

for ever in their mouths. To any question respecting their opinions they commonly reply in his verses; as when interrogated concerning their ideas of the state of the soul after death, a poetical Gipsy made answer:—

“Nor soul nor love divine can die;
Although our frame must perish here,
Still longer hope points to the sky:
Thus sings the poet Das Kubeer.”

They believe their souls to be particles of the universal spirit, in which it is after death absorbed. In this life, feasting and drinking constitute their supreme good; and every kind of crime may be expiated by plentiful libations, except, perhaps, the indiscreet disclosure of their opinions to strangers, which is characteristically punished by rubbing the offender's nose against the ground. They call in the aid of a Brahminical astrologer, to fix on a lucky name for their children, notwithstanding that they profess Mohammedanism; and permit the urchins to remain at the breast until five or six years of age. This practice, together with the violent exercises which they are taught in their youth, probably tends to curtail the lives of their women, who generally handsome and engaging, pass the morning of their lives as tumblers or dancing girls. They have no fixed dwelling; but wherever they encamp, erect temporary huts with light mats of sedge or rushes. They go about in companies, like our strolling players, hiring their services for a stated period, generally a year, to a sirdar, or manager.

“In the upper provinces of Hindoostan, the little encampment of these people are frequently very regular and neat, being there formed by the *sirki* (rushes) entirely. Each apartment, though not much larger than a mastiff's kennel, has its own particular inclosure or courtyard, generally erected in such a manner as to become a species of circumvallation to the whole portable hamlet, which, at first sight, reminds a traveller of Lilliput or Fairy Land. The appearance of the people alone can undo the deception, and then even one cannot help wondering where so many men, women, children, and other domestic animals, manage to

sleep or shelter themselves from the storms which sometimes assail these itinerant people.”

The men, who are remarkably athletic, practise not only juggling in all its branches, but perform feats requiring the most consummate agility and prodigious strength. Many of them obtain a livelihood by leading about dancing-bears or monkeys. Others, impatient of the arts of petty roguery, become Dacoits;* and as such, says their historian, are no doubt often hanged. They inter their dead, he observes, and the only ceremony seems to be to forget their sorrows, by getting completely drunk immediately afterwards. Little more formality accompanies their marriage.

In their habits, the Gipsies are far more uncleanly than the ordinary Hindoos, and devour all kinds of food, even the dead bodies of jackals, bullocks, and horses. They sometimes, in addition to their profession of jugglers, employ themselves in collecting medicinal herbs, and in catching mungooses, squirrels, and the bird called *daho*, which they use as food or medicine. The women practise physic, cupping, palmistry, and tattooing, to which the Hindoo women are still addicted; and usually sally forth in the morning from their encampment, with a quantity of herbs, dried birds, &c., to exhibit their skill among women of the neighbouring villages. Should they not return before the jackal's cry† is heard in the evening, their fidelity is suspected, and they are punished by their husbands. The following song, in which a juggler de-

* *Daka* means robbery, and in the active form becomes *dukyt*, notorious for their depredations as pirates in the *Sunderbund* branches of the Ganges, by the name *Decoits*. If we may credit very respectable testimonies of the fact, those *Dukyts* are frequently guilty of sacrificing human victims to *Kali*, under circumstances of horror and atrocity scarcely credible. *Asiatic Researches*, vol. vii. p. 465.

† Bishop Heber, in describing the cry of the jackal, observes, “The noise was quite equal to that of an immense pack of hounds with half the rabble of a county at their heels except that the cry was wilder and more diabolical.” Vol. i p. 297.