Bramins is a constant incarnation of Dherma, God of Justice."

"A Bramin, whether learned or ignorant, is a powerful divinity."

"Although Bramins employ themselves in all sorts of mean occupations, they must invariably be honoured; for they are something transcendently divine.

"Never shall the King slay a Bramin, though convicted of all possible crimes: let him banish the offender from his realm, but with all his property secure, and his body unhurt."

"No greater crime is known on earth than slaying a Bramin."

With all these attributes of divinity, the Bramins often exhibit much of the imperfections of mortals. To restrain their excesses, which were committed under the assumed sanctity of their character, it was found necessary to repeal the Order which exempted them from all jurisdiction, and to subject them to the general operation of the laws; and, notwithstanding the broad shield of popular favour, and supposed divine impress which is stamped upon their persons—though "no greater crime is known on earth than slaying a Bramin"—a year never elapses without their undergoing the judicial sentence of the law, in one form or other; and Bramins are publicly executed, whenever their crimes are such as to call down so ignominious a punishment†. Thus, we may

\* See Sir William Jones's Translation of Munoo.

† An execution of this nature occurred during the administration of



assume the right of regulating the administration of their law, impracticable as the attempt was declared to be—we may plant the British standard on the summit of their conquered Citadels, and trample on the necks of their Princes—we may, for the purposes of revenue, usurp a controul over their public worship, and deny to multitudes the right of access to their own temples—we may subject to the punishment of death the sacred persons of their Priests, when those Priests are declared, by their own law, however guilty, to be beyond the reach and operation of law;—and yet, on an occasion the most revolting to humanity, meriting to be classed in the number of those scourges which have afflicted and desolated mankind, and by its continuance reflecting dishonour on the British name and character, we are not to interfere with the barbarous practice of burning Widows alive on the funeral pile, because—any attempt to interfere with the Laws, the Religion, or Usages of Hindoostan, is calculated to endanger the stability of our Eastern Empire!!

Such is the dilemma to which the advocates of Non-interference are reduced. They cannot maintain their argument, without the argument impeaching our practice; while, by a singular fatality, the effect of our practice, attesting as it does the total absence of danger, in the midst of innumerable innovations, furnishes a most remarkable and signal refutation of their argument. The conclusion is inevitable—we must either be consistent, and do more; or honestly confess that we have already done too much; and that considerations of interest are with us far more powerful stimulants to action, than the claims of humanity, or the obligations of moral virtue.

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Warren Hastings, when the power of Great Britain was far from having attained the ascendancy which it has since acquired. As this was the first instance of the kind, an universal sensation was felt as to the policy and probable consequences of the measure. The moment at length arrived—the multitude were assembled—the officers of justice proceeded to inflict the sentence of the law—the Bramin was hanged—while the crowd of spectators gazed at the spectacle, and then—quietly dispersed.

## CHAPTER V.

*Precedents for Interference—Infanticide—Edict of Marquis Wellesley—Successful Efforts of Governor Duncan and Colonel Walker—Jogee Tribes—Regulation against Widows burying alive—Prohibition of burning alive, by the Mohammedan, Portuguese, Dutch, Danish, and French Governments.*

IN the course of the present inquiry, one reason that has been assigned for abolishing the Immolation of Females, was the prodigal waste of human life, and consequent violation of the laws of civil society. It is important therefore to inquire, Whether the history of Hindoostan furnishes no precedents of direct interference with those superstitions, which have been equally characterized by the same objection?

It appears, that four several instances have occurred, not less marked by atrocity than the burning of women alive, where the Government has humanely interfered, without experiencing any molestation from the Natives.

During the administration of the Marquis Wellesley, a custom prevailed, to a considerable extent, in the Island of Saugor, of committing Infants to the Ganges, in compliance with a vow made by the Mothers. His Lordship, with that promptitude and decision which mark his character, humanely resolved to put an end to so unnatural a practice; and issued an Edict, in 1802, *declaring the perpetrators of this act to be guilty of murder*. At the annual period appointed for the celebration of this ceremony, the multitude assembled as usual, but were soon dispersed by the soldiers in attendance, without the least offer of resistance, or any attempt to resume so inhuman a rite.

A similar usage, long established among the Rajpoots, was also prohibited by a Regulation issued in the year 1804.

It is delightful to record the further triumphs of benevolence in the same cause, in the west of India.

The practice of Infanticide existed among the Jarejahs; and so prevalent was the custom, that not less than 3000 female infants were computed to be annually destroyed in the Province of Cutch and Guzerat alone\*. Colonel Walker was employed by Governor Duncan in a mission to those tribes, to suppress, if possible, this atrocious proceeding. He united persuasion with authority—he reasoned with the Chieftains—appealed to the feelings of mothers, and vindicated the rights of nature with a zeal worthy of the cause, and characteristic of the man. The Chiefs declared the

\* Buchanan's Colonial Ecclesiastical Establishment, p. 126.

practice had existed 4000 years, and alleged the impossibility of relinquishing what had been consecrated by antiquity and usage. But humanity finally triumphed. There needs no further testimony to his success than a simple statement of facts. On his subsequently revisiting these people, they were accustomed to hail him as their benefactor and friend; while the mothers, presenting their rescued offspring to his arms, would exclaim, "they are not ours, but yours\*."

The last instance relates to the Jogee tribes, with whom it was customary to bury their Widows alive with their deceased husbands. The Supreme Government, with a commendable regard for human life, issued an Order in the year 1817, by which the further continuance of this practice was prohibited, under the severest penalties.

These instances prove what may be effected where the heart is prompt to feel, the head to devise, and the hand to execute. They form a series of Precedents, honourable in their character, and decisive in their evidence as to the facility of suppressing those barbarous practices which are attended with the loss of lives. Nor is it possible to urge any argument in favour of these respective measures, which does not apply with equal force to the practicability of putting an end to the burning of Widows on the funeral pile†.

But while we are speculating, with a refined policy, as to the danger of exercising an act of humanity and moral duty, the experiment has already been made with success 300 years ago by the Mohammedan Conquerors of India. The Mogul Government has uniformly discountenanced the practice of burning Widows alive; and the extent of the benefit thus conferred may be estimated by the remarkable fact, that in no part of Hindoostan is the rite *less known* than under their sway, and in none is it *more common* than in that which is the centre of British power and ascendancy. Among the various feelings awakened by the contemplation of this custom, that the followers of the Cross should learn a lesson of humanity from the worshippers of the Crescent, is not one of the least afflicting.

This example was humanely followed by the Portuguese Government.

One of the first acts of the great Albuquerque was to prohibit the continuance of this scourge. He would not suffer such an out-

\* See Moor's Hindu Infanticide.

† It is said, that a partial revival has of late taken place in some of these practices. If so, a deep responsibility is incurred by not instituting the necessary inquiries, and enforcing the existing laws. The most benevolent efforts will fail, if not watched over in their progress; and in proportion as we must applaud the humanity that first applied the remedy, must we condemn the negligence that suspends or defeats its efficacy, by the want of that active perseverance which can alone extirpate long-established usages.

rage upon moral feeling to be committed in the face of a Christian community, which possessed the means of abolishing it. The fruits of this intervention exist to the present period; and the humanity of Albuquerque, in India, has ever been as celebrated as his valour\*.

The Dutch, the Danish, and the French Governments, uniformly refused to sanction this custom.

Why is the name of Britain alone excluded from this honourable list of competitors? Is it that policy and duty in our case are irreconcilable, however blended in that of others? Or is it that the genius of commerce, operating like the laws of refraction, presents a medium of its own, which falsifies all the conclusions of experience, and all the suggestions of true benevolence? Whatever be the cause, the conviction is most humiliating, that *the British Government is the only European Power, in India, that tolerates the practice of burning Widows alive on the funeral pile!*

The consequences are painfully exemplified in the following fact. The Natives in some of the *Foreign Settlements*, being deprived of the means of celebrating the rite, because *there it is prohibited*, are occasionally known to pass over to the *adjoining British Settlements, in which it is permitted*; and where, no longer restrained by prohibitory enactments, they could perpetrate the act without the fear of interruption†.

## CHAPTER VI.

*Testimonies as to the Practicability of abolishing the Rite—Opposite Views; by what characterized—The Practicability established—Successful Interference of Local Authorities.*

AFTER the various facts and arguments which have been successively laid before the reader, the sentiments of those whose local knowledge and ample sources of information must stamp peculiar authority on their judgment, seem to be an important desideratum. This deficiency we would now supply by a long series of

\* The Commentaries of his son, Bras de Albuquerque, contain the following remarkable record of this fact: "When Alf. de Albuquerque took the kingdom of Goa, he would not permit that any woman from thenceforward should burn herself; and although to change their custom is equal to death, nevertheless they rejoiced in life, and said great good of him, because he commanded that they should not burn themselves."

† It is mentioned, to the honour of the Gentleman who was in charge of the Government of Chundernagore (one of the Foreign Settlements), that "finding his humane intentions almost invariably frustrated by the parties removing without his jurisdiction, he was discouraged in resisting the evil; but that he had determined to use means to prevent the interested relatives of the Widow conveying their unhappy victim for the purpose of immolation to British territory." Papers &c. 1821. p. 243; see also ditto, p. 109.

powerful and concurring testimonies, from persons resident in India, expressive of the practicability of entirely abolishing the immolation of Widows on the funeral pile. These testimonies are as follow :

“ From what I have heard from several very respectable Bramins, I am almost satisfied, that the exercise of a very trifling degree of authority would put a stop to this perversion of reason and humanity in future.”—See Letter, addressed by a Collector, to the Hon. Mr. Elphinstone. Papers &c. p. 65.

“ I take this opportunity to express my concurrence in the opinion which I found to prevail with the Judicial Officers, at the several stations, with whom I conversed on the subject, that the practice of Hindoo women burning themselves on the funeral pile of their deceased husbands, if prohibited by Government, might be effectually suppressed, without apprehension of any serious obstacles.”—See Letter from the First Judge of the Calcutta Court of Circuit. Papers &c. p. 243.

“ After having attended at several Suttees myself, for the purpose of gaining as much information as possible on the subject ; and having paid considerable attention to it ever since I have been in this district ; and after having attentively considered the doctrines under which it is sanctioned, the circumstances attending the actual performance of the sacrifice, and the terms upon which those who have been prevented from burning have subsequently lived with their relations and neighbours ; I am decidedly of opinion, that the abolition of the practice by law would not be attended with any evil consequences : on the contrary, I think the enactment of such a law is dictated by every principle of humanity ; nor does it appear to me, that the abolition of the practice is altogether inconsistent with the spirit of toleration which has ever distinguished the British Government.”—See Letter, addressed to the acting Superintendent of Police, by an acting Magistrate. Papers &c. p. 235.

“ Regarding the prevalence of Suttee as the effect of local immorality, instead of general religious prejudice, I do not hesitate in offering my opinion, that a law for its abolition would only be objected to by the heirs, who derive worldly profit from the custom ; by Bramins, who partly exist by it ; and by those whose depraved nature leads them to look on so horrid a sacrifice as a highly agreeable and entertaining show.”—See Letter of a Magistrate. Papers &c. p. 237.

“ A law might doubtless be promulgated for the abolition of this practice, without causing any serious disturbance. It has already been done in regard to the sacrifice of children at Saugor, and elsewhere, as well as the practice of destroying female infants, and the burying of women alive. Why, if these customs, which were

also generally practised, have been abolished by a humane Government, should not the practice of Suttee be abolished ? The destruction of a woman, or of a child, in the eye of the law, is equal.”—See Letter from an acting Magistrate, addressed to the acting Superintendent of Police, in the lower Provinces. Papers &c. p. 239.

“ Any law, abolishing the Suttee, would be attended with no other effect than it should have under every good system of Government, the immediate and due observance of its enactments. I would most willingly undertake to promulgate any orders regarding its abolition, throughout the district under my charge, without dread of any ill consequences arising from the interference of Government.”—Letter from a Magistrate. See Papers &c. p. 241.

“ I feel assured, that with the exception of a few necessitous Bramins, who derive a nefarious reward for presiding at this infernal rite, the prohibition of the practice would give universal satisfaction.”—Letter from an acting Magistrate, addressed to the Secretary to the Government, Fort St. George. Papers &c. p. 270.

“ It appears that this abhorrent, and often utterly illegal practice, was forbidden by the foreign Governments of those Settlements, and that the prohibition was obeyed without a murmur. And there can be no doubt, that the practice of Suttee might be as easily checked and prevented throughout the British territories, as any of the other murderous practices above referred to\*.”—Letter from one of the Judges, addressed to the Register of the Nizamut Adawlut. Papers &c. p. 99.

“ I meet with frequent instances of the interference of Government in matters intimately connected with the prejudices of the Hindoos ;—the repeal of the law prohibiting the capital punishment of Bramins at Benares—the laws against infanticide—the rules prohibiting dhurna, &c. &c.—I have submitted the above remarks, not with the hope that I can have afforded any new information, but only to offer the grounds of my opinion, that the barbarous custom of Suttee may be prohibited, without exciting any serious or general dissatisfaction among our Hindoo subjects.”—Letter from the acting Superintendent of Police, to the Secretary to the Government. See Papers, 1821, p. 229.

We might still further multiply these extracts, if what has been already adduced were not amply conclusive. It is sufficient to observe, that we have here an assemblage of testimonies of the highest authority,—from men holding public and official situations,—from Collectors, Magistrates, Zilla Judges, and a Judge of the Calcutta Court of Circuit,—persons acting without any

\* Infanticide, burying alive, &c.

previous concert with each other, and resident in different parts of India, and yet declaring, in the most unequivocal manner, their unanimous conviction, that the abolition of the atrocious rite of burning is just, practicable, and unattended with danger.

It is necessary, however, to acknowledge, that sentiments varying from those already cited, are avowed by others, strongly insisting on the faith of Treaties, and the danger of Innovations, but distinguishable much more for general assertion, and confident prediction, than for any adherence to sound argument.

These objections have already been impartially considered; and, therefore, we would only further remark, that the present is too momentous a subject to be determined by mere assertion, however confidently uttered. The time is arrived for this inhuman practice to undergo the ordeal of public opinion; and for the relative weight of argument, of fact, and of assertion, to be calmly and dispassionately examined. The question itself is a question of Life or of Death, and, consequently, we must bring to the consideration of it all those rules of evidence, and all that process of argument, which can alone satisfy men's sober judgments, and direct them in a decision, which is to terminate either in the death-warrant of the victims, or in the revocation of their degraded and mournful lot.

It is on this principle that we have endeavoured to conduct the present inquiry. To assertion we have opposed argument; we have supported argument by an appeal to facts; and surmise has been met with demonstration. To the facts already stated, bearing collaterally on the subject, we have now to add those of direct and authoritative proof, by which the practicability of abolishing the custom will be found to be incontrovertibly established.

These facts are comprised in the following cases of positive interference:

The first instance recorded of this kind, in the Official Documents so often alluded to, occurred in the year 1805, in the interference of the acting Magistrate of the Zilla of Behar, who had been informed of the intention of a female, not more than twelve years of age, to burn with her deceased husband. The Darogah was directed to repair to the spot, and the following is a statement of the result: "On the Darogah's arrival at the place, he found the girl surrounded by an immense concourse of people, and *the friends of the deceased* preparing to set fire to the pile, upon which they had already placed the corpse, and persuading the girl to ascend it also. She appeared to be in a perfect state of stupefaction or intoxication; and as it did not appear to be *the wish of her friends* that she should burn herself, I deemed it incumbent on me to exercise my authority, as Magistrate, to prevent it; and I am since given to understand that the girl and her

friends are extremely grateful for my interposition\*."—See Letter of Mr. Elphinstone. Papers &c. p. 23.

The Magistrate of Burdwan (Mr. Bailey), in recording four sacrifices prevented taking place in the year 1813, as not being conformable to the Circular Orders, specifies one instance of successful interference, under circumstances where popular feeling was likely to be strongly excited:

"One of the four women, above mentioned, was the wife of a man of opulence and respectability, in the Town of Burdwan; and the Rajah and most of the principal people were very urgent with me to sanction her becoming a Suttee. Acting under the supposed intention of the Court's instructions, I resisted the performance of this abominable sacrifice, merely on the ground of the woman having an infant child; and although numbers of people were assembled, and the preparations for the sacrifice were all completed, I succeeded in preventing it, without any hazard of popular tumult or dissatisfaction." See Papers &c. p. 37.

A strong evidence of the facility with which the practice may be suppressed, is contained in a letter from the Magistrate of Chinsurah, which states, that "so little do the people appear to have interested themselves in the affair, that the mere publication of an order from himself, prohibiting the practice, effectually prevented it; and that no single instance of a woman burning herself has occurred since."—See Papers &c. p. 99.

Another instance of the ease with which women are withdrawn, even in the midst of the preparations for the ceremony, occurs in the interference of a Magistrate at Midnapore, in 1816, who "prevented a woman from burning, because he understood from the Zemindar, that she was not the lawful wife of the deceased. The persons assembled to kill her, and the lookers-on, seem to have felt no religious compunction at letting her go. They would appear to have considered the matter as a dry matrimonial question, to be decided by a proper jurisdiction, with which they had nothing to do; and they suffered the woman to depart."—See Papers &c. p. 100.

At Benares, in the year 1815, "there were three instances of women prevented becoming Suttees;—one under the rules contained in the instructions of the Court of Nizamut Adawlut; and two under no particular rule, their cases not having been anticipated in those instructions." With respect to one of these women, we are told by the Magistrate, "my order for that pur-

\* We have in this instance a lively representation of the manner in which these sacrifices are brought about, and what pretensions they have to be considered voluntary. *The friends of the deceased husband* are seen intent on the poor widow's destruction, *her own friends* anxious for her preservation, and the unfortunate victim herself intoxicated with stupifying drugs.

pose reached the officers who were to execute it, as Ghorna (the name of the woman) was actually on the way in a palanquin to ascend the pile; and she was brought back to her home, without any obstacle, by means of the very conveyance in which she had quitted it."—See Letter from Mr. Bird, the Magistrate of Benares. Papers &c. p. 133.

The first Judge of the Calcutta Court of Circuit observes, "I am happy in being able to adduce an instance of effectual interference in the suppression of this barbarous custom, under British authority. In the territory of Delhi, the late Resident, Mr. Metcalfe, never, when apprised of the intention, permitted the burning of a Widow to take place, and was prepared to prevent the practice, whenever necessary, by forcible interference, but which was requisite only on one occasion that came under his immediate observation." He then adds, "Without attempting to enter into a discussion of this interesting question, I have considered it a duty merely to state such circumstances, connected with the subject, as have presented themselves in the course of my official duties; and I have been induced to mention the instance of successful interference by the Resident at Delhi, as affording an example which I believe nearly every Magistrate in the Country would, if authorized, be most happy to follow; and in order to show that there appears no insurmountable obstacle to a measure, with regard to the exigency of which, if shown to be practicable, I conceive there can be but one sentiment."—See Letter of Mr. Forbes. Papers &c. p. 243.

Mr. Marriott, the Magistrate of Tannah, observes, that in order to check the practice, he adopted, what he terms, a *police law*; he then adds, "I now have the happiness of believing that the course which I have adopted has been the means of saving many poor, infatuated, or intoxicated females from destruction. The effects of my measures have been, that two applications only have been made for the sacrifice; but as they were not made in the mode which I prescribed, they did not take place."—See Papers &c. p. 256.

A very striking and remarkable case is communicated by a Judge and Magistrate, in the Northern Concan, of a Widow resolutely bent on becoming a Suttee, and opposing every possible resistance to the humane endeavours of the Magistrate to prevent her. "The woman," he observes, "was brought into Basseen in a perfectly frantic state, and was placed under restraint, until her mind should become, in some measure, tranquillized.

"At first, she avowed a resolution to destroy herself by other means, if she was not permitted to accomplish her original purpose; but she was deprived of the power of doing herself any injury; at the same time that every precaution was taken to pro-

vide her with food, such as she might partake of without the danger of violating any of the rules of her religion.

"I am happy to be now able to state, that the Register has succeeded in preserving the life of this infatuated woman; she has, at length, been restored to coolness and reason, and has quitted Basseen with a strong feeling of gratitude towards Mr. Hockley, whom she regards as her preserver."—See Papers &c. p. 245.

A similar statement is furnished by the Magistrate of Anjar.—A woman having expressed her determination to burn, "I proceeded," the Magistrate remarks, "to her house; and as she appeared firm in her resolution, I could only persuade her to delay the ceremony for a few days, promising that at the expiration of that time, if she persisted in her wish, she should meet with no hindrance. As might be expected, twenty-four hours produced a total change in her mind; instead of the hysterical grief, with which she was before affected, tears came to her relief, and she declared her resolution not to burn."—See Papers &c. p. 260.

But besides the evidence afforded by these examples, instances are not wanting of private individuals interposing with effect, and rescuing the victim at the very moment of impending destruction. A circumstance of this kind is communicated by Mr. Hale, one of the Judges in the Southern Concan, as having occurred in the Vizadroog province. "A young officer," he observes, "who commanded the fort, hearing of the intended sacrifice, and acting no doubt from motives of humanity, took means to prevent its accomplishment, chiefly, as he relates, through the persuasive interposition of a Bramin. Whatever, however, were the means, the attempt was abandoned; and although the occurrence was subsequently reported to me, it did not appear to be complained of; and I am informed the intended victim is now living, and thankful for her escape."—Papers &c. p. 258.

These instances of successful interference have more weight than a thousand assertions, and form the best reply to those alarmists, who would represent India in a state of popular tumult and insurrection at the least prospect of innovation. And though some of the cases occurred under circumstances provided against by the Regulations, yet, collectively taken, they may be considered as furnishing indisputable evidence of the practicability of abolishing the inhuman rite of burning, without any fear of injurious consequences.

## CHAPTER. VII.

*Appeal to Constituted Authorities—Necessity of Penal Enactments—Awful Responsibility incurred—On whom it attaches—Argument of Policy finally considered—Duty and real Policy of Great Britain.*

SUPPORTED by these testimonies and facts, we would now confidently submit, With what pretensions to truth the plea of danger can henceforth be urged against the abolition of immolations? and, if their suppression has been proved to be both safe and practicable, Whether any doubt can exist as to the necessity and importance of such a measure?

Too long has the barbarous practice been permitted to continue under the influence of a popular but erroneous judgment. The British power has now been established in India upwards of sixty years; and in this period of time, how many thousand Widows have perished on the funeral pile! How many Orphan Children might attest the tardiness of our zeal, and the languor of our benevolence! It cannot be pleaded, that public attention has not been directed to the subject. Fourteen years ago, Dr. Buchanan uttered these remarkable words: "Until the Supreme Government in Bengal shall declare that it is utterly impracticable to lessen the frequency of the Immolation of Females, by any means, *the author will not cease to call the attention of the English Nation to this subject.*"† Since this appeal was made, it is probable that upwards of Twenty Thousand Victims, in the several Presidencies, have swelled the sad catalogue of sufferers; and at this moment, the crime is increased, not diminished! Where are the bowels of our mercy? Where our fears of the retributive justice of Heaven? How long shall this scourge continue to desolate India, and dishonour Britain? We may answer, in the memorable language of a Bramin,—"*Till the British Government shall think proper to abolish it.*" We would, then, solemnly appeal to those who hold the destinies of India in their hands, to arrest the progress of this destructive rite, and to vindicate the character and honour of the Country from so foul a reproach. We would loudly call on all the friends of humanity, on all who are not insensible to the claims of benevolence, morality, and religion, to aid in rescuing so many wretched victims from a practice not enjoined by their own law, and expressly condemned by ours; and while so many circumstances are calculated to remind us that we are a Nation of

† Christian Researches, p. 154.

British Merchants, let us not forget that we have also to sustain the character of British Christians.

If, too, the feeble voice of the writer might be permitted to reach the shores of India, he would testify that the groans of the perishing Widow have penetrated to Britain, where they have awakened the strongest emotions of British sympathy; and that so long as the Government in Bengal shall tolerate the immolation of females, the friends of humanity "will not cease to call the attention of the English Nation to this subject."

What, then, is the duty of Great Britain? It is to meet an evil of such acknowledged magnitude by the application of a *final and effectual remedy*; and no provision short of an *universal prohibition, declaring the practice to be henceforth punishable by the severest penalties*, can ensure so desirable a consummation.

Such are the sentiments of many high local authorities. It is observed by Mr. Hale, one of the Judges in India, that "*it is a case where no medium will be found to exist*;" by Mr. Petty, a Magistrate in the Southern Concan, "*probably nothing short of an enactment, rendering the aiding in, or abetting them, highly penal, will at present materially diminish their number*;" by Mr. Wright, adverting to a district where it is less prevalent, "*if tolerated, under whatever restrictions, I do not hesitate to pronounce that it will, in a short term of years, become nearly as prevalent as it now is in Bengal*;" Mr. Hale, the Judge already alluded to, speaking to the same effect, remarks, "It is greatly to be feared, that as soon as the provisions of existing rules are thoroughly and distinctly understood, and that it becomes universally known, that *free toleration of this awful ceremony is acknowledged* strictly according to the tenets of the Shaster, *the custom will again revive*; and I am still more inclined to fear, if the practice revives at all (having now literally, as far as my observation goes, ceased) that *it will speedily reach its former height* from this impression;" while Mr. Pattle, the first Judge at Allypore, adverting to the rapid increase of the custom, declares, that "*any interference, save that of a total prohibition, under the severest penalties, will even be productive of a mistaken spirit of jealousy and opposition*||."

We cannot suffer this remark of Mr. Wright to escape, supported as it is by the concurring sentiments of Mr. Hale, without earnestly impressing its importance on the attention of the reader, viz. *the possible revival of the custom in parts where it has long slumbered, owing to the supposed legality now given to the practice by the Regulations*\*\*.

\* Papers &c. p. 259.

† Ditto, p. 212.

‡ Ditto, p. 218.

§ Ditto, p. 255.

¶ Ditto, p. 259.

\*\* See p. 5.

prove to be more than prophetic; if the revival here alluded to, and fearfully anticipated, should ever unhappily be exemplified in all its mournful realities; if the funeral pile should be destined again to rear up its head, where its horrors have almost been forgotten; what will be the responsibility of the Government of India, or of those who hold a controul over that Government at home? and what limits will be imposed to the British Public at large, in the expression of their sorrow, and probable overflowings of wounded and irritated feeling?

If, too, the immediate abolition of the rite be thus urgent, what shall we say to the suggestion, not unfrequently offered, that we may ultimately look for the cure of this evil in the gradual increase of intelligence, which is beginning to develope itself in India?

This argument might have some weight, if the progress of intelligence were of a more accelerated character than circumstances allow us to suppose, or if the immediate abolition of the rite were not proved to be both safe and practicable. But, this fact being once satisfactorily established, to delay the enjoyment of an acknowledged good, because at some future, yet more remote time, you anticipate its attainment by the operation of other causes, what is this but to procrastinate a happiness already within your reach, and to be justly responsible for all the misery of the intervening period of a long and criminal delay?

*In the mean time, on whom will the blood of the many thousand victims that are destined to perish on the funeral pile, be visited?* This is a solemn and momentous question, before which we may well pause, and weigh all the present and all the future consequences. It cannot be dissembled, that the charge of guilt will attach primarily to the Government of India, who are the conscious spectators of the act, and, largely possessing the means, are yet deterred from employing those means for its suppression. It next attaches to the British Government at home, who acquiesce in the motives that influence this reluctance. And finally, the whole British People become parties to this moral guilt, if, knowing as they do the existence of the crime, they do not consider themselves pledged to use all lawful means for abolishing a rite, derogatory to the British character, forming an anomaly in the administration of civil law, and involving a flagrant breach of the laws and commandments of God.

We may conclude these remarks by observing, that the very plea of policy which is so industriously urged against every measure affecting the habits and superstitions of the East, furnishes, in a more enlarged and enlightened sense, one of the strongest arguments for their adoption. What, let us ask, has been the past policy of Great Britain towards India, and what have been its fruits? The system has been to leave India as we found her—

bowing before her idols—trembling at the phantoms of her own imagination—and in the undisturbed possession of a religion of “pollution and blood.” And this conduct has been vindicated as the maxim of a wise and profound policy, lest in the noble endeavour to dispel the moral darkness that hung over her horizon, and in imparting to her the light and joy and peace of a religion from above, we should become the victims of our zeal, and perish amidst the efforts of our benevolence. What has been the consequence? The consequence has been a long protracted night of superstition to India; with the means of salvation around her; but means, alas! unavailing, because almost wholly unemployed. The very attempt to evangelize her has been proclaimed to be useless; as if the power of God had lost its title of omnipotent; as if the Gospel had ceased to be the ministration of the Spirit, and India was for ever to be erased from the records of the Divine mercy. Thus the British Government in India has, till very lately, exhibited the mournful spectacle of Christianity, without the communication of its privileges; and light, while all around presented the gloom of and dreariness of Idolatry.—If the influence of our mercy had but been as widely felt as the extent of our power, what a different scene would India, with her hundred millions, have now unfolded to the eyes of Europe!!

What, then, is the true policy of Britain towards the East? We will answer, in the memorable language of a distinguished Patriot and enlightened Philosopher\*, “Providence has thrown these Indian territories into the arms of Britain, for their protection and welfare.” This is a sentiment as admirable for its wisdom, as it is blessed in its fruits. Other systems are founded on secondary causes. This recognizes a divine agency, appointing its instruments for the accomplishment of its own gracious purposes. One excludes the Bible; the other is founded upon it. The first aims at establishing Empire for the perishable object of human glory. It is power without beneficence, as if beneficence were not moral power without coercion to support it, and as if the only legitimate end of all Government were not the happiness and improvement of the people. Let us abjure, then, for ever, a cold, selfish, and calculating policy, which seeks nothing but its own; and learn, from the nature of man and the revolutions of Empires, that true policy will ever be proved to be that which is most in unison with the real interests of mankind, and which secures public happiness on the foundation of an enlarged and disinterested benevolence; and while all must agree in deprecating a religion without policy, let us not refuse to admit that a policy without religion is the reproach of a Christian nation. Let, then, murderous rites be abolished, as incompatible with humanity and law; and

Sir William Jones.

truth be propagated through the medium of moral suasion. Let Schools be multiplied in the three Presidencies, as occasion may offer; because it is in them that we are to seek for the germ of intelligence and moral improvement, which, by expanding the powers of the intellect, will ultimately bring the absurdities of a monstrous superstition to the bar of human reason, and thus prepare the way, through the blessing of God, for the reception of that Divine Truth, which must one day include India within the conquests of the Gospel. The object is of national importance, the sphere vast, and the expectation of success great and certain. It is by labours such as these, that we shall best redeem the debt that we owe to India. Great Britain has long signalized herself, in that portion of the globe, by a series of the most illustrious achievements; she is now called to sustain her title to a higher fame, and to a more durable glory, by the efforts of her benevolence. Instead of verifying the charge, that the marks of her Empire, in the East, are principally to be found in the track of her desolating wars, let her be able to appeal to memorials which shall consecrate the blessings of her rule in the admiration and gratitude of succeeding ages. It is thus that India, emancipated, through our instrumentality, from the yoke of a cruel superstition, and admitted to a fellowship in the peace and hopes of the Gospel, will recognize in Britain, no longer a Conqueror to whom she is bound by the terror of our arms, but a Benefactor indissolubly endeared by the triumphs of our mercy.

THE END.