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ABOUT THINGS OF INDIA

FAST DISAPPEARING BEFORE EFFORTS OF CIVILIZATION.

Original Members of the Order of Criminals Were Religious Devotees Who Reduced Murder to An Art — Not Mere Vulgar Slayers of Men—Criminal Life Where Son Follows Father.

It was a happy inspiration that led to the adoption of the word "thug" as a synonym for a ferocious criminal. Its very sound is suggestive of silent and sudden murder. It echoes the thug of the slunghshot.

This, of course, is a mere coincidence; the word is not English, in spite of its sound. It is Hindostanee. In England it has no newspaper currency, but retains its historical meaning, a caste of Indian stranglers.

In becoming popular the term has suffered some degradation, for the thugs of India were no vulgar sluggers and murderers. They were religious devotees and artists in crime. De Quincey would have given them high rank among the practitioners of "Murder Considered as a Fine Art."

The thugs, indeed, were under vows to Kali Devi, the black-browed consort of Siva the Destroyer. She is that terrible personage who appears in the Hindoo pantheon as a fierce but beautiful woman, riding on a tiger, or as a hideous, blood-stained idol, garlanded with skulls. Banded together as caste brethren, the thugs hunted men to offer them the deity of destruction, and because she required a bloodless sacrifice they killed their victim by suffocation.

The thugs, not being cannibals, could not live by mere murder, so they robbed their victims and divided the spoils between themselves and the temples of Kali. As a religious body they were protected by the Brahmins and by pious but impecunious rajahs, who licensed and taxed them. It was an easy way for a ruler to increase his revenue, and the victims were travelling merchants who would not be missed.

During the many centuries of war and anarchy in India Thuggee flourished mightily. Under Aurungzebe, to whom as a Moslem Kali was an abhorrent idol, it suffered a check. Hindoo fanaticism supported it. The Nawab of Surat had captured a band of thugs and was about to release them for a ransom offered by certain Banians, who hoped to acquire "religious merit" by the act. The Emperor ordered the thugs to be strung up by the left hands in the jungle and left there to die. The Banians, prototypes of the sentimentalists who present notorious modern criminals with bouquets, banqueted the stranglers before the execution.

These terrors of the Indian highway are now extinct, like the sabre-toothed tiger. About sixty years ago many hundreds were executed and the remainder transported or put to work at tent-making and other peaceful trades in strict confinement.

It was the writer's privilege a few years back to visit one of the last of these world famous stranglers. He had been captured young and sentenced to imprisonment for life in a central Indian jail.

In a cool corridor that overlooked the sunlit garden a venerable old man was weaving the pattern of a Persian carpet. Tall and erect, with snowy mustache and high caste features, he might have passed in uniform for a British colonel bronzed by years of service. He showed not a single one of the criteria of the type criminal as described by Lombroso.

Nadhoo, so he was called, had been so long a prisoner that he was rather cared for as a curiosity, a museum specimen, than treated as a criminal. He had become an expert in weaving, and when the loom were idle was by no means unwilling to talk of his experiences as a thug. He had been born in the caste, and devoted early to the service of the Kali. His father led him to the secret place in the jungle and there initiated him, by the weird rite of the corpse and the dagger, into the freemasonry of the brotherhood.

He learned their signs, how to interpret the omen of the owl, the patter of the "ramawsi"—the secret language of the craft. Being a precocious youth, as he said, he was selected to play the part of "talker," or confidence man. He was ostensibly a traveler on the Delhi road, where the Indian Midland Railway now runs, for his brother, who dealt in silks and cotton goods in a Deccan city. Of his exploits as talker of the band of Tulsi Ram, a notorious thug, executed long ago for his crimes, he told this tale:

"Tulsi Ram was the right arm of Kali, and I was the right arm of Tulsi Ram. It was I who decoyed Nasur Khan, the rich jeweler, with coaxing words, as men take carp from a pond by tickling their sides.

"Nasur was journeying to Delhi with gems from Mysore and a caravan laden with silks in bales and rich brocades. I came before him as a poor trader, begging for permission to join his train for the sake of protection against thieves."

A twinkle in the old man's eyes betrayed his relish of the irony of the situation.

"Nasur was as hard as the stones he dwelt in," he continued, "and the price he demanded for his protection was high. Then I told him that the Rajah of Mulwa had news of the approach of his caravan, and Nasur's heart became as water, for he feared the horsemen of Mulwa and the toll they take.

"Nasur's heart was glad within him when he rode aside from Mulwa, and when he met Tulsi Ram merry was his greeting. Quiet merchants all, they seemed—my brothers—and Nasur's men chatted with them, as travelers, of price and grain. And as they conversed together they made a jest about the thugs so my brethren gathered around Nasur Khan and his men, two to a traveler, and when all were listening openmouthed to a story of Hatim Tai's an owl hooted twice from the jungle. That was the signal."

The old man illustrated with wrist and knuckle the act of tightening the dumal, a handkerchief, around the neck of the victim. He told how the travelers were buried while warm in the graves that had been prepared for them. For himself, it was his destiny to be a thug. "It is our custom," he said. "The potter's son takes to the potter's wheel; the coppersmith's to the tinkling hammer."

Strangely enough, the veteran became himself a sacrifice to the goddess of his vows. For Kali Devi is also the patroness of that scourge of India, cholera morbus, and next hot weather the old thug passed away during an epidemic. Kali had stretched out one of her hundred hands and called her devotees away.

From this confession it seems that winning the confidence of their victims was the mainstay of the thug business. Theirs was not the bold overt, "Your money or your life" attack of the bandit, but the crafty approach of the criminal tactician. They reckoned on taking their man off his guard, as the "coney catcher" did in sixteenth century London and as the bunco man does to-day in Western America. Confidence operators are as old as graft itself.

The work of suppressing thuggee was done by Col. Sleeman, one of those martyrs to exile and official duty that the Indian civil service needs and trains. In the district where he replaced blackmail and brigandage by law and order the town of Sleemanabad—Sleeman's city—stands for his monument. The long task of rounding up the thug bands was made easier by disaffection within their ranks. The powerful religious band was broken when unbelieving Moslems were admitted as members of the robber caste and rose to be leaders. The Kali worship became a mere pretext for robbery and murder, and thuggee fell before the repressive measures of a strong executive.

One is not surprised to hear of European criminals adopting methods more or less like those of the thugs. If a robber can trust his pals, two heads and two pairs of hands are better than one. A skillful grasp on the throat by one man stifles the cry for help and safeguards the operations of his partner. But as no idea of religious duty would avail in court they must stop short of strangulation or risk a charge of murder.

The garrotters who infested London in the '60's choked but did not kill the late returning citizens. When chloroform came into use in surgery the under world of crime, or at any rate its master minds, at once appreciated its value. It was painless, it was safe—for them; the victim would awake in a state of mental confusion; he could give the police no clew. The drug became popular with the scientific criminals who operated on English railroad lines, where the closed compartments secure privacy. Sometimes a subject died under chloroform by misadventure, but that might have happened at the hands of a young medical practitioner.

In Paris, however, the tricks of Indian thuggees have been closely followed. Look over the files of the Parisian papers of recent years and you will find accounts of men found dead in lonely places with leather cords around their necks and empty pockets. They had resisted the attacks of strangler thieves. In other cases wealthy men, returning from the opera or foot fell victims to the handkerchief trick. In this case the "foulard" of heavy Lyons silk took the place of the cotton "rumal" of the thug.

A robber dressed like a workman or petit bourgeois would approach a belated clubman and offer him for sale a ring, ostensibly picked up from the pavement. If monsieur did not take alarm the robber's partner, who had crept behind his victim, smared his mouth and throat in a moce. Then with a quick jiu-jitsu turn the thug heaved him off the ground on to his back, like a sack of coal, and his partner stepped up and rifled monsieur's pockets. The victim was then drummed on the pavement with force enough to stun him and the thugs made their escape.

The French gendarmerie trace this clever and successes operation to the teaching of a professor who lectured in the criminal quarter of Paris some sixty years since. About that time the thugs of India were being brought to trial and the revelations that followed excited great interest in Europe. It is very likely that the professor borrowed his line of treatment from these published cases. But old Nadhoo of the jail would have said that the spirit of an executed thug had incarnated itself in the Frenchman in order to propagate the mystery of thuggee in the virgin soil of France.

The thugs of India, it was said, began as devotees, but ended as brigands. Some form of brigandage, indeed, seems epidemic in Asiatic countries that are not ruled by the strong hand. Burmah is a case in point and so are the Philippines.

The thugs of Burmah were called dacoits. During the first few years of the British occupation the troops were actively employed in small detachments in running down the "dakus" and laying their chiefs by the heels. It was a rough school for subalterns. The nature of the warfare is well illustrated in Kipling's "The Taking of Lungtungpen," a jale of the harrying of a dacoit stronghold by Mulvaney's detachment. But dacoity is now extinct in Burmah and the country is policed by native constabulary.

A Bret Harte Joke.

Sam Davis of Nevada once made a wager that he could successfully imitate the style of any living or dead poet and do it so thoroughly that the difference was not discernible and that the public, the press and the critics would not detect the fraud. As a result he wrote "Binley and 46," to which he signed F. Bret Harte's name. The fake was put out in a publication known as the Open Letter. It described an engineer who took his train through a snowstorm in the Sierras, dying at his post. From the Atlantic to the Pacific the poem was copied. "Binley and 46" was given a full page in Leslie's Weekly, with a portrait of Bret Harte, and described as "the best short poem of the decade." It was many years before Mr. Harte denied its authorship. The poem has since been incorporated in several books of popular recitations, notwithstanding Binley freezes to death beside a roaring locomotive furnace, with 150 pounds of steam up and two cords of wood within reach.

No Surprises In Dreams.

No one is ever surprised in a dream. A man dreaming is at one moment bathing in the sea and at the next moment soaring in a balloon, but the sudden and inexplicable change does not surprise him, nor is he surprised to meet in the flesh friends long dead, nor is he surprised to find himself doing deeds that really are beyond him. The reason is that dreamers have no memory. In real life to be pursued through the streets by a lion would be astonishing, but this accident would be accepted in a dream as horrible, but quite commonplace, the memory not being there to say that it it is unheard of for lions to pursue one in cities. In the same way, in dreams, men are not surprised to find themselves ballooning because they don't remember that they were never up in a balloon before, and they are not surprised to find themselves conversing with dead people because they don't remember that these people are dead.

A Lost Lesson.

The proprietor of an engineering works in Scotland, according to The Dundee Advertiser, was watching the leisurely efforts of an apprentice who was swinging his hammer in a gentle way.

"Look here, laddie," he said, going up to the youth and taking the hammer from him, "when I see a man that takes his hammer by the end of the shaft and strikes a proper blow like that I give that a man 32 shillings a week, but a man that takes it in the middle like this only gets 25 shillings a week and the sack whenever we get slack. See?"

Hoping he had sufficiently well driven home his point, he surveyed the lad more in sorrow than in anger, but the latter requested an extension of the lesson.

"Please, sir," he said, "where do I hold it for four shillings a week?"

Two Mistakes.

An Irish merchant who had more money in his pocket than his appearance denoted took a seat in a first-class carriage. A dandy fellow-passenger was much annoyed at Pat's presence and, missing his handkerchief, taxed him with having picked his pocket. After recovering his handkerchief, which he had put in his hat, he made a lame apology, but Pat stopped him with this remark:

"Make yourself easy, darlint. Don't bother about the matter. You took me for a thafe. I took you for a gentleman. We were both of us mistaken, that's all, me honey."

Defined.

Teacher—Who knows what triplets are? Teacher's Pet—I know. Two twins and one left over.

Have the Billiard Habit.

Natives of New Zealand are victims of the billiard habit. The inspector of native schools in New Zealand attributes the lax attendance of the young Maories to the fact that their parents "spend their whole time playing cards or billiards." He alleges that the children are often kept up all night billiard-marking and are of course utterly unfit for school work next day. He says he encounters billiards everywhere on his travels. The game is even played on the roadside.

He Had Not Lost It.

A London bus driver had shouted, "'igh Oborn!" says a writer in Pearson's Weekly, till the passenger on the seat behind him could no longer resist the temptation to make a joke.

"Excuse me," said the passenger, "but haven't you dropped something?"

"I see wot you're driving at," returned the driver keenly, "but never mind. I shall pick it up when we get to Hoxford street."

Champion Cheese County.

The Sheboygan county (Wis.) dairy boards of trade sell annually 8,000,000 pounds of cheese, or almost one-half of all the cheese sold in this great dairying state of Wisconsin. But this is not all. Of the 116 cheese factories in Sheboygan county only sixty-five sell their product in the county. All elements considered, $1,500,000 is paid annually for Sheboygan county cheese.—National Magazine.

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