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THE TEGS.

The disposition to destroy life is well known to be one which not only acts independently in the human character, but is liable to be awakened uncalled into activity by a great number of other sentiments, such as the extreme thirst for gain, offended self love, panic terror, and on a strong sense of justice, philanthropy and other of the superior sentiments of a nature. We are now about to introduce the notice of our readers a remarkable tribe who, from generation to generation, carry on murder as a regular trade, partly under the influence of the love of gold, but chief in obedience to sentiments of a higher, though equally abused character.

The Thugs are a Hindoo race who infest the roads in India, for the purpose of robbing travellers. The states of Bhopal, Oude, Gwalior, and Bundelkurn and the Company's possessions in the Bih, are their chief residence, and the thoroughfares which they chiefly haunt, are those of the Deccan, Scindia, and Hoikar's count, down to the sea and the Delhi country. Ostensibly, they are simply cultivators of the ground; but for eight months of the year, they move in gangs along the roads, under various disguises and pretences, murdering and robbing every party whom they think they can overpower without danger to themselves. They must have practised this trade at least since the days of Akbar the Great, in the sixteenth century, as that sovereign on one occasion executed five hundred of them in one province. Indeed, the profession has not only become hereditary, but of old standing, but it is invested with all those inveterate characteristics which attend what is called caste in India. The young are regularly brought up to it, and, though some are of course better qualified by their natural character than others, some are known to show such repugnance to it, as to abandon it for any more legitimate means of living.

Though the Thugs are indifferently of the Mahomedan and Hindoo religions, they unite in the grand superstitions which chiefly prompt and support their minds in their abominable courses. They put an implicit confidence in omens. The partridge, the shama, the deer, the jackall, and other animals, are supposed by them to foretell good or bad luck, according as they appear or are heard on the right or left hand. Leaving their homes in bands at the end of the rainy season, they direct their steps to their high priest or goro, generally an old Thug (no matter whether Hindoo or Mussulman) who has retired from the trade, and lives upon the contributions of his descendants or disciples, who look up to him with great reverence for advice and instruction, and bend to his decision in all cases of doubtful dispute. On this old man they confer presents. He then consecrates a kodalee or picaxe, which they carry with them on all occasions, and to which they ascribe many virtues, one of which is, that it can prevent the spirits of the murdered from rising from their graves which are dug with it. On this occasion, young Thugs who have passed through a kind of noviciate, and acquired the necessary ardour and hardness of heart, are presented by the priest with the roma, or landkerchief—the instrument employed in strangling their victims—which, establishing them in the highest grade of the profession, and insuring a larger proportion of the booty, is regarded as an object of the highest ambition. The priest then tells the young Thug how many of his family have signalled themselves by the use of the roma, how much his friends expect from his courage and conduct, and implores the Goddess Bowanee, whom the Thugs of all religions regard as the arbitress of their destinies, to vouchsafe her support to his laudable ambition and endeavours to distinguish himself in her service. When we reflect on the base character of the Hindoo priesthood, among which it is a maxim that untruth and false swearing are virtuous and meritorious deeds when they tend to their own advantage, we shall not wonder that any should be found to employ their influence, and that of their

religion, in urging human beings to signal themselves by acts of murder.

Having performed their various superstitious rites, the Thugs proceed to rendezvous at some place previously appointed, where the gangs make their final arrangements for the season, one of the most important of which is to fix on their private signals.— They then break off into parties of from twenty to a hundred and fifty, and begin to patrol the roads, usually appearing as a collection of travellers, who have combined for mutual protection against marauders.— One of their customs is, never to shave or cut *pamu* till they have killed their first traveller. There is seldom any display of courage among the Thugs. All their murders are effected in a cunning and insidious manner, so as to avoid danger. Some of the younger members, who are not considered as having sufficient *hard-breastedness*, as they call it, even to witness a murder, are employed as scouts to ascertain the approach of travellers, their strength, their weapons, the direction in which they are going, and the valuables which they carry. If they conceive themselves to be a match for the party, one or two of the most smooth spoken among them are sent to join it, and make way perhaps, for a junction between it and the larger body of Thugs. If they succeed in lulling the suspicions of the party, they will proceed in company for a considerable way, till coming to a convenient place, they propose a grand repast the expense of which they are willing to bear. After dinner, two or three will play the guitar, while the rest sit round smoking and talking. At length the private signal is given; each traveller is caught round the neck by a handkerchief, which the wretch who threw it twists as hard as he can, while two of his companions hold the hands of the victim. If any struggle takes place, a kick throws the unhappy traveller upon the ground, where the work of death is completed. They then select the most secret place in the neighbourhood for the interment of the bodies, sometimes a thick mango grove, and not unfrequently the beds of rivulets. Parties of two, four, and nearly as high as twenty, are thus disposed of. As treasure is often carried from place to place in India, the Thugs sometimes secure an immense booty. An instance of their obtaining seven thousand pounds in gold and jewels occurred a few years ago. They display the greatest cautiousness in the selection of their victims, and in every circumstance of their atrocious trade. The government runners are seldom attacked by them, because their fate could not fail to become a subject of inquiry. For the same reason, and from a dread of resistance, they rarely make up to Europeans. In 1823, a formidable gang deliberated about attacking two British officers, who were passing by dawn, and finally negatived the proposal for these reasons: 1st, because such gentlemen seldom carry valuables with them in dawn trips; 2nd, because they always carry pistols; because their destruction would become matter of publicity. The leading maxim of the Thugs is that dead men tell no tales, and for this reason murder invariably precedes robbery. On one occasion, a risaldar, a woman, and fourteen other persons, were murdered by a party at Chapara, on their way to Hydrabad: before the murder was completed, four poor travellers came up, and these, though presenting no temptation in the way of booty, were strangled also, in order to prevent discovery.— Two of the poor men were going one way, and two another, and the two couples did not reach the spot at the same time.— "When the first two came up," said an informer in evidence, "we made them sit down: when we had murdered the risaldar and his companions, and when the second two came to the top of the pass, at the foot of which we were, our people persuaded them we had had a dispute, and induced them to descend, which at first they were unwilling to do. When the leaders came up from the work they were engaged in, they insisted on strangling these four poor men, who submitted in silence to their doom.

At the end of the season, or upon having acquired a considerable booty, the Thug

goes home to his wife and family, to enjoy his ill gotten gains. He is careful to take a portion of his wealth to the temple of Bowanee, whose priests in return, promise him immunity and success in his trade, and if he should fail in the exercise of his vocation, all the delights of paradise. These priests are said not only to connive at the horrible trade of the Thugs, but on many occasions to give them information respecting travellers, and to suggest particular lines of road as most favourable for their purpose.

Within the last few years, since the conclusion of the Mahratta war in India, the attention of the supreme government has been directed to the practices of the Thugs, many of whom have consequently been apprehended and executed. One named Dirgpaul, who from his great daring and success acquired among his companions the title of *Subahdar*, was seized in 1832, and an account of him is thus given by a gentleman who was present at his execution:—"His ancestors have been Thugs for many generations, and his brother Luchman is still one of their leaders. Of a great variety of murders detailed in evidence, I select a few as specimens. The first affair at which Dirgpaul figures is in the year 1817, at the murder of a pundit at Selodha, a village north-west of Sangor one march. The body of the pundit, with those of some others in the same grave, were disinterred by captain Slesman. He was next concerned in the murder of fourteen shopkeepers at Seronge, and got 2900 rupees, equivalent to about £139. The day after, seventeen *Rohillas*, marching through this part of the country, fell in with the gang, and were likewise strangled by Dirgpaul and his party. In 1821, he was concerned in the murder of four police guards, at a place called Bnanpore, and the bodies were buried in a rivulet. The following day, a native officer of Holkar's army, with four troopers came up, and they also were strangled and buried under mango trees. Four days subsequent to these murders, they fell in with a Nawab, whose name was Amber Khan, and his wife, and ten soldiers, all of whom were murdered by this gang. Just as they had completed their work, eleven *convallitees*, or carriers of Ganges water, came up, who suspecting what they had been about, let out a hint of the kind. The consequence was, that the gang of Thugs fell on them also, and the whole party were strangled. Their bodies were buried, in some empty houses close by; and the bones of these twenty three unfortunate victims have lately been dug up by captain Slesman's people, and an inquest held on them by the native local authorities. In 1823, he was the principal in the murder of eleven men, one woman, and one girl, in all thirteen, in their way from Poona towards Indore. The gang of Thugs amounted to one hundred and fifty. Dirgpaul was the man who cajoled the party, and persuaded them to march in company with them. The booty on this occasion was 1000 rupees. After halting a day at this place, of murder, they were joined by more Treasure bearers, travelling with four ponies. In a sequestered spot, at mid-day, the whole were murdered, and the bodies thrown into the jungle. The treasure found on them amounted to 25,000 rupees (2,400). The last act recorded of Dirgpaul, who was the principal man in concerting the murders, with another notorious leader, was the murder of a native officer of rank, in the service of the Queen of Oodipore, called Loll Singh, of his wife, a female servant, and six men followers.— The Thugs mustered two hundred and fifty strong, fifty of whom were under the command of Dirgpaul. The subahdar, Loll Singh rode a mare, and his wife was nursing an infant boy. The Thugs kept in company with the travellers for some days, and by one of the leaders riding a horse whose tail was docked, they persuaded the subahdar they were sepoy, and that the rider got the horse from his European officer. Having intoxicated him with opium and stramonium, the Thugs fell on him and his companions a little after dusk, and the whole were killed, with the exception of the infant, whom Dirgpaul kept and adopted. This child was brought in with the prisoner, and

is now being educated at the Sangor Government school, at the expense of government. This man had a singular leer on his countenance: when he was under trial for his life, and subsequently, when under sentence of death, it did not forsake him; and with his little wooden spindle twisting cotton, he affected a carelessness, at once unnatural and indecent. He was executed, with twenty nine others, on the morning of the 30th June, 1832: and although his *courage* was great, his *caution* was also conspicuous.— Six carts conveyed them to the place of execution, which was outside the town of Sangor, about a mile and a half from the jail. The gibbets were erected temporarily, and formed three sides of a square. The posts supporting the cross poles were fixed into stone walls, about five feet high, and from the edge of one stone wall to the other, a beam was placed for the wretched men to stand on after ascending the ladders. The nooses were all ready, hanging from the cross-beams, and each man, as he landed on the platform selected his rope. Considering it an everlasting disgrace to die by the hands of the common hangman, the condemned Thugs no sooner take hold of the halter, than they push their heads into the noose, and with loud shouts and cheers, adjust the knot behind the ear, jump off, and launch themselves into eternity! The beam against which the ladders are resting, is the platform on which they stand, and which is withdrawn; but the men are all off swinging, before this can be done. Dirgpaul waited to see nearly all his companions off, and I well remember the last look he took of them, before he swung himself from the fatal beam."

The character of this extraordinary race is full of what our habits of thinking would incline us to consider as inconsistencies.— With all their superstitious veneration for the priesthood, and although some of them are themselves Brahmins, they make no scruple to kill persons of that sacred order.— Though so remorseless in general, that they will destroy even those who have preserved them from prison and death, they are capable of manifesting some of the most amiable feelings. They will, as in the case of Dirgpaul, preserve and cherish a helpless child; they will lament the death of a friend or relation with the bitterest grief, and do anything even to the surrender of themselves to justice, to extricate their wives and children from imprisonment. Feringia, the Jemadar of the Thugs, when in confinement, avowed that he would have "surrendered himself after the Bhilsah affair, if he had met the party of Ngeeb who had charge of his family; and he more than once burst into a flood of tears, on an allusion being made to his relations who were condemned in the Bhilsah trial, and hanged at Jubbalpore." If we reflect, however, upon the circumstances under which this trade is carried on, and the motives which animate its professors, we shall be less surprised at these exemplifications of human kindness. The following of this mode of life is evidently not the result of an original disposition to murder: The Thugs are no collection of lovers of blood from all India, but a localised race, each of whom, whatever be his original tendencies, is forced by a kind of destiny of blood to adopt the business of slaughter. Superstition has evidently supplied the pristine impulse to the awful trade and still helps greatly to maintain it in vigour. Taught by all that he holds sacred to regard murder and robbery as honourable and advantageous in this world, and still more so in the next, the Thug must proceed to his dreadful work with a mind quite at peace with itself. When, in addition to the sanction obtained from the objects of worship, the young Thug has the authority and recommendation of his parents for the trade he is destined to, he can hardly fail to engage in it with heartiness, or at least without compunction. Man is also, as we may remark in various spheres of life, capable of assuming a professional character, considerably different and apart from his domestic one. Regarding murder as his profession, the Thug practices it as a matter of course, all the time retaining his better feelings for