From the London Magazine.

HINDOO WIDOWS.*

It has long been a question with those conversant with East India affairs whether the practice of suttee, or widows burning on the funeral pile with the bodies of their husbands, should be permitted by an enlightened Christian Government. The reluctance with which it has been witnessed, and the appearance of force being in some instances used by the relatives and priests to compel cremation, produced an interference on the part of the authorities, which it appears has only tended to make the practice more common. It was ordered that, when a suttee was about to take place, the official persons on the spot should inquire whether the act was voluntary on the part of the widow, and that they should attend at the funeral pile and see that no force was used. This at once authorized suttees, and by requiring the presence of the magistrate or his representatives gave the sacrifice a consequence which it had not. As no European could witness such a scene without trying, by gentle means at least to prevent it, unavailing interference gave the victim the air of a martyr, and natural vanity and pride were called into the aid of superstition.

A decided prohibition would be the natural course of the government in India; if this is not issued, considerations of policy are the sole cause. It has been a principle with it, and, it is supposed, one of the main causes of its stability, not to interfere with the religious prejudices of the natives. Nevertheless, such interference has taken place in some cases. Infanticide, the putting to death of the aged, infirm, slaves, and others, though at the desire of the party slain, have been prohibited without dangerous consequences. It becomes then an issue of fact; and the question to be tried is, whether the natives are attached to this custom of suttee to that degree that a decided prohibition would be attended with any dangerous consequences to the government in India; or whether it might cause that amount of dissatisfaction among them, which, though it should not threaten the stability of the government, might fairly, according to their prejudices, be considered a grievance. In determining this question, evidence of several kinds is to be considered.

The practice of suttee is not *enjoined* by the Hindoo sacred writings —it is only *recommended* by part of them, and in fact discountenanced by Menu, the greatest of Hindoo authorities, who enjoins upon the widow, not cremation, but austerity and a pure life. The custom, however, is chiefly prevalent among the lower Hindoos, who know nothing of the Shasters; it is in fact a superstitious rite, founded upon a popular prejudice that the widow, by the act of suttee, secures permanent bliss in another world. The frequency of the sacrifice varies in different districts; and so far from being a uniform religious offering, it appears to depend upon the caprice of the individual, or the extent of the superstition of the district. As the consequences of the

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sacrifices are not supposed to be a general good to the community, but merely a security of eternal happiness to the widow herself, it might be inferred that a general prohibition would be viewed with indifference. The wives, not yet widows, would not be afflicted by a loss still in distant prospect, and, in case of dying before their husbands, not to be in this manner obtained. It would directly concern no other persons. Accordingly we find, that in all those cases where a magistrate, influenced by his own views or other circumstances, has prohibited the rite, no dissatisfaction has been expressed, either on the part of the relatives or the people generally, but that, on the contrary, in some instances the widow and her friends have subsequently declared their gratitude at the interference.

It is a mistaken notion that the widow is influenced to self-destruction by the fear of loss of caste, or by disgrace consequent upon a non-performance of the rite. There is no such motive. In the higher classes, self-immolation is rarer than in the lower. Loss of caste and overwhelming disgrace indeed follow a failure of resolution on the pile itself. Should the widow flee when the fire is once lighted, she is then dishonoured for ever; and here the interests of the community, as seen through superstitious notions, become acted upon; because it is held an undeniable truth that these imperfect sacrifices provoke the wrath of heaven, and call down upon the country its judgment in drought, famine, or plague.

Now a decided prohibition of the suttee, or a total neglect of it by the government, could not have produced this dreaded event; whereas the partial interference of the authorities, has absolutely proved the cause of it, or at least supposed to be so, which, in effect, is the same thing. The priests and attendants round the pile have always taken good care that the suttee should not benefit by any sudden fit of repentance or failure of resolution. If the victim has not been always secured, the pile has been constructed in such a manner that escape was nearly impossible, and force was frequently used to hold or strike down the unhappy victim who was seen struggling from the pile. One of the devices of certain magistrates, and of their interpretation of the general order, has purposely led to the escape of individuals from the flames. It being ordained by the government that the directions of the Shasters should be minutely complied with, the pile has been constructed above ground, supported by pillars, covered with a roof, and partially lined with burning materials. This construction renders escape easy: and it was hoped that, should imperfect sacrifices become frequent and facile, that the horror and dread which the natives entertain of such a catastrophe would naturally make them unwilling that the suttee should be attempted. Now the natives see, as far as this plan has been attended with success, that it has been caused by the interference of the British authorities. Thus, by these half measures, the very result has been brought about in a degree which it was desired to avoid altogether. A drought of two years, which lately took place, has been entirely attributed to this tampering with the suttees.

Instances have occurred where the sacrificed widow has been too young to have herself the decision of her own fate, and where relatives have inhumanly interfered and absolutely forced her immolation. In-

quiry will probably decide that these relatives and their assistants have been worked upon, not by superstitious but by interested motives. Such an act would, if proved against a person, be murder, and he would be amenable to the criminal law. The police ought certainly to ascertain that this inhuman act is not perpetrated, but the investigation ought undoubtedly to be made in such a way as not to lead to the supposition that the voluntary act is authorized and sanctioned by the government. It is possible that it may be both a difficult and a delicate matter to make this inquiry in a satisfactory manner. It is the form now to ask leave of the Company's magistrate; where leave is given, the victim goes to the sacrifice with the additional satisfaction that she is authorized by the government; if leave is reluctantly yielded, and all persuasion and solicitation attempted, the victim goes to the sacrifice with an additional honour and credit; where leave has been withheld, the suttee has not taken place.

Many opinions are held upon the subject by the best informed persons in India: we are inclined to think that the balance of intelligence and ability is on the side of the safety and humanity of issuing a direct prohibition. The question has also been agitated both in the India House and in the House of Commons; and the papers before us contain the proceedings on the subject, both at Leadenhall-street and in the east. The reports of the different magistrates from various districts contain many interesting facts, some of which we shall give, in addition to the brief summary of the question, which we have just run through, and which will both receive and reflect light upon the facts in the extracts.

Before we proceed to the quotations, we may observe, that the policy of the Mogul government was to tolerate these sacrifices with the utmost latitude; and several interesting anecdotes are given of suttees by Bernier, in his Travels in India, in the time of Aurengzebe. This bigotted emperor of course looked upon these Pagan rites with abhorrence, but he thought it prudent to let them alone. On the contrary, the practice has been disapproved by a Hindoo rajah, and was forbidden during the reign of this individual, for ten or twelve years, in his extensive principality.

The first description of a suttee that occurs in these papers, is the case of a widow named Hoomalee, and one of great atrocity. The perpetrators were punished with imprisonment:—

"The case is that of a widow named Hoomalee, a girl of about fourteen years of age, whose husband, a Brahmin, died when absent from his family, and a fortnight after the event, her father being absent and unacquainted with what was passing, she proceeded to burn herself on a pile prepared by other near relations, and which was fired by her uncle. She soon leaped from the flame, and was seized, taken up by the hands and feet, and again thrown upon it, much burnt; she again sprung from the pile, and running to a well hard by, laid herself down in the water-course, weeping bitterly. A sheet was then offered, and she was desired by her uncle to place herself upon it; she refused, saying he would again carry her to the fire, and she would rather quit the family and live by beggary, or any thing, if they would have mercy upon her. At length, on her uncle swearing by the Ganges, that if

she would seat herself on the cloth he would carry her home, she did so, was bound up in it, carried to the pile, now fiercely burning, and again thrown into the flames. The wretched victim once more made an effort to save herself, when, at the instigation of the rest, a Musselman approached near enough to reach her with his sword, and cutting her through the head, she fell back, and was rescued from further suffering by death."—p. 13.

Three more similar cases, are thus reported:—

"We have adduced one affecting instance in which that option was implored, and most inhumanly denied. A narrative of almost equal horror, but of briefer suffering, appears in the proceedings of your government in the judicial department, in the month of August, 1822, with several other cases stated to be considered by the Nizamut Adawlut as demanding particular notice:—'The case of Mussunt Kumbahin Cuttack is reported to have been at first in appearance perfectly voluntary, and the widow performed the usual ceremonies, after which she dropped herself into the burning pit or koond, which in this province is always used for burning the bodies on the occasion of a woman becoming a suttee. Immediately on dropping into the pit, she rose up and stretched out her hands to the side of the pit, but whether this was done with an intent to escape, or whether it was merely an involuntary motion from pain, does not appear; however, Keyjed, a washerman, who appears to have had the management of the ceremony, seeing this, gave her a push or blow with a bamboo, which tumbled her into the hottest part of the fire, where she was immediately consumed. The washerman was summoned before the magistrate, but released, under a doubt if his conduct had been illegal. The Nizamut Adawlut remarked, that he ought either not to have been summoned, or being summoned, should not have been released without punishment.'

"At Maradabad, three persons were committed for assisting at an illegal suttee, and the magistrate of the same district reports a case, of which the following is the substance:—'On the 28th May, 1821, a person named Bhoonmlanee, reported at the thannah of Goomour, that a year and a half had elapsed since his brother Sewarour had died; his wife, Rhoobe, aged twenty years, proposed to perform suttee. The thannadar being unwell, sent some burgundauzes to prevent the sacrifice, and they reasoned with the woman, but without effect. The thannadar repaired instantly to the spot, where he found a large assembly of people, in the presence of whom the woman prepared herself and sat upon the pile, having with her the turban of the deceased husband. Bhoomutrai then set fire to the pile, and when the flames reached her body, she jumped out of the fire. Her relations immediately tried to force her back into the flames; but the thannadar rescued her, though she was much burnt. He then apprehended the persons concerned in the sacrifice, and sent them with the woman to the magistrate, and Bhoomatrae was committed for trial.'

"The magistrate at Gornekpore reports a second case of compulsory suttee, in addition to that which was brought under the consideration of government in August, 1821, the particulars as follows:—'Mussumul Bussuntree leaped twice from the pile and attempted to escape; she was twice thrown back by her relations, who surrounded the pile, and

forcibly detained her there until consumed. This took place in the presence of the cutwall of the city, who, with others proved to have been concerned, are committed for trial to the judge of the circuit.'"—pp. 14, 15.

The following paragraph contains a description of the manner in which a suttee is usually brought about, by Mr. Ewer, superintendent of the police of the lower provinces, who is a favourer of the direct prohibition:

"'I know (Mr. Ewer continues) it is generally supposed, that a suttee takes place with the free will and consent of the widow; indeed, that she frequently persists in her intention to burn in spite of the arguments and entreaties of her relations; but I submit that there are many reasons for thinking that such an event as a voluntary suttee very rarely occurs; that is, few widows would ever think of sacrificing themselves, unless overpowered by force or persuasion; very little of either is sufficient to overcome the mental or physical powers of the majority of the Hindoo females; and a widow who would turn with natural and instinctive horror from the first hint of sharing her husband's pile, will be at length gradually brought to pronounce a reluctant consent, because distracted with grief at the event, without one friend to advise or protect her, she is little prepared to oppose the surrounding crowd of hungry Brahmins, and interested relations, either by argument or force; accustomed to look to the former with the highest veneration, and to attach implicit belief to all their assertions, she dares not, if she was able to make herself heard, deny the certainty of the various advantages which must attend the sacrifice; that by becoming a suttee she will remain so many years in heaven, rescue her husband from hell, and purify the family of her father, mother, and husband; while, on the other hand, that disgrace in this life, and continued transmigration into the body of a female animal, will be the certain consequence of a refusal. In this state of confusion a few hours quickly pass, and the widow is burnt before she has had time to think on the subject. Should utter indifference for her husband and superior sense enable her to preserve her judgment, and to resist the arguments of those about her, it will avail her little; the people will not on any account be disappointed of their show, and the entire population of a village will turn out to assist in dragging her to the bank of the river, and in keeping her down on the pile.'

"'Under these circumstances nine out of ten widows are burnt to death; and having described the manner in which these sacrifices are generally performed, I shall now proceed to show that they are more frequently offered to secure the temporal good of the survivors, than to ensure the spiritual welfare of the sufferer or her husband.'

"'I have already stated, that the widow is scarcely ever a free agent at the performance of a suttee, and therefore her opinion on the subject can be of no weight, and whether she appear glad or sorry, stupid, composed, or distracted, is no manner of proof of her real feelings; her relations, her attendants, and the surrounding crowd of men, women, and children, will be seen to wear one face of joy and delight, none of the holy exultation which formerly accompanied the departure of the martyr, but all the savage merriment which in our days attends a box-

ing match, or a bull bait; nor can this be otherwise among those present, her relatives are directly interested in her death; if she had a son, he may perhaps wish to be relieved from the expense of maintaining a mother, and the trouble of listening to her unseasonable advice; if she has none, her husband's male relations will take care that she stand not in their way, by claiming his estate for life, which is her legal right. The Brahmins are paid for their services, and are of course interested. The crowd assemble to see a show, which in their estimation affords more amusement than any other exhibition with which they are acquainted, and the sacrifice is completed, because the family is anxious to get rid of an encumbrance, and the Brahmins desirous of a feast and a present.'"—pp. 16, 17.

We shall now give some examples of suttees conducted in a different spirit, when the act is voluntary, and the resolution of the devoted widow a high example of fortitude and unshrinking resolution. The following is an extract from a private letter from Mr. Pringle to Captain Robertson, collector, dated Camp, at Bour-Boodburg, 6th February, 1825:—

"Information was brought to me yesterday morning at Peepulwundee, where I was encamped, that a suttee was about to sacrifice herself at the village (Boree); I immediately sent my carcoons to try to dissuade the woman, and at least prevent her mounting the pile till I should arrive. I rode over myself in the forenoon, and found that every argument had already been used to prevent her without effect. I told her that she would suffer no disgrace by not going, and if she was under any anxiety about her future maintenance, I would take care she should not want; but that if she persisted in burning, it must be according to the rule of the Shasters, when if, as was most probable, her nerves should fail her, and she came out of the fire, she would lose her caste and reputation. When she heard this she smiled, and told me that she was actuated from no sudden impulse of enthusiasm, but that it had been the cool determination of her whole life, ever since she was married; and that she had often promised her husband she would not survive him, and she was fully resolved to abide by her word; that if she wished to remain she had children and relations who would be willing to support her, but her resolution was not to be altered by any offers of maintenance; that with regard to the form of the pile, the facility of escape would only serve to prove the firmness of her resolutions; and she begged that I myself would be present to see how heroically she could behave. She appeared to be between fifty and sixty years of age, and had two sons and several grand-children; her husband resided as private tutor in the family of Gobal Row Despandee, at Chinchodee, where he died three days ago: she herself had gone the day before yesterday to the alabazar, where another suttee had been burnt, and she had assisted at the ceremony; on her return home in the evening she was met by the messenger bringing her husband's bones; she immediately expressed her determination of burning with them, much to the grief of her family and the villagers, who remained up the whole night trying to dissuade her, but in vain. When I found her determined to go, I took care to have the pile constructed on the most orthodox plan; above was a light covering of dry twigs, supported by four forked

posts firmly fixed in the ground; the ground below was covered with wood and cow-dung, leaving a space of about five feet on the top; on three sides the pile was surrounded with grass and straw, and the fourth was left entirely open. After the preliminary ceremonies, which the woman went through with perfect self-possession, it was nearly dark when she was brought up to the pile: I told her to look at it well before she went further; she did so, and said distinctly her resolution was fixed: she stopped a few minutes at the edge of the pile performing the last ceremonies, during which time her senses appeared to be failing her; she was then assisted in mounting, and all were made to stand at a little distance, except her two sons, who applied a light to the outside of the pile, as she did within; not a word was uttered, and in a moment the pile was in a blaze—she raised herself and turned completely round, and her cries were heard distinctly for about three minutes, when the fury of the flames, fortunately, by the dryness of the fuel and the strength of the wind, soon put an end to her sufferings; the surrounding grass was consumed almost instantly, and the covering above remained burning, but did not fall in till long after her death: her person was quite visible during the whole of the time—the by-standers were amazed at her constancy, but she was an old woman, and was perhaps too feeble to get out of the fire, otherwise I think human nature would have been too strong in her to have permitted her to remain as she did. I have been thus particular, as I believe it is the first time the new pile has had a trial, and the account may perhaps interest you. It was not until yesterday that I heard of the Ala suttee, which the villagers had not reported to the shekdaur: I fancy it was conducted on the old plan; it was much against the will of the Brahmins that I carried my point yesterday, but when I appealed to the Shasters they had nothing to answer."—pp. 138, 139.

The following is a similar case extracted from a report by Mr. Anderson, criminal judge at Surat, dated 18th June, 1825.

"Yesterday morning, the 17th, Kasumath Sokajee, of the Patana Prubhoo caste, and a clerk in the collector's office, died of the epidemic cholera; his widow Dworkabaee declared her intention of immolating herself on the funeral pile. Application was made to me for permission; I immediately proceeded to the house, and found the widow with all the circumstances about her denoting the intention she had formed; she was an old woman, between fifty and sixty years of age; she was perfectly collected, and replied to the different arguments I used to dissuade her from the sacrifice with coolness, and in a manner to convince me that she would go through with the resolution she had declared. There was no appearance of natural excitation from any cause—no influence—no encouragement; her relations and her sons, grown-up men, were in great grief, and declared they had used every persuasion to induce her to refrain from the vow.

"I directed the shastree to ascertain if the widow was competent according to the Shaster, in all its conditions, to become a suttee; he made his inquiries, and stated that she was so. I asked if he thought she was free from influence of any kind, and if he himself considered that the vow was the widow's voluntary act; he replied he had no doubt of it; it appeared to me also in the same light. I then declared that

these sacrifices were so contrary to humanity, so dreadful, that the government could never approve them; but still, in its toleration in matters of religion to all its subjects, it allowed the practice, if countenanced by the Hindoo religion and law, and therefore I felt myself constrained to grant the permission required, and that permission I accordingly gave, however reluctant I was to see the best feelings of our nature so violated.

"In the determination to see that the permission was not abused by any obstacle being offered to prevent the effect of any subsequent disposition, should any such be shown, on the part of the unfortunate woman, to retract, I proceeded to the phoolpara, and witnessed the awful, and really most dreadful sacrifice.

"The conduct of the widow throughout was that of the most perfect firmness, and freedom from alarm; she engaged in and witnessed the appalling preparatory ceremonies with a collectedness and presence of mind I could not have conceived. Seated on the pile, she adjusted the faggots about her with an unaltered countenance, and on my addressing her, with a last hope, that, in that situation, she might be shaken, saying, that I would still protect her in a return to her house, she unhesitatingly, and in the tone and manner she had preserved throughout, declared, that what she was engaged in was her happiness. Aloud she called to her son, directing him to heap the fuel upon her, and then with her own hand applied the torch to the pile. For two or three seconds the torch did not take effect—she sat with unchanged countenance—the flames then burst forth—she was seen clapping her hands, and in less than a minute all of this most frightful and revolting spectacle was over."—pp. 143, 144.

In the following extract is a full and interesting narrative of the sacrifice of an heroic old lady, detailed by Commissioner Robertson. It is dated 7th June, 1825.

"I am sorry to have to report to you the successful immolation yesterday evening, of a Brahmin widow, on a pile constructed according to the new model laid down by the shastrees of this place. This is the first suttee which has occurred at Poona since September, 1823. Every means were used to dissuade the woman from burning; the boldness of the attempt only gave her new courage: her husband had died on the evening of the 5th instant, and when her intention was declared, she was waited upon by the shastree of the court, and by other public functionaries of my department. They sat with her till past midnight, without effecting any change in her determination. I delayed as long as possible, before I went to her myself, in the hopes that if poignancy of grief was the cause of her resolution, it might be somewhat abated, and her mind more fitted to listen to reason. I found her, however, at eleven o'clock, perfectly calm and fixed. No argument, no dread of issuing from the fire and disgracing herself, induced her to swerve from her purpose; she was deaf to the prospect of visiting the infernal regions, should she change her resolution while burning, and so die. Neelcunt Shastree, Thuthey, and other learned and eminent shastrees, who have influence over the minds of the people, visited her after I left her. They knew my determination to be present at the construction of the pile, and at the burning, and their arguments of dissuasion were

urged with all the interest which their conviction of the woman's inability to remain in the fire, when there was an opening for escape, could arouse. The escape of a suttee alive would bring a calamity on the country; and I learnt for the first time, that the cause of our not having had any rain for two years, was generally attributed to the escape of Radhabhyee in 1823.

"Every argument failed with this woman: a pilgrimage to Benares would divert her grief, and Neelcunt Shastree had an hundred rupees ready to give her; other shastrees would contribute their mite, and so would government: she had already seen Benares, and her own means were ample to visit other places of pilgrimage: various acts of devotion were mentioned to her; she had visited or performed the most interesting in the society of her husband. What pleasure would there be in a lonely repetition? She had not a single relative alive, and not an acquaintance for whom she cherished any regard, why should she live? and why was she prevented from accompanying him, for whom alone she had any affection? She had balanced every thing, and knew the precise nature of what she was about to undertake; she had within the last week visited upwards of a dozen women who had lately retracted their declaration of burning—she had discovered that they were 'dissuaded, not prohibited.' The terrors to them of the new pile were to her its beauties—she would show her affection and her firmness—she was old enough to know what she could dare, and what she could do—others were chained to life by other motives—she had no child to cling to her for protection—she never knew the weak tenderness of a mother—she was an isolated being in the universe, without friends, and without an affection that was not centered in her husband. She would not, like some, tremble at the pile; and though fifty years had passed over her, she required not to be supported to the performance of this last act of her duty and pleasure.

"The shastrees having left her, the pile was constructed under my own superintendence. Four strong posts, ten feet distance from each other, and ten feet high above the ground, supported four cross beams fitted into deep hollows to prevent them from slipping. The space within the posts too was filled up with dry billets of wood to the height of four feet and a half, leaving a distance of five feet and a half to the top of the posts. The woman was less than five feet high. The upper part of the pile, from the wood to the top, was enclosed, excepting a door of two feet and a half wide at one corner, with cusby and grass, and the roof was covered with rafters supporting first, grass, and then billets of wood. There was a fresh breeze from the southwest, and her position was on the northeast side of the pile. No combustibles were allowed to be used, excepting grass and the cusby straw: I estimated the intensity of their heat and the fury of their blaze by far too lightly; and I ought to have been more scrupulous in regulating their thickness just opposite to the woman's head: at the upper part of the pile there was only one bundle of straw in thickness, but bundles were piled downwards (like tiles resting on each other) at half their length, so that the thickness opposite the suttee's head was equal to three bundles. Perhaps the shastrees, who had before been so eager to prevent the suttee, and who must have known the fury of the conflagra-

tion that would ensue better than myself, did not care to point out this mistake to me, in the hopes that it might possibly effect the destruction of the suttee, for they looked with horror on the probability of her escape; the universal belief, however, was, that the woman would immediately reappear from the pile on its being lighted.

"The conduct of this extraordinary old woman, when preparing for death, was characterized by the most determined bravery and coolness; she spoke to every body, repeated the invocation and prayers in an audible, distinct, and fervent tone, and walked her rounds about the pile, over rough stones, with the most perfect steadiness; several gentlemen of the cantonment were present, and we once or twice believed that she had a reluctance to enter the pile, from a disposition we thought she evinced to loiter and converse; I therefore sent Neelcunt Shastree to her, who explained to her there was no disgrace in then retracting, and that I had requested him to beg her to reconsider what she was undertaking; she only smiled and sent me her blessing; after entering the pile and laying herself down, an officiating Brahmin went in to her; I was afraid he was tying her down, but before I had satisfied myself on this head, he again came forth and handed a light to the woman, who placing it between her toes, lighted the pile at her feet, and then stood up with the light in her right hand, and with the most undaunted courage set fire to the pile in several places over her head: while she was employed in this manner, the officiating priests were firing the outside; at first a slight fire was seen in various parts, just as we observed the woman lying down by the body of her husband; but almost in an instant afterwards the fire burst into one sheet of flame, and in about a minute and a half the grass and cusby of the sides having been consumed, the suttee was seen dead, with her right hand in the very position in which it was remarked before the flames enveloped her from our view; although we were ten or twelve yards from the pile, and to windward, the heat was so overpowering that we were obliged to step back. My opinion is, that this woman died before the fire could have scorched her flesh in more than one or two places; the wind blew the flame directly through the pile and upon her face, and she must have been instantly deprived of breath from the want of air, as well as from the heat of the very little there might be left to inhale."—pp. 151, 152.

The following is another account of a resolute sacrifice that took place at Concon Essary Poona, on Sunday the 12th June, 1825.

"On arriving at the ground where the suttee was to burn, I found the officiating Brahmins preparing the pile, in the manner laid down by the Shasters of Poona. There were four strong posts fixed into the ground, with grooves at the top of each, into which cross beams were fixed, and upon them cross rafters were placed, so as to form the roof of the pile. The length of the space between the corner posts might be about nine feet, and the breadth probably five, while the height of the posts were about eight or ten feet; dried logs of wood and cow-dung were piled up to the height of four and a half feet inside the corner posts, and dry grass was laid on them. The roof of the pile was formed of hay and wood, the only use of which seemed to be to exclude the light, as it was too light above the bodies to assist in burning them; the space between the top of the pile and roof might be

about four feet, which was enclosed by bundles of kusbey placed longitudinally, giving the inside the appearance of a cabin or hut; a door was left, rather more than two feet wide, at one corner, so that ingress and egress might be obtained. The kusbey was placed much more thinly on the windward side than on the other, as it was hoped that if the woman was not suffocated at once by the flames and smoke, that she would come out, and it was expected that from this consequence no one would be found bold enough to again undertake a similar act of devotion.

"During the time that the pile was constructing, the body of the husband was laid on a bier at the edge of the river, and his widow dressed in flowers, and surrounded by her friends and relations, sat at its head.

"When the pile was finished, the body was lifted up and placed in it, and the woman having first gone through the customary ceremonies of ablution and worship, and distributed victuals to those round about, ascended herself with hardly any assistance: she sat up for the space of one or two minutes, looking at her husband's body, and then coolly arranged a place near it, on which she laid down, a Brahmin handed her a lighted torch, which made a sign to those outside, and in a few seconds the whole kusbey was in a blaze. She never moved from the place on which she first laid down, and her death must have been instantaneous.

"When the straw was all burned, it appeared to those looking on as if she was moving in the pile, and a feeling of horror thrilled through the by-standers at the idea of the torture she was suffering. On looking more closely, however, it appeared to be only her knees which had assumed an upright posture from an horizontal one, by the contraction of the sinews, and the same effect was produced upon those of the dead body.

"Her death must have been as easy as possible, and if her mind was in that happy state we must suppose from her having the resolution to make such a sacrifice, I think it would be desirable if every person could resign this world with as little bodily or mental suffering. She lay down to die a violent death, and as she must have supposed, a very agonizing one, with as much composure as I will venture to say most men lay down to sleep."—pp. 147, 148.

In a letter from the Commissioner in the Deccan, Mr. Chaplin, dated 17th June, 1825, we find some very cool and philosophical opinions:—

"Humanity is apt to shudder at these sacrifices, and true religion very properly condemns them; but recent observation convinces all who have been present, that much of the horror of the sacrifice itself is the effect of the imagination of the spectators, which has no foundation in reality. The dread of death once got over by the devotee, death is in fact passed, unless indeed the pile is very scantily supplied with fuel, so that the victim may be purposely roasted by a slow fire. But such a mode of construction is neither consistent with the Shasters nor with established usage, by which in all matters of law and custom we profess to be guided. Both the old and the new piles seem to be equally efficacious in quickly destroying life, for suffocation seems to follow instantly the application of the torch to the inflammable materials. It is

an idle fancy to suppose that the torture is prolonged even for a minute, and it is quite certain that a woman drowning herself in a well, or swallowing a little arsenic, would undergo much greater bodily suffering. Whilst such sacrifices are religiously deemed meritorious, we cannot suppress them by any half measures. The exposure of the naked bodies of the Milesian virgins, it is recorded, put a stop to their propensity to suicide, and if we could so far trample upon inveterate prejudices, as to collect and scatter the ashes of the Brahminee victims of fanaticism in the quarters belonging to the polluted and degraded castes, we too might check the practice without resorting to an absolute prohibition of it. I confess, however, I deprecate all interference in these sacrifices, beyond that of ascertaining that they are purely voluntary—that point decided, the pile cannot, in my opinion, be too combustible. I must also take leave to question our right to harass the afflicted widow by long, frequent, and pertinacious visitations, or by any vexatious delays in constructing the pile, by which means the body of the deceased husband which ought to be burned a few hours after death, is liable to become a mass of putrefaction dangerous to the health of relatives, who are compelled to approach it to perform the last rites, and who are obliged to fast until the final act of cremation is completed; we have seen, and we shall again see, that to the persuasis mori, to those who believe that this immolation opens the way to the mansion of bliss, to those who are armed to resist all pain, inured to suffer, and resolved to die, no dissuasive arguments are of any avail; I therefore think that we should refrain from unnecessarily annoying the unhappy devotee in her last moments, by endeavouring to make her feel more deaths than one, and by giving unprecedented vexation to all those who are connected with her."—pp. 145, 146.

We shall close this article by recording, that the number of suttees were in—

1820 - - - -	597
1821 - - - -	654
1822 - - - -	583
1823 - - - -	575
1824 - - - -	572

DESTRUCTION OF AN OAK BY LIGHTNING.

M. Muncke describes a case in which an oak, being struck by lightning, was rent and destroyed in an extraordinary manner. The trunk of the tree was about fifteen feet in height, a foot and a half or two feet in diameter at the branches, and three feet in diameter at the root. The top of the tree was separated as if by the stroke of a hatchet, and without any appearance of carbonization: the trunk was torn into a thousand pieces, exceedingly small in size when compared with the original mass, and thrown to a great distance. The division and destruction was such as to sustain the thought, that in certain cases the lightning might cause the entire dispersion of the tree, an opinion which was suggested by the circumstance that lightning which had fallen at Le Chateau de Marbourg left no traces of a rafter that had occurred in its course.—*Bull. Univ.* A. viii. 194.