

them opportunities of ascertaining, and whose benevolence prompted them to relieve their necessities. It devolved on the whole community of believers, who regarded it not as a burden, but a privilege, to minister to the wants of those who bore the image of Christ; and by their unwearied attentions to the discharge of this labour of love, they made the light of their liberality and benevolence to shine, as to command the admiration even of the cold and selfish heathens around them.—As duty as the Sabbath returned, and as soon as they had brought their sacred duties to a close, the lists of the poor, the aged, the widow, and the orphans were produced for a consideration; and as if each had been hastening to bring forth the fruits of faith, and to prove the sincerity of that love they had just professed to their Saviour, by the abundance of their liberality to his people, they set themselves to the grateful task, with a zeal and enthusiasm, whose fresh and unabated vigour betrayed no symptoms of their having already been engaged in a lengthened service. The custom was for every one in turn to bring under public notice the case of a brother or sister, of whose necessitous circumstances he had any knowledge, and forthwith a donation was ordered out of the funds of the church, which the voluntary contributions of the faithful supplied. No strong or heart-stirring appeals were necessary to reach the hidden source of their sympathies; no cold calculations of prudence regulated the distribution of their public alms; no fears of doubtful propriety suggested delay for the consideration of the claim; no petty jealousies as to the preference of one recommendation to another were allowed to freeze the general current of their charity. By whomsoever the case was recommended, or in whatever circumstances the claim was made, the hand of benevolence had answered the call almost before the heart found words to express its sympathy; and with a unanimity surpassed only by their boundless love, they dealt out their supplies from the treasury of the church, whenever there was an object to receive, or a known necessity to require it. Where the poor in one place were numerous, and the brethren were unable from their limited means to afford them adequate support, they applied to some richer church in the neighbourhood; and never was it known, in those days of active benevolence, that the appeal was fruitlessly made, or coldly received.—Though they had poor of their own to maintain, neighbouring and foreign churches were always ready to transmit contributions in aid of the Christians in distant parts, and many and splendid are the instances on record of ministers and people, on intelligence of any pressing emergency, hastening with their treasures for the relief of those whom they had never seen, but with whom they were united by the strongest ties of the same faith and hopes. Thus, when a multitude of Christian men and women in Numidia had been taken captive by a horde of neighbouring barbarians, and when the churches to which they belonged were unable to raise the sum demanded for their ransom, they sent deputies to the church that was planted in the metropolis of North Africa; and no sooner had Cyprian, who was then at the head of it, heard a statement of the distressing case, than he commenced a subscription in behalf of the unfortunate slaves, and never relaxed his indefatigable efforts, till he had collected a sum equal to eight hundred pounds sterling, which he forwarded to the Numidian Churches, together with a letter full of Christian sympathy and tenderness.

[To be continued]

THE TRAVELLER.

SACRIFICE OF A HINDOO WIDOW.

FROM THE DIARY OF A BRITISH OFFICER.

The *suttee* took place at a village, a few miles from our camp, and horrible as it may sound to stand by and see a fellow-creature—a woman—burnt to death, yet my brother, and the young civilian, being the only magistrates in the neighbourhood, considered it their duty to attend the ceremony, in hopes of dissuading the infatuated victim from her purpose, or failing of this, at least to rescue her in the event of her springing off the pile; for if no Europeans were present, the brutal Brahmins would, under such circumstances, thrust her back into the flames: and instances have occurred where the woman's life has been saved by the interposition of a magistrate, even after the fatal pile has been lighted.

When we arrived at the spot, we found a number of Brahmins erecting the funeral pile close to the sea; and it excited feelings of unutterable disgust, to see the relations of the unfortunate widow laughing and jesting as they arranged the horrid apparatus. They appeared to look forward with pleasure to the approaching tragedy, and no one seemed to bestow a thought on the fearful sufferings which the victim of superstition must endure ere the sacrifice was completed.

The pile was composed of logs of wood interspersed with layers of dry straw, sugar-canes, and other combustibles; this was covered with a mat, and to render it still more inflammable, was saturated with *ghee*, or clarified butter. The height of the erection might be about four feet, the breadth being just sufficient to admit of two bodies lying side by side; and above it was a platform of dried wood, so constructed as to fall upon the bodies, as soon as the fire consumed the slight props by which it was supported.

After about two hours spent in building the pile a confused din of trumpets and tom-toms announced the arrival of the widow, preceded by the corpse of her husband, and followed by a crowd of friends and relations. She was a beautiful young creature, not more than eighteen or nineteen years of age, and my blood ran cold as I saw her led forth like a lamb to the slaughter.

Much as I had heard of the courage displayed by Indian women in the act of self-immolation, I did not believe it possible that one so young, and of so delicate a frame as the present victim, could behold the dreadful apparatus prepared for her destruction without a shudder. But no traces either of sorrow or of fear were visible on her placid countenance. She seemed to have taken leave of this world for ever, and to have fixed her every thought on the prospect of meeting her husband in eternity.

Her pale, interesting features, gave the most perfect idea of resignation. And her firm step and self-possessed manner satisfied us that no exciting or stupefying drugs had been administered to prepare her for the awful ceremony.

We had come determined to save the poor creature, if possible, and were more than ever anxious to do so now that we had seen her.

While the corpse was being prepared for the funeral pile, we insisted on being allowed an interview with the intended victim, and made use of every argument we could think of to dissuade her from her purpose. We offered to make her a handsome allowance for life, and to protect her from the malice of the priests, if she only consented to live. But all was of no avail. The accursed Brahmins had done their work too well.

If a widow refuses to sacrifice herself, those crafty hypocrites, those ministers of the devil, expel her from her caste with curses and ignominy; she is looked upon as a degraded being; she cannot marry again; she becomes an outcast, shunned and despised by all; and even her nearest relatives dare not countenance her.—In the temples women are daily exhorted to this act of self-immolation, by promises of eternal happiness and threatened with poverty, scorn and infamy, if they allow the natural love of life to prevail.

Is it then to be wondered at, that poor ignorant creatures, thus urged and threatened by a crafty priesthood, prefer death, even a fiery death on the funeral pile, to life purchased at such a price?

The poor girl appeared grateful for the interest we took in her; and a tear—the first we had seen her shed—trembled on her long silken eye-lashes

as she thanked us: but her resolution remained unshaken. She presented each of us with a cocoa-nut, which she begged us to keep for her sake; and waving her hand with the air of an inspired being, she motioned us to withdraw.

To my dying day I shall never forget that scene.

As we turned to depart, I saw a devilish smile of triumph steal over the countenance of the officiating priest.

The corpse having been stripped, and washed in the sea, was stretched naked as it was upon the ground in front of the funeral pile; and the widow, seating herself at the head, prepared to take leave of her relations. It was very affecting to see her aged mother throw herself at her daughter's feet, kiss them, and bid them farewell.

The poor girl's firmness could not withstand this trial—she wept bitterly—but it was only for a moment. Waving her hand as if wishing to be left to her own thoughts, she appeared to forget every thing upon earth, and with her face raised to heaven, called incessantly on her gods. Her attitude was that of intense devotion; and, except when disturbed by persons kissing her feet, or making her touch cocoa-nuts, which are then esteemed holy, she never moved a limb.

During this time the priests chanted passages from their sacred books, promising eternal happiness to their poor victim if she kept up her courage and completed the sacrifice. When they had finished, the corpse was laid upon the funeral pile, and the widow, unassisted, walked three times round it. Having completed the third round her little brother knelt at her feet and kissed them, while her father poured oil upon her head; and the unfeeling monsters who surrounded her, many of them women, raised a joyful shout, mingled with peals of laughter, as if exulting at the near approach of the last awful ceremony. It was fearful to behold such hardness of heart, particularly among women.

The young widow's earthly career was now drawing rapidly to a close. A few moments more, and she would be suffering the most horrible of deaths. But her eye quailed not nor did her lips quiver. She ascended the fatal pile as if it had been her bridal-bed; and stretching herself by the side of the loathsome corpse, already in an advanced state of decay, she clasped it in her arms, and rested her beautiful head on the breast, which was literally a weltering mass of corruption.

It was fearful to behold the living and the dead thus united; to contrast the rounded limbs and graceful figure of that fair girl, with the bloated, grinning corpse which she held in her embrace. My heart sickened at the sight, and a feeling of deadly faintness came over me; but I had strength to see the tragedy completed.

I was close to the pile, and watched the poor victim's countenance narrowly; it was pale as death, but perfectly placid. She never moved a muscle, and appeared more like a marble image than a living being. Even on the brink of eternity, with the prospect of so fearful a death before her eyes, the fortitude inspired by a blind and devoted superstition, supported her through the trial.

When all preparations were completed, a horrid yell was raised, and a number of men rushed, with lighted torches, towards the pile, shouting, dancing, and screaming like demons. In an instant the whole was in flames. Heaps of burning straw fell on the two bodies. The death shriek of the wretched victim was drowned amidst the roar of a thousand voices.

The bickering flames rose high above the pile. All was one glowing mass of fire, and the poor creature's sufferings were ended. Once I saw her struggle, but it was only for a moment, and dreadful though her agony must have been, it could not have lasted above a few seconds.—The wind was high, and the dry wood burnt with such fury that in a few minutes, more than half the pile was consumed, and no one would have guessed that two human bodies were smouldering in the midst.

As we turned to leave the accursed spot, the worthy doctor, who had hitherto remained a silent but deeply affected spectator of the dreadful ceremony, found it impossible any longer to restrain his indignation, and standing up to the principal Brahmin, he gave vent to his outraged feelings in choice Malabar, of all known languages, the one most abounding in powerful anathemas.