

The group whence they proceeded were on the opposite shore, about two hundred yards off. We could distinctly see them. An old female was lying on a bedstead close to the edge of the water, tightly held down by two men, while a third male and a young girl were apparently pouring cold water in large quantities over the struggling woman.

Of course we supposed it some practical joke, and turned to our head dandy for an explanation.

"Make die old woman," answered he, without the slightest emotion.

For a moment Jerry thought the boatman misunderstood him, and he repeated the question: the same reply was given.

"What! do you mean to say they are murdering the woman?"

"No, sahib, no. Those old woman children make die mother."

We stood petrified—puzzled; totally at a loss to comprehend the scene, considering it wholly impossible that children could thus publicly be murdering their own parent, or that such an act could thus be perpetrated in noon-day, while a party like ours stood looking on with apathy. We therefore made further inquiries, and learnt the following facts.

The old woman, having been given over by the doctors and priests, had been brought down by her family to the water's edge, at the time when the tide was lowest, in order that, with the returning rise, the waters might carry her off, and the god of the stream receive her into everlasting life. The better to secure this, the more effectually to shorten her pains, those who had thus exposed her to (what they considered) certain death, had stopped her nose and eyes with mud, leaving her mouth only open, that she might the better supplicate the river deity. But alas! the best schemes sometimes fail, and this pious plan of securing immortal bliss to a parent had miscarried. The tide, by some accident, had omitted to carry her away, and the old woman was discovered by her affectionate children alive and kicking, just when they ought to have found her swallowed up by the god of the Ganges. This was a disgrace not to be borne. Not only was it a slur on the unhappy female, whom the waters had refused to receive, but on her whole family; in fact, on the whole tribe. To evade this stigma, her own children were now drowning her on the pallet where she lay, blessing her all the time they kept suffocating her with water.

"Good God!" cried Jackson, "that is downright murder. Cross directly to the spot."

"What for?" replied the dandy, who steered. "It is probably too late to save her; and besides, sahib, why should you do so? Her fate is come."

"Not so; she may yet live many happy years," chimed in our friend Jamieson.

The native, who was really an intelligent man, with a smile of compassion at our total ignorance of Indian habits, instantly replied,

"Happiness, sahib, is no more for that old woman. You save her life,—what then? She is a Hindoo; she will be worse off than a dog; none will receive her; none will know her; her own children will fly from her. Cursed by all, she will wander a stranger, despised by all good men. She will envy the pariah dog that the Englishman shoots for pleasure; for she will know less kindred than the wild animal that forages amidst the carrion for his meal."

"Never mind that," cried I; "cross the stream: she shall at least have the choice of life."

"The river runs too fast. To go over is impossible."

Jerry Jackson joined in the general murmur we set up, and the menaces with which we threatened our crew, if they did not instantly make the attempt we desired.

An Indian is sullen, and submissive when opposed. We could get no answer. The boat steadily glided on.

We now began to shout; but all seemed equally futile, for the wretches went on in their work of murder, heedless of our cries, or the prayers of the poor doomed creature. We saw her once struggle so fiercely against death, that she rolled off the pallet. The man and woman again lifted her on it, and held her tightly down, while a third approached her with a pot of water. She screamed; he applied it to her mouth; we could distinctly hear her almost unearthly screech; he put it to her lips, and thus began to stifle her.

Jerry Jackson could bear no more. He seized his rifle, and in a minute the proposed murderer rolled over,—whether dead or not, I have never heard to this hour. We hurried on, fearful of the consequences. If that shot was mortal, say, reader, was Jackson a murderer, or a justified avenger?



EDUCATION.—He that makes his son worthy of esteem by giving him a liberal education, has a far better title to his obedience and duty, than he that gives him a large estate without it.