travelled in some state, as a man of rank, accompanied by numerous attendants, and a few palanquins or doolies, in which were said to be the ladies of his family, though in reality they contained little but the implements of their profession. On the road, so disguised, with nothing about them to awaken suspicion, these traders in death would fall, as though by accident, into the company of other wayfarers, and watching a favorable opportunity on the skirts of some jungle, or in some secluded place bordering upon a convenient watercourse, would throw the murderous waistband or turban-cloth round the neck of their victim, and scientifically do him to death. One man threw the fatal noose, another, seizing the other end of the rope or cloth, drew it tightly round the helpless wretch's neck, the two together pressing his head forward with their disengaged hands, whilst a third seized him by the legs and threw him to the ground. There could be no resistance. The work was quickly done. The body was then stripped, the property secured, and very soon the corpse was buried. The consecrated pickaxe, plied with miraculous silence, soon dug a grave for the body.* If a stranger approached whilst they were thus engaged, they laid a cloth decently and reverently over the carcase of the murdered man, and kneeling down beside it, lifted up their voices and wept, over the death of a beloved comrade.

Various were their artifices—great their cleverness. They were, indeed, consummate actors. If the locality were a dangerous one, the country much frequented,

* The pickaxe, forged with due solemnity, and then consecrated with certain prescribed formalities, was held in especial veneration by the Thugs. It was forbidden to bury the dead with any other instrument; for it was the symbol of their profession, and a legacy left, it was believed, by the goddess herself. "Do we not worship it," said a *Thug* to Colonel Sleeman, "every seventh day? Is it not our standard? Is its sound ever heard, when digging the grave, by any but a *Thug*? And can any man ever swear to a falsehood upon it?" Another asked, "How could we dig with any other instrument? This is the one appointed by Davee and consecrated; and we should never have survived the attempt to use any other."

they would throw up a slight enclosure of canvas, pretending that their women were behind the screens, and bury the body within it. Or, warned of the approach of travellers by one of their scouts, some clever member of the gang would throw himself down by the wayside, and simulate the spasms and convulsions, or the exhaustion and prostration of a dying man; and whilst the sympathising travellers were gathering round him and administering such simple remedies as were within their reach, his companions would conceal the body of their victim, and clear away the traces of their guilt. Sometimes the locality favored a readier and easier mode of disposing of the corpse, which was flung into a neighbouring river, or dropped into a convenient well.

Thus were these murders—systematically, artistically—perpetrated, with an adroit avoidance of detection which seldom or never failed. Human life in India is not of much account. A corpse by the wayside in England fills nearly a whole county with horror and astonishment. In India, even a humane English gentleman passes it by on the other side, and is only so far concerned at the spectacle, that probably his horse has shied at it, as it would at the trunk of a tree. Every one is accustomed to the sight of human bodies drifting down the river—floating islands inhabited by gorging birds of prey; or if you should chance to reside in a villa on the river-side, you are not concerned by the knowledge that the round white balls which dot your lawn like snow-flakes, or with which your little children are playing, are so many human skulls. Still less do the natives of India, by whom the European gentleman is infected, in due time, with this apathy, bestir themselves, body or soul, about these indications of our frail mortality. Death in India comes in many sudden shapes. If a certain Moodoo-sooden, or Rungoo-Lal, is missing from his

accustomed place, or does not reach the end of a journey (should any one expect him), his anxious relatives take it for granted that he has been bitten by a serpent—that the cholera has preyed upon his vitals, or a wild beast has eaten him up. No descriptions of the missing one are inserted in the newspapers, and no members of the detective police are employed to discover the cause of his disappearance. Somehow or other he has been absorbed. "*Mur-gya*"—He has gone dead.

And so it happens that hundreds of natives of India disappear;* and their disappearance is either hardly noted, or it creates no astonishment or alarm. A journey in India is an affair of many months; and numerous are the perils which beset the path of the unprotected pedestrian. Hence it is that whole hecatombs were sacrificed to the Goddess Davee, and no one took account of the victims. Travellers likely to be missed were not especial objects of regard with the Thugs. They suffered such noticeable personages to pass on their way unheeded. Or, if tempted by the largeness of the spoil which glittered before them, they were betrayed into a departure from their ordinary cautious mode of procedure, they summoned to their aid something more than the common artifices of their profession, and surpassed themselves in cunning and skill. Sometimes the very envi-

* I ought rather to have written thousands. A correspondent in the Thuggee Department wrote me a few years ago: "In India hundreds of thousands disappear in a year or two, without the most distant clue but Thannadar's reports, to ascertain whether they have not been foully murdered. Villagers have assured me that to their own certain knowledge scores of men murdered by robbers, or in affrays, have been reported dead of cholera, snakebites," &c. It is not easy to arrive at a correct estimate of the number of people murdered annually by the Thugs. A native newspaper (the *Sumachar Durpan*) of great respectability, in 1833 declared that "one hundred *Thugs* slaughter, on an average, *eight hundred persons in a month*. It is not, therefore," added the writer, "going beyond the truth to affirm that, between the Nerbudda and the Sutlej, the number murdered every year is not less than ten thousand." The writer calculates that within these limits a hundred Thugs were always out on their murderous expeditions—probably many more were so employed. And this calculation only relates to a certain tract of country. I am inclined, however, to think that the individual performances of the Thugs is here somewhat overrated.

ronments of the marked man favored the escape of his murderer. The Thugs always knew their men. They never threw the noose without previously acquainting themselves with the circumstances of their victim. If they murdered a Company's Sepoy, on leave to his native village, carrying his savings wrapped up in his waistband, they knew that it would be long before he would be missed, either by his own family, or the adjutant of his regiment; and that, if missed by the former, his disappearance would be attributed to ordinary death, or if by the latter, to desertion. If they murdered a confidential public or private servant, bearing treasure from one station to another, they knew that the absence of the man, or the party of men at the accustomed place, would be attributed to the dishonesty of the treasure-bearers; and that whilst the police, if set upon the track, were in search of him, they would be far away from the district through which his journey had lain. They took care to leave behind them no living witnesses of their guilt. If they hunted down a man of note, they destroyed all his attendants. They always went *forward;* they never presented themselves in a town or village through which one of their victims had passed. So that even if they went on, riding the horses or wearing the clothes of the men they had murdered, their appearance excited no mistrust. They had always a ready story at command. They had always a given character to assume. They understood each other thoroughly, and they acted in concert, though often they appeared to be strangers. They had a secret dialect of their own; but often more serviceable than this were the secret signs by which they silently communicated with each other. They played their parts, indeed, with consummate address; and they passed on unsuspected to pursue their dreadful trade in the next convenient locality. For such localities they had keen and disciplined

eyes, as artists have for the picturesque or sportsmen for good covers ; and their faces sparkled and their hearts swelled when they chanced on these good murder-grounds.

It might seem from this account of the depredational excursions of these professional robbers, that they were men without a local habitation or a name, flitting from place to place, and never establishing for themselves such social connexions as were likely to cause their migrations to be matter of observance, or, indeed, to attract any kind of continued notice. But such was not, by any means, the case. They belonged for the most part to particular villages, where they left their wives and children ; and they outwardly followed some peaceful calling. They cultivated the fields—rented a few acres of ground—or, perhaps, embarked as agriculturists on a larger scale, and employed laboring men to work under them.* Their occasional absence from the village was necessarily remarked. Sometimes the real cause was not suspected ; but often it was a matter of open notoriety. A Thug set out on his dreadful journey, and every one in the village knew the cause of his departure—except, perhaps, his own wife.

It was not, indeed, a matter of much concernment to the villagers that these migratory murderers should set out upon their journeys to remote places, and return richer than they went. They did not murder their neighbours. Indeed, the village directly benefited by the blood-money that was brought home. The Zemindar, or head man, had an immediate interest in the success

* Take from among many instances the following, from the evidence of Colonel Sleeman's approvers:—"I remained in my own house for about a year and a half at Guntoulee, working upon my own fields as a cultivator, for I rented 100 beegahs of land, and employed laborers ; the villagers knew that I was a man who went from home occasionally, but they knew not that I was a murderer."—Again: "I remained in my own house for two months after this, cultivating in my fields, for I rented three or four beegahs of land, chiefly, however, as a blind to conceal that I was a Thug, and to make a show that I was a cultivator. I started again on Thuggee."

of the expedition. A certain amount of tribute, or hush-money, was always paid to him; and the police officials, in the same manner, were bribed into silence.* Often, indeed, the brothers, or other near relatives of the village police, were members of the Thug gangs; and Thugs themselves have been known to wear the official brass-plates on their breasts which stamped them as Government employés. The protection of the Zemindars often went the length, especially in the native states, of overt and violent interference, and pitched battles have been fought in defence of the tribute-paying criminals when extermination has threatened the gangs.† The payments made by the Thugs and other depredational leagues, of which I shall speak presently, formed no inconsiderable item of their revenue. They looked to it, indeed, as to a perennial source of income from which they could make good any deficiencies in the amount of the Government claim, and sometimes applied the screw with such freedom that the unhappy Thugs, alarmed by their increasing exactions, migrated altogether from the extortionate village, and sought a resting-place where they might dwell without disgorging so large a share of their murder-gotten wealth. At one time, it may be added, so openly was the traffic carried on, that merchants often came from a distance to purchase the plunder brought home by the migratory gangs; but it would seem that the extension of the Company's judicial machinery, and

* "I always," said one approver, "after my journey, was obliged to give the Zemindar, Ragonauth Sing, of my village, some present, for the whole village knew that I was a Thug, and the Zemindar would have had me put in irons but for these presents. All Thugs thus propitiate their Zemindars."

† "At last," said another approver, "being traced by the Saugor guards, the Gwalior Regent, Bayza Bhaee, was induced, at the suggestion of the British Agent, to send out a detachment of two companies of infantry to secure them. The head man of the village was determined to protect them, in consideration of the share of the booty they had always given him. An action took place, in which several lives were lost, while the camp of the Governor-General of India, Lord William Bentinck, and that of the Bayza Bhaee, were within hearing of the guns. The Thugs all made their escape, in disguise, with the women, but were soon after taken."

the greater vigilance of its officers, soon indicated the necessity of greater caution in the disposal of the spoil.*

It may be doubted whether any class of natives ever followed their peculiar avocations with a keener relish than these Thugs.† They were brought up from early youth to the dreadful trade. Thuggee was to them not merely a profession. It was a religion. They believed that the Goddess Davee smiled down upon their exploits, and communicated with them through the agency of certain recognised sights and sounds. They performed ceremonial rites in propitiation of the deity, and then looked eagerly for the anticipated omens. No augurs, in remote ages of classical antiquity, ever consulted the auspices with more solemn outward observances, or a firmer inward faith in the expected revelations. A larger range of deity-directed signals was, however, embraced in the code of these Eastern soothsayers. Men and women, of different kinds, and in different situations, were pressed into the service as omens, and various animals, wild and tame, were believed to have the same commission from the goddess. There seems to have been no harmony and consistency observed in the inter-

* The following, from a very interesting Report, by the late Captain Lowis, on River Thuggee, contains a very decided opinion on the subject of the complicity of all classes of the village communities:—"To conclude, there seems no doubt that this horrid crime has been fostered by nearly all classes of the community—the landholders, the native officers of our courts, the police, the village authorities—all, I think, have been more or less guilty. My meaning is not, of course, that every member of these classes, but that individuals, varying in number in each class, were concerned. The Foujdaree police gomastahs have, in many instances, been practising Thugs; and the chowkedars, or village watchmen, frequently so. It is much to be feared that men so respectable in position as to make it seem almost incredible that they should give protection to such criminals, have, in fact, done so, for it appears out of the question that the total population of a village should be Thugs engaged in the regular practice of Thuggee, and several of them frequently apprehended on the gravest suspicion of that crime, without the cognisance of the Zemindars."

† I have alighted upon only one statement which militates against this general assertion, and, perhaps "proves the rule." A Thug, named Dhosoo, examined by Captain Paton, at Lucknow, declared "we only thug from necessity, not from pleasure—it is fearful business." But I could pile up proofs of the relish with which they pursued their trade.

preting of these divine manifestations. Thus a lame man and a dancing-master—a potter and an oil-seller, were equally unpropitious. Of the brute creation, the donkey and the jackal were regarded as the most important members, and various were the sights or sounds of encouragement, or warning, eagerly looked for from the unconscious beasts. Certain months of the year, and certain days of the week, were proscribed as of ill omen; and it was necessary that they should regulate both their diet and their toilet in the manner of which Davee was supposed to approve. If they were fortunate, they ascribed all their good fortune to a due regard of these heavenly directions, and if misadventure befel them, they attributed it, with praiseworthy candor, to their own misinterpretations, or neglect of the omens through which the goddess had frequently vouchsafed to make known her wishes to her people. "Even the most sensible approvers," writes Colonel Sleeman, "who have been with me for many years, as well Mussulmans as Hindoos, believe that their good or ill success always depended upon the skill with which their omens were discovered and interpreted, and the strictness with which they were observed and obeyed. One of the old Sindouse stock told me in presence of twelve others, from Hyderabad, Behar, the Dooab, Oude, Rajpootana, and Bundelcund, that had they not attended to these omens they could never have thrived as they did; and that in ordinary cases of murder a man seldom escaped after one of them; while they and their families had for ten generations thriven, though they had murdered hundreds of people. 'This,' said he, 'could never have been the case had we not attended to omens, and had not omens been intended for us.' Every Thug present concurred with him from his soul."

When once the omens had shown themselves to be

propitious, and Davee had smiled down upon the enterprise, murder became not only a religious duty, but a pleasant task. No compunctions then visited the enlightened Thug. "And do you never feel sympathy for the persons murdered—never pity or compunction?" asked Colonel Sleeman of a Thug, who had turned approver. "Never," was the answer. "How can you," pursued the English officer, "murder old men and young children, without some emotions of pity—calmly and deliberately as they sit with you, and converse with you—and tell you of their private affairs—of their hopes and fears—and of the wives and children they are going to meet, after years of absence, toil, and suffering?" And the answer returned was: "From the time that the omens have been favorable, we consider them as victims thrown into our hands by the deity to be killed, and that we are the mere instrument in her hands to destroy them; that if we do not kill them, she will never be again propitious to us, and we and our families will be involved in misery and want." "And," questioned Colonel Sleeman, "you can sleep as soundly by the bodies, or over the graves of those you have murdered, and eat your meals with as much appetite as ever?" And still the answer was: "Just the same—we sleep and eat just the same—unless we are afraid of being discovered." These last words do not indicate the fulness of faith which we should have expected to find in such a worshipper of Davee; for it was the professed belief of the Thugs, that if the omens were properly observed and interpreted, they never could be discovered.

Indeed, such was their confidence in the protective power of the goddess, that they believed that she would not only, if religiously served, shield them from harm, but visit with her wrath all who injured them. Nor was this belief confined exclusively to the Thugs. Their

ravages were regarded with something of superstitious awe even by influential chiefs. At least, such was the statement of the murderers themselves, and there is other evidence to support the supposition. When Colonel Sleeman asked an approver if he knew any instances of influential natives suffering for acts of enmity or opposition to the Thugs, he was answered: "A great many. Was not Nanha, the Rajah of Jhalone, made leprous by Davee for putting to death Bodhoo and his brother Khumoolee, two of the most noted Thugs of their day? He had them trampled under the feet of elephants, but the leprosy broke out upon his body the very next day." "Did he believe," asked Colonel Sleeman, "that this punishment was inflicted by Davee for putting them to death?" "He was quite sensible of it," was the answer. "Did he do anything to appease her?" was then asked. "Everything," replied the approver. "Bodhoo had begun a well in Jhalone; the Rajah built it up in magnificent style; he had a tomb raised to their name, fed Brahmins, and consecrated it; had worship instituted upon it—but all in vain; the disease was incurable, and the Rajah died in a few months a miserable death. The tomb and well are both kept up and visited by hundreds to this day, and no one doubts that the Rajah was punished for putting these two Thugs to death." This was but one of many instances which Colonel Sleeman's approvers were eager to relate. One man, when asked if he knew any other cases of the same kind, replied, "Hundreds! When Madhajee Scindiah caused seventy Thugs to be executed at Multoun, was he not warned in a dream by Davee that he should release them? and did he not the very day after their execution begin to spit blood? and did he not die within three months?" Then other witnesses were ready with other proofs of the omnipotence of Davee, and told how, when certain Rajpoot chiefs arrested eighty Thugs, all their families were afflicted, how they

all perished, "not a child left;" and how one who had imposed certain fines upon the gang, the very day that he took the money lost his only son, "and the best horse in his stable; and was himself taken ill, and died soon after a miserable death." But they all acknowledged that even Davee could not withstand the good fortune of the Company. "The Company's good fortune is such," they said, "that before the sound of your drums, sorcerers, witches, and demons take flight—and how can Thuggee stand?"

Thuggee did not stand—it fell. The great work of rooting out these monstrous depredational leagues was accomplished in a few years by the energies of a few European officers. Up to the year 1829 but little had been done to suppress the abomination. Occasional evidences of the crime had presented themselves some years before, and a few gangs of professional murderers had been arrested. In 1810, General St. Leger, then Commander-in-Chief, issued an order cautioning the troops, especially the Sepoys, about to proceed on leave to their homes, against "a description of murderers denominated Thugs," who infested the districts of the Doab, and other parts of the Upper Provinces. About the same time some of the more active of our magistrates in Upper India had succeeded in securing the persons of a number of these murderers, but although several of them confessed, and the property of the murdered men was found in their houses, the higher judicial authorities did not consider that the evidence was sufficient to convict them. "Mr. Wright apprehended seventy-six, of whom seventeen made confessions which strongly criminated the remaining fifty-nine, who denied. Those who denied, and those who confessed, were alike released by one sweeping order from the Nizamut Adawlut without security or anything else;"* and sent back to carry

* *Letter from G. Stockwell, joint magistrate, Etawah, to T. Wauchope, magistrate, Bundelcund, December*, 1814.

on their old trade, emboldened by impunity and success.

These were but fitful efforts resulting in nothing. The subject excited little general interest, and no organised efforts, on an effective scale, were made to root out the enormous evil. Indeed, its extent was imperfectly known even to the best informed of our officers until about the time which I have indicated, under the government of Lord William Bentinck, operations were formally commenced, and a regular "Department" for the suppression of Thuggee instituted by that enlightened nobleman. And so vigorously was this great work prosecuted—with such remarkable intelligence, and such admirable perseverance were all our measures shaped, and all our projects executed—that, ten years afterwards, Colonel Sleeman, to whose benevolent energies we are, under Providence, mainly indebted for the success of the undertaking, was enabled to write:—"In 1830, Mr. George Swinton, who was then Chief Secretary to the Supreme Government of India, and our best support in the cause which Mr. F. C. Smith and I had undertaken, wrote to him to say that he feared success must be considered as altogether unattainable, for he had been given to understand by those who appeared to be well informed on the subject, that the evil had taken deep root in all parts of India, and extended itself to almost every village community. There were certainly at that time very few districts in India without these resident gangs of Thugs ; and in some, almost every village community was more or less tainted with the system, while there was not one district free from their depredations. No man aware of the fearful extent of the evil could ever have expected to see so much progress made in its suppression within so short a time ; because no man could have calculated on those many extraordinary combinations of circumstances upon which our success has chiefly depended—combinations which it behoves us

gratefully to acknowledge, as Providential interpositions for the benefit of the people entrusted to our rule—interpositions which these people themselves firmly believe will never be wanting to rulers whose measures are honestly intended, and wisely designed for the good of their subjects."*

How this great work was accomplished is soon told. These vast criminal leagues had hitherto thriven upon the ignorance of the British authorities. We could do nothing to suppress them, for, indeed, we knew little or nothing about them. They were mighty secrets—hidden mysteries—dimly guessed at, not at all understood. But now Sleeman and his associates, resolved that this trade of Thuggee should no longer be any more a mystery than tailoring or carpentering, began to initiate themselves into all the secrets of the craft, and were soon, in their knowledge of the theory of the profession, little behind the professors themselves.

It need not be said that all this information was derived from frequent intercourse with the Thugs themselves. Our officers having apprehended some of these professional stranglers, selected the likeliest of the party, and by holding out to them promises, not only of pardon, but of employment, soon wormed their secrets out of them. In a little time Sleeman and his associates had learnt from these "approvers" all that was to be learnt from them—all the mysteries of their craft, the whole art of Thuggee—how the murder-gangs set out on their journey, how they propitiated the goddess, how they consulted the omens, how the victim was first beguiled, how the noose was thrown, how the body was buried—how they brought up their children to the trade, how generation after generation of Thugs lived prosperously and securely, and how it happened that the native chiefs

* *Sleeman.* Preface to published Report on the Depredations committed by the Thug gangs of Upper and Central India. Calcutta, 1840.

either protected or stood aloof from them, whilst the English were ignorant of their doings. Everything that these approvers, turning their backs for ever on Davee, and bowing down before the irresistible *ikbal* of the Company, now revealed—and they were tolerably loquacious in their revelations—was carefully noted down, and the statements of one informant collated with those of others. From these men Sleeman and his associates learnt not only the whole theory and practice of Thuggee, but gathered no small amount of knowledge concerning the gangs that were in actual operation, and the men who were connected with them. With such clues as the approvers afforded, it was now easy to hunt down the different gangs which were scattered over the country, and many large captures were made. New approvers were brought upon the lists of the "Department," and new gangs were hunted down. Many criminals were thus brought to trial, convicted, and sentenced either to be hanged, transported, or imprisoned.*

These captures struck terror into the hearts of the whole fraternity of Thugs. And far more terrible than the English officers, environed with the prestige of that irresistible ikbal of the Company, which was acknow-

* One or two extracts from Colonel Sleeman's Reports will suffice to convey an idea of the extent of these captures and their results:—"When they arrived at Dakhola, Captain Borthwick having heard of their proceedings, detached a party of horse to apprehend them. The horsemen came upon the gangs unawares, while encamped outside a village, and accused them of stealing opium; they were glad to have an opportunity of clearing themselves of this unfounded accusation, so accompanied the horsemen to the village for the purpose of being examined; immediately on their arrival they were secured and taken to Captain Borthwick, of whom seventy-nine were made prisoners—viz., five made approvers, seventy-four tried by Colonel Stewart (resident at Hyderabad), thirty-nine condemned to death, twenty-one to imprisonment for life, eleven to limited imprisonment, and three acquitted." Again: "Capt. Borthwick having received intelligence of the residence of these gangs, arranged for their apprehension as soon as a party of them returned from one of their excursions. He proceeded with Capt. Macmahon and about 200 of the Jhowrah cavalry, and came upon their villages before daylight, and so completely surrounded them that the capture of the whole gang was effected without the escape of a single individual—in all fifty-three Thugs; four of whom were made approvers, twenty-two executed, eleven transported, three sentenced to limited imprisonment, and thirteen released for want of evidence."

ledged to be too powerful for Davee to combat, and his well-armed, well-mounted followers, was the knowledge that their own brethren were turning against them, and that ever at the stirrup of the Thug-hunting Englishmen went one or more apostate members of their own murderous Guild. It was plain to them, now that all their secrets were revealed—that there was no safety any longer to be derived from the ignorance of the dominant power—that let them go where they might in the Company's territories, the Thug-led Thug-hunters would be upon their track. Some endeavouring to find in the neighbouring native states a fair field for their operations, or to obtain service under the native chiefs, fled hastily across the boundary-line; but there, too, the Philistines were upon them. English humanity was not brought to a stand at the confines of the country subject to our own regulations, and guarded by our own police. From Northern Oude to Southern Hyderabad our influence at the native Courts, and the labors of our political officers, produced the same results as in our own provinces; and even there some, hopeless of eventual escape, and weary of a life of unceasing anxiety, rushed into the presence of the English officer, flung themselves at his feet, and implored him to receive them as approvers.*

* Indeed the operations of our officers in the Deccan and in Oude do not constitute the least interesting chapter in the great history of Thuggee-suppression. There were greater difficulties to be overcome by those who operated in the native states—difficulties such as are here set forth by Captain Malcolm: "No analogy," he writes, "exists between the proceedings in the Thug Department within the territories of the Honorable Company, or any other well-regulated state, and those which are carried on in the Nizam's dominions, in which no system of police can be said to exist. In the former, the parties charged with this duty are armed with a warrant, before which the gates of every village are thrown open, and the police, if not aiding or furthering the object on which they are employed, dare not openly at any rate throw any obstacles in their way. In the Nizam's territory, however, the case is very different; a few of the principal Talookdars evince the greatest readiness to afford me prompt assistance whenever called on by Government to do so. Their authority, however, does not extend to the villages held on military and other rent-free tenures with which their districts are studded, aph the Potails of which affect to attend to no orders but those emanating from their immediate superiors. The consequences frequently are, that when a Thug is traced into a village of this class, the gates are shut in the face of the pursuing party; or should they have been allowed to enter from igno-

But great as was the personal energy and ability brought to bear upon the suppression of the crime of Thuggee, it was hardly probable that our officers should have achieved complete success unless armed with peculiar powers—unless a certain relaxation of the law, warranted by the extraordinary character and the extreme enormity of the crime, had been legalised by the Supreme Government. For some years we had been trying men accused of Thuggee; but they had almost invariably escaped. It had been difficult, to a degree perhaps not readily appreciable by English lawyers or any other residents in this little island of Great Britain, to convict men, upon clear judicial evidence, of specific acts of Thuggee. The migratory character of the murder-gangs—the vast extent of country which they traversed—the number of local screens and fences—the difficulty of personal identification—the craft and subtlety of the offenders themselves—the unlimited amount of false swearing and of false impersonation which, at any time, they could bring into our criminal courts—were obstructions to the course of justice, under a strict interpretation of the existing law, which were seldom or never overcome. A timid or even a cautious—perhaps I ought to write a "conscientious" judge, would be sure to acquit even a notorious Thug for want of satisfactory evidence of the commission of a specific offence. Some of the causes which I have recited contributed largely, also, to the embarrassment of the question of jurisdiction. A murder was committed in one part of the country, and the murderers were apprehended in another, perhaps some hundreds of miles distant from the scene of the

rance of the object of their visit, the Government orders, when produced, are treated with the utmost contempt; and if the party do not quietly take their departure, they are generally forced to do so by the armed men stationed at the place on the part of the Jagheerdars, or by the armed villagers themselves. Serious collisions have in consequence arisen, in which several of my men have at times been severely wounded, and at others treated with the greatest indignity."—[*Captain Malcolm to Captain Reynolds. Preface to Captain Sleeman's Report.*]

atrocity. To limit the jurisdiction in such a case to the particular Zillah in which the crime was committed, was to throw up all sorts of difficulties and delays, and almost to ensure the prisoner's escape. These impediments to the strict and prompt administration of justice were wonderfully protective of Thuggee. The more complicated the machinery, and the more formal the procedure of our courts, the better for these professional stranglers. They throve upon the legal niceties and the judicial reserve of the English tribunals, and laughed our Regulations to scorn.

It was wisely determined, therefore, after due consideration by the supreme Government of India, to make the case of Thuggee an exceptional case, and to sanction a relaxed application of existing laws and regulations to members of the great fraternity of Thugs. Accordingly an Act was passed in 1836, by which a man convicted of belonging, or having belonged, to a gang of Thugs was rendered amenable to imprisonment for life, whilst at the same time, prisoners accused of Thuggee were made liable to the jurisdiction of any of the Company's Courts, without reference to the locality of the alleged offence, and the formality of the Mahomedan *Futwah* was dispensed with as a preliminary to the trial of this class of proscribed offenders.* The

* The act being conveniently short, I may as well give it in a note:

Act XXX., 1836. (1) "It is hereby enacted, that whatever shall be proved to have belonged, either before or after the passing of this Act, to any gang of Thugs, either within or without the territories of the East India Company, shall be punished with imprisonment for life with hard labor. (2) And it is hereby enacted, that every person accused of the offence made punishable by this Act, may be tried by any court, which would have been competent to try him, if his offence had been committed within the Zillah, where that court sits, anything to the contrary, in any Regulation contained, notwithstanding. (3) And it is hereby enacted, that no court shall, on a trial of any person accused of the offence made punishable by this Act, require any Futwah from any law officer."

A supplementary Act (No. XVIII. of 1837) decreed that "any person charged with murder by Thuggee, or with the offence of belonging to a gang of Thugs, made punishable by Act No. XXX. of 1836, may be committed by any magistrate, or joint magistrate, within the territories of the East India Company, for trial before any criminal court competent to try such person on such charge."

good effect of these enactments were soon felt. They were all that the Thuggee officers needed to enable them to carry out the great work which was placed in their hands. The strong defences of the Thug gangs were now struck down. They had no longer our ignorance on the one side, and our judicial over-scrupulousness on the other, to protect them. So the work of suppression went on bravely. The gangs were hunted down; our gaols were filled with Thugs; conviction and condemnation were no longer unattainable ends; and a great institution which had existed for centuries was broken up in a few years.

I do not say that there is no such thing as Thuggee, at the present time, in any part of the Company's dominions. It is probable that still an occasional traveller may, from time to time, be strangled by the wayside. But the cases are few in number, and comparatively insignificant in character. The system is destroyed; the profession is ruined; the Guild is scattered, never again to be associated into a great corporate body. The craft and the mystery of Thuggee will no longer be handed down from father to son. A few English officers, acting under the orders of the supreme administrative authorities, have purged India of this great pollution. If we have done nothing else for the country, we have done this one good thing. It was a great achievement—a great victory. And it is one to be contemplated without any abatement of satisfaction, or any reservation of praise.

It is a greater exploit than the conquest of Sindh or the Punjab, or the annexation of Pegu; and the names of the commander of that little army of Thug-hunters and of his unflinching lieutenants, ought, in every History of India, to have honorable mention, and by every student of that history to be held in grateful re-

membrance. I cannot conclude this chapter better than by the mention of them. They are Sleeman, Borthwick,* Ramsay, Reynolds, Malcolm, Etwall, Hollings,

* Two examples of gangs captured by Captain, now Colonel, Borthwick, are given in a note at page 372, from Colonel Sleeman's Report. But the first of these is so remarkable, not only for the interesting character of its details, but also from the circumstances of its being an account of the capture of, I believe, the first considerable gang of Dacoits convicted and punished in any part of India, that I am induced to give in this place an amplified version of the story almost in the words that it was related to me:—"Captain Borthwick was at the time Political Agent of the western division of the province of Malwa, in which the principality of Rutlam is comprehended. The chief of this state was then a minor—a circumstance which occasioned a more frequent and minute interference in the administration of its affairs than commonly characterised our political control over the native states of that province. So situated, the Political Officer was necessarily kept constantly informed of all that transpired, both by the Akhbar-Nowese, or news-writer, whom he had stationed in the principality for the purpose, and by the minister himself of the state. In the course of almost daily communications from these individuals, Borthwick received an account stating that five bodies of the Bunnyah or Sudookar class had been discovered in the jungle, a few paces from the high road, ten or twelve miles to the southward of Rutlam, the capital of the state. They were slightly covered with stones, and had the appearance of having been recently murdered. The part of the country where these bodies were stated to have been discovered, was much infested by predatory Bheels, and on reading the report, Borthwick's first impression was that the crime had been committed by them. The unusual atrocity of it, however, determined the British agent immediately to proceed to Rutlam and investigate the case. The inquiry was accordingly commenced; but it had not proceeded far before Borthwick saw that the Bheels were in no way concerned in the murders, but that the perpetrators were evidently Thugs. At the same time it transpired that six or eight days previously, about which time it was supposed that the murders must have been committed, a large body of travellers had passed through that part of the country along the highway towards Hindostan. They had the appearance, and, indeed, gave out that they were pilgrims returning to their homes, after having paid their devotions at a shrine of peculiar sanctity in the western part of Guzerat. All this tended so strongly to excite Borthwick's suspicions that these travellers were the authors of this atrocious deed, that he resolved upon taking immediate measures for arresting them. It was observed that they were travelling very leisurely, but, after the lapse of so many days, they could hardly have proceeded to a distance of less than 100 miles. Resolved, however, upon making the attempt to effect their seizure, and having obtained from different persons, who had well observed and even conversed with some of them, a full description of their appearance, he despatched a party of native horsemen, under the command of a smart and intelligent officer, in pursuit of them, with the strictest orders, when once he came up with them, not to lose sight of them until they were secured and brought in for examination. Furnished with a description of the supposed gang, and with requisitions on the local authorities of the villages and districts through which they would have to pass, calling upon them in the name of the British Government to afford him every assistance in their power to effect this object, the party set out in pursuit. It was only at the village of Dekhola, about 150 miles from Rutlam, whence they were despatched, that they came up with the gang. Having satisfied himself that they were the people of whom he was in pursuit, the officer went to the principal man of the place and presented his requisition for aid; but finding the latter was unable to give him the assistance he required (the village being a small and poor one), he had recourse to a piece of

Lowis, Graham, Paton, Riddell, Ludlow, Birch, Miles, Marsh, Whiteford, and others of good service and good

strategy, which is worthy to be held in remembrance for the sake of its own cleverness as well as for its excellent results. The Government of India had established a strict monopoly of opium over Malwa, which had then existed for some time, and these very horsemen formed a portion of the body of troops employed by Captain Borthwick, and posted at the different commanding outlets to prevent the unauthorised export of the drug. So it occurred to the officer, on finding the village could not supply him with means sufficient to use coercion, to take advantage of this circumstance—to denounce the gang as smugglers, and charge them with having contraband opium in their possession. Too glad to find there was not the slightest insinuation thrown out as to their real characters, they were eager with their offers to submit their luggage at once to the officer's inspection. This, however, not suiting his purpose, he pretended that no inspection at so paltry a village, where there were no authorities of sufficient importance to testify to the result, would be satisfactory to the British Agent, and signified his desire to have it made at a place where it could be effected in a more open and authoritative manner. After some hesitation on the part of the gang they agreed to go back with him to Bhulwâra, a stage to the southward of Dekhola, which they had passed a day or two before. At Bhulwâra there was a large body of Sebundies, or police soldiers, which, on arriving there, the authorities, in compliance with the requisition presented by the officer, placed at his disposal. He now considered he had sufficient means to make a capture of the gang, and thinking it no longer necessary to disguise his suspicions and intentions regarding them, openly charged them with being Thugs, and declared his determination to carry them before Captain Borthwick, to be subjected to a strict examination. Boldly and clamorously they attempted to repel the charge. They declared themselves to be innocent and inoffensive people returning from their pilgrimage to shrines in the west of Guzerat. To all this he paid no attention, but was not a little staggered on a paper being presented to him by one of the leaders, which was asserted to be a passport of the English Government, under the protection of which he (the leader) declared they were travelling. This caused doubt and anxiety to the officer, which, however, was in some measure appeased by considering the strictness of his orders, and in feeling assured that if it came to pass that a mistake had been made, every allowance would be shown to him. All his fears, however, were speedily dispelled by one of the gang, in a paroxysm of fear, coming to him and confessing that they were Thugs, and offering, if his life were assured to him, to make a full disclosure of all their proceedings. This was a contingency for which Captain Borthwick had fortunately prepared him, and he accordingly on the instant separated this proffered approver from the gang, and kept him from that moment away from all intercourse with his comrades. In the mean while Captain Borthwick himself, after despatching the officer and party from Rutlam, proceeded to Joura, a small town twenty miles to the north of the former, there to await the result of the measures he had taken. Shortly afterwards he received a report from the officer of the success that had attended him, which was speedily followed by his arrival at Joura with the gang in his custody. Borthwick immediately entered upon the examination of the approver. Of the information which was thereby elicited, that part which contained a full and particular account of the murders committed by the gang, from the time they passed Rutlam until they were overtaken at Dekhola, claimed his immediate attention. The approver gave an account of no less than eighteen different murders committed in that short interval; and in order to confirm this part of his evidence, Capt. Borthwick sent him the following day under a guard, and accompanied by a native writer, to note all that transpired along the line of road upon which the murders were stated by him to have been perpetrated. In every instance stated, the place where the body of the

repute. Many of these were afterwards distinguished as agents for the suppression of professional Dakoitee. But to this important subject I must devote another chapter.

This chapter, however, would hardly seem to be complete without some mention of a fact, more prominently noticed elsewhere, illustrative of the completeness of the efforts which were made for the entire suppression of Thuggee. Through the instrumentality of Colonel Sleeman and one of his assistants, Lieutenant Brown, Schools of Industry were established at Jubbulpore, with the view of affording employment to adult approvers, and of educating their children—so that the little ones, instead of being initiated into the fearful mysteries of Thuggee, were trained to the understanding and the practice of useful trades, and the rising generation of professional murderers turned into industrious artisans.*

murdered person was deposited was pointed out. The several bodies were disinterred, and each instance was verified by the village authorities nearest to the spots. Thus a complete corroboration of the approver's statements was obtained; and other approvers having come forward, the guilt of the gang, individually and collectively, was fully established by a mass of incontrovertible proof."

* See the Chapter on Education, and the papers in the Appendix, for a further account of these schools.

CHAPTER III.

Dakoitee—Its Antiquity—Measures of Warren Hastings—Hereditary Robber Castes—Their Customs—Local Dakoitee—Complicity of the Zemindars and Moostajirs—Effects on the Suppression of Dakoitee—Appointment of a Special Commissioner for Lower Bengal—New Act—General Remarks.

THE efforts of these energetic and indefatigable officers at the head of the Thuggee Establishment had hitherto been mainly directed to the suppression of that great crime which gave the name to their Department. But when they had reason to believe that their measures had broken up the greater number of gangs, and suppressed the activity of the evil, if they had not wholly rooted it out, they began to address themselves to the eradication of another foul disease of cognate origin and kindred aspect, which, if not so terrible to contemplate, was more extensively disseminated, and scarcely less fatal in its effects upon the general peace and happiness of the people.

It was no new thing to the comprehension of English residents in India at this time that robberies, attended with violence, often, indeed, with murder, were frequently committed in dwelling-houses by gangs of armed men. For three-quarters of a century had these gang-robbers been known as *Dakoits*, and every one in India, or, indeed, every one with the commonest knowledge of India and her affairs, knew well that *Dakoitee*, or gang-robbery, was a crime of very frequent occurrence in all parts of Hindostan. Ever since we had established police-bands to capture, and law-courts to try, offenders of any kind,

we had been capturing and trying Dakoits, and passing laws against them, tinged with more or less of the severity or the leniency of the times. In the days of Warren Hastings, when a sort of unscrupulous vigor, not in effect so injurious to humanity as it seems to be in description, was brought to bear upon the disorders of the country, it was decreed that not only should every convicted Dakoit be executed in his own village, but that the village should be fined "according to the enormity of the crime, each inhabitant according to his substance, and that the family of the criminal should become the slaves of the state, and be disposed of for the general benefit and convenience of the people, according to the discretion of Government."*

* General Regulations for the Administration of Justice, August, 1772. This measure was recommended by the Committee of Circuit at Cossimbazaar. The arguments with which they support it are curious:—"We have judged it necessary to add to the regulations a proposal for the suppression and extirpation of Dakoits, which will appear to be dictated by a spirit of rigor and violence very different from the caution and lenity of our other propositions, as it in some respects involves the innocent with the guilty. We wish a milder expedient could be suggested, but we much fear that this evil has acquired a great degree of its strength from the tenderness and moderation which our Government has exercised towards these banditti, since it has interfered in the internal protection of the provinces. We confess that the means which we propose can in nowise be reconcileable to the spirit of our own constitution; but till that of Bengal shall attain the same perfection, no conclusion can be drawn from the English laws that can properly be applied to the manners or state of this country. * * * We have many instances of their meeting death with the greatest insensibility; it loses, therefore, its effect as an example, but when executed in all the forms and terrors of law in the midst of the neighbours and relations of the criminal; when these are treated as accessories to his guilt, and his family deprived of their liberty, and separated for ever from each other, every passion which before served as an incentive to guilt, now becomes subservient to the purposes of society, by turning them from a vocation in which all they hold dear, besides life, become forfeited by their conviction; at the same time their families, instead of being lost to the community, are made useful members of it, by being adopted into those of the more civilised inhabitants. The ideas of slavery, borrowed from our American colonies, will make every modification of it appear, in the eyes of our own countrymen in England, a horrible evil. But it is far otherwise in this country; here slaves are treated as the children of the families to which they belong, and often acquire a much happier state by their slavery than they could have hoped for by the enjoyment of liberty, so that in effect the apparent rigor thus exercised on the children of convicted robbers, will be no more than a change of condition, by which they will be no sufferers, though it will operate as a warning on others, and is the only means which we can imagine capable of dissipating these desperate and abandoned societies which subsist on the distress of the

But although in those days our early administrators were not without some general knowledge of the habits of this "race of outlaws, living from father to son in a state of warfare against society,"* though it was known that Dakoitee was something more than an accident, a casual blot, a superficial excrescence, it had been but imperfectly ascertained to what extent, and in what perfection, it was an integral institution. But when the same process that had been applied to the exposition of Thuggee, with all its systematised enormities, its creeds, and its rituals, was brought to bear upon the kindred crime of Dakoitee, there was found to be as much system in it, as stern a faith, as engrossing a superstition. It was seen then that Dakoitee was the normal condition of whole tribes born and bred to the profession, that there were robber-castes in India just as there were soldier-castes or writer-castes, and that men went out to prey upon the property of their fellows—and, if need be, on their lives—with strict religious observance of sacrament and sacrifice, strong in the belief that they were only fulfilling their destiny, and doing good service to the deity whom they adored.

I do not mean that there was no such thing as accidental Dakoitee—that men not bred and born to the

general community." The logic of this seems rather to halt in the concluding passages; for if the sale of the families of the Dakoits was calculated to better their condition and enhance their happiness, it could not have operated as a very effectual warning. The Committee of Circuit seem to have recommended the proposed measure as a severe and deterring punishment, and then taken the greatest trouble to demonstrate that it would be no punishment at all.—[*Letter of the Committee of Circuit at Cossimbazaar, August* 15, 1772, *in Colebrooke's Digest. Supplementary Volume.*]

* Warren Hastings (1773). The following description of the Dakoit bands, written eighty years ago, shows that our predecessors in India had a very fair general knowledge of the subject: —"The Dakoits of Bengal are not, like the robbers in England, individuals driven to such desperate courses by sudden want. They are robbers by profession, and even by birth; they are formed into regular communities, and their families subsist by the spoils which they bring home to them; they are all, therefore, alike criminal wretches who have placed themselves in a state of declared war with Government, and are, therefore, wholly excluded from every benefit of its laws." —[*Letter from the Committee of Circuit to the Council of Fort William, dated at Cossimbazaar, August* 15, 1772. *Colebrooke's Digest. Supplementary Volume.*]

profession never, under the force of accidental circumstances, took to Dakoitee for a livelihood—but that it was established upon a broad basis of hereditary caste, and was, for the most part, an organic state of society. "I have always followed the trade of my ancestors—Dakoitee," said Lukha, a noted Dakoit, who subsequently became approver. "My ancestors held this profession before me," said another, "and we train boys in the same manner. In my caste, if there were any honest persons, *i.e.*, not robbers, they would be turned out and not kept with us." The first of these belonged to a robber-tribe known as *Budducks*, one of the largest and most exclusive of the depredational castes; the other was of the tribe of *Hurrees*. Sometimes boys were adopted into these robber-castes. "I was hitherto a Beree by caste," said another approver, "and converted into a *Kheejuck* (another robber-tribe) by one of Jeeteen of that caste, who, seeing me begging and distressed, took me under his protection, and gave me maintenance." Sometimes they married into a robber-caste, and took up the trade with their wives. Sometimes they inherited the profession from the mother's side. "Man Singh, a very noted leader of Budducks," said the same Lukha, whose evidence I have above quoted, "was a Gosaen and not a Dakoit, but he united himself to a Budduck woman, by whom he had Man Singh. This man had been engaged in a hundred enterprises."

Such, read by the light thrown upon this deeply interesting subject by the investigations of our British officers, were the hereditary robber-castes of India; the Budducks, the Kheejucks, the Hurrees, the Dosads, and others. The gangs, composed of these men, were for the most part distinguished by their exclusiveness and uniformity. Dakoitee was conducted by them with all becoming solemnity; it was, like Thuggee, a mysterious institution

not to be lightly approached—one into the hallowed precincts of which admission was to be obtained only by formal initiation. But though there were robber-castes, and many gangs of Dakoits composed of these exclusive fraternities, all Dakoitee was not of this constitutional character. There were gangs of a less formal and select kind—gangs composed of men of different tribes,* often strangers to each other; and there were Dakoits not of the hereditary class, lay members, as it were, of the profession, who troubled themselves little about presiding goddesses, and set about their work in a less scientific way. But although in these gangs might be discerned a fusion of many castes, they all seemed to rally round the men of the hereditary robber-castes, without whose agency they believed that they could accomplish little. "A convicted Dakoit in the Purneah gaol," writes an intelligent officer of the Thuggee Department, to whose investigations we are indebted for much of our knowledge of the robber-castes of India, "from whom I sought information, confessed to me his having been with three different gang-leaders, with whom he had been concerned in ten different Dakoitees within the Purneah district. These gangs were promiscuously composed, but the nucleus was composed of the robber-castes, and he laid it down as a rule, well known by the robber fraternity, that no gang could retain its organisation and efficiency without an admixture of the '*janam chors*,' as he styled them, or 'born robbers.' This man was one of the industrial castes which are called by the robber-castes

* "The Budducks," said an approver of one of the local Purneah gangs, "depredate with men of their own caste alone, and no others; and we in this part of the country depredate with people of all castes, and the houses of the different men are not in one place, but various distances remote the one from the other, some 10 or 12 coss (20 or 24 miles), others only 1 or 2 coss (2 or 4 miles), therefore, those who live near them are well known to all, and those who live far off are only known to Moostajirs and Sirdars. The members of the gang, then, do not all know each other, but only the Sirdars and Moostajirs know all."—[*Evidence of Bokhai, Mistry.*]

'*janwars*,' a common term for simplicity and clownishness in India, but by which is here meant the uninitiated. He assured me that his '*oostad*,' or teacher, was a *Dosad* (a notorious robber-caste), and that on one occasion, when he proposed to set up a gang himself, this man told him that without the assistance of the hereditary robber-castes, no gang ever was or ever could be established, for that to them alone had descended, through a long line of ancestors, the '*ilm*,' or secret lore necessary for the purpose."*

This at all events was something to know—but there was much more to be known. The hereditary robber-castes constituted the aristocracy of depredational crime. They were the leaders and instructors of these organised bands of robbers—the pivots upon which the whole machinery turned. Every gang was more or less regulated by them, but every gang was not mainly composed of them. The most noticeable thing of all was the extraordinary extent of these depredational leagues—the thousands of members that they numbered. There seemed, indeed, to be a network of organised plunder spread over the whole face of the country. It was a tremendous suggestion which staggered the credulity, and baffled the comprehension even of men accustomed to the excesses of great criminal leagues. But they set themselves to work vigorously—to learn all they could, and do all they could—believing that as they had stricken down Thuggee, Dakoitee could not stand up much longer before the *ikbal* of the Company.

The first approaches to a full understanding of the subject were made without stumbling on any great difficulties. The greater the segregation of this or that class, the easier is it to trace out and to illustrate its idiosyncrasies. Now the Budducks and Khejucks were not only exclusive, but migratory castes. They carried

* *MS. Notes of Captain Hippisley Marsh.*

on their depredations at a distance from their own homes, and set out in gangs composed entirely of their own fraternity. It was as easy to elicit a full revelation of the practices and observances of the Budducks or Khejucks, as of their fellow-adventurers, the Thugs. Indeed, our previous investigations into the physiology of the one, facilitated our enquiries into the habits of the other, and guided us more directly to the truth. There were many points of analogy between them. They had a secret dialect, and secret signs. They assumed various disguises. They offered up sacrifices. As with the Thugs, so with the Budducks, the goat was the favorite victim. They consulted the auspices. They had the same overflowing faith in the cry of the jackal. They swore oaths of fidelity and secrecy. They were altogether the same sort of comfortable religionists, with the same utter disregard for the happiness of their fellow-men.*

The ordinary practice of these gangs was to set out, after the usual ritual preliminaries, in parties of thirty, or forty, disguised as travellers, or pilgrims, or bird-catchers, or anything else that might promise good chance of concealment. The principal implement of their profession was the spear. The spear-head they carried about with them, concealed on their persons;

* Captain Marsh says that the habits and organisation of the robber-castes of Purneah were analogous with those of the Budducks of Western India. "It is wonderful," he observes, "how perfectly similar are the habits and organisation of the Western Budducks and of the robber-castes of the Purneah district. No Budduck can exist without wine—*i.e.*, fermented liquor—ditto, the robbers of Purneah. No Budduck reaches full manhood without being initiated into the mysteries and dialects of the caste—ditto, the robber castes of Purneah. No Budduck ever heartily consents to till the soil, but will escape it on the first opportunity—ditto, the robber-castes of Purneah. The little land they till is only to make a show, and screen their real profession. No Budduck gang would ever dream of attacking a house without the preliminary rites and *poojah* of Kalee—ditto, the gangs of the robber-castes of Purneah. Every Budduck Dakoit has a peculiar fashion of girding his breast, back, and loins, so as to offer no impediment to his movements, and to protect him from blows, a fashion not used by any description of peaceable men—ditto, the Purneah robber-castes. All this I have learnt from their own lips and their own showing."—[*From an unfinished demi-official Letter from Captain Marsh to Major Sleeman.*]

the handles they either converted into walking-sticks, or buried in a convenient place. One of the party sent on in advance, or some confederate at a distance—a corresponding member of the society—either brought or sent in tidings to the effect that he "had his eye on a rich house." A full description of the locality—of the building itself, of its inhabitants, of the probable means of defence, as far as they could be ascertained, was communicated to the leaders of the gang; and then the night and hour of the attack being determined upon, the gang was duly mustered, and an estimate formed of its adequacy to the intended enterprise. If the party were not considered strong enough to secure success, some "auxiliaries" were called in. These were members of robber-tribes, or local Dakoits, resident in the neighbouring villages. With their party thus augmented they took counsel together, and determined on their plan of operations. It was their policy then to separate for a day or two before the meditated attack, a nd then to meet at a given hour—an hour after night-fall—and to advance at once to the enterprise. They then collected the handles of their implements, fixed them into the spear-heads and axes, prepared their torches, divested themselves of all their superfluous clothes, and advanced to the attack.

It was always a nocturnal surprise. With flaming torches, and spears glittering in the broad light, they came suddenly on the sleeping inhabitants of the doomed house, and either roused them with their noise, or pricked them up with the points of their weapons. Thus suddenly startled from their sleep, finding themselves surrounded by armed men, whose numbers their fear greatly exaggerated, the unhappy merchants, or bankers, so surprised, could seldom muster either their senses or their courage sufficiently to conduct an effec-

tive defence. If by any chance the resistance was obstinate, the Dakoits, who had not always the stoutest hearts to sustain them, were in a fair way to be beaten back. But the chances were greatly in their favor. A party suddenly surprised is always at a disadvantage. So it often happened that the luckless inhabitants, confused, bewildered, panic-struck, like people under the influence of a fearful dream, did all that they were directed to do —pointed out the places where their wealth was hidden, and went like sheep to the slaughter.

Though the ritual formalities of which I have spoken may have been peculiar to particular classes of Dakoits, the mode of procedure here described seems to have been common to all. With the more demonstrative part of the business, indeed, we had been long acquainted. What we now discovered was not only the very curious inner history of the social organisation and religious environments of Dakoitee, but all the secret mechanism of those screens and defences, only dimly known before, which enabled the great crime to run riot over the whole length and breadth of the land. That the location in an Indian village of numbers of professional robbers, ever and anon setting out on depredational journeys, and returning with much spoil in their hands, should be unknown either to the villagers, high or low, or to the rural police, was clearly an impossibility. It was a matter, indeed, of notoriety in the village. It could not be otherwise. In such cases, amongst us, knowledge is exposure and extermination. A gang of robbers could not exist for a day in an English village after their location were once discovered. Every influential man in the neighbourhood would be eager to secure their capture and imprisonment, and the county constabulary would soon beat up their haunts. But in India all this is reversed. The squirearchy and the police are alike inte-

rested in the protection and sustentation of Dakoitee. The Zemindar and the Thannadar grow rich upon it. They do not foster the rank weed for nothing. Dakoitee is highly remunerative. The head man of the village shares the spoil with the successful robbers. He has his seigneural rights.* He is a harborer of thieves on a large scale. They come and go freely, uninterruptedly, so long as they are disposed to pay for the privilege; and as their very existence depends upon the payment, they must perforce submit to the exaction. They are, so to speak, the servants or children of the great men, who supply them in time of need with food and clothing, and make moneyed advances to them when they set out upon their expeditions. Indeed, the robber-gangs are often

* From the depositions of a Budduck approver, named Lukha, we gather a full-length picture of a model Zemindar of this kind, whose exactions at last drove a profitable association of Dakoits clean off his estate.

"Five hundred rupees out of this booty," says the approver, after detailing the circumstances of a Dakoitee, "were given to Thakur Dhotal Sing, the great landholder of the village in which we resided."

And again, after another enterprise:

"We gave a share of one-fourth of the booty to Thakur Dhotal Sing, the landlord of Sepreea."

The fourth of the spoil, however, did not suffice him. He grew more exorbitant in his demands:

"In five or six days we reached home in safety; but the landlord, Dhotal Sing, exacted from us more than a fourth of this booty as his share. The rest we divided, but the rapacious landlord got us all seized and bound, and taking from us all the gold and bullion, gave us only one hundred rupees each. . . . . We prepared to leave this man's estate, but he implored us to remain, and swore solemnly never again to behave dishonestly to us."

It seems that they consented to remain; but in a little time the greedy landlord was at his old tricks:

"Dhoulut and I got about a hundred rupees, but we had no sooner got home than Thakur Dhotal Sing came with his son and the other joined proprietors of the estate, seized us all, tied our arms behind our back, and demanded a fourth of our booty. We brought out one of the two hundred rupees, and declared that was all we had gained by the enterprise, but they would not believe us. We protested and remonstrated, and told them that we would leave their estate, as it would never do for us to take all the risk and trouble of Dakoitee, and for them to take all the profit. They were a senseless set of peasants, and all we could say seemed to make no kind of impression upon them—as we committed Dakoitees on others, they committed them on us. They were a short-sighted people, or they would have seen the advantage of observing the same good faith with us that we always observe with our patrons."

This time they acted up to their threats, and betook themselves to another village:

"Dhotal Sing," says the ill-used Dakoit, "the chief of Sepreea, was a rapacious man, and used to extort from us, in some mode or other, a good deal more than the fourth of our booty, which we considered the seigneural, or Zemindaree right; so we went to reside in the village of Bigholee, not far distant."

attended either by one of these landowners in person, or by a delegate from his immediate family. The connexion between them is of the closest kind. Each is necessary to the well-being of the other.

The bare outside fact of this criminal participation of the landlords was no discovery of modern times. It had attracted the attention of Warren Hastings,* who saw at a glance that it was wholly impossible to suppress Dakoitee without proclaiming the responsibility of the Zemindars as accessories to the crime, and in all cases of conviction punishing them with as much severity as the active offenders.† He would have made short work of these nursing mothers of crime, and hung up the fattest Zemindar with as little compunction as the leanest Dakoit. As I have said before, the most vigorous measures are often the most humane; and I have little doubt that if these recommendations had been carried out and persevered in, and a heavy blow thus struck at conniving landlords, we should not now be hearing, after the lapse of three-quarters of a century, that around the immediate seat of the supreme Government—almost under the

* See Proceedings of Governor and Council, April 19, 1774, quoted in "Colebrooke's Digest," supplementary volume.

"At this time I have repeated complaints from all parts of this province of the multitude of Dakoits which have infested it for some years past, and have been guilty of the most daring and alarming excesses. I know not whether the knowledge of these evils has been officially communicated to the members of the Board. To me it has only come through the channel of private information, as I do not recollect to have heard the slightest intimation of them from the Zemindars, farmers, or other officers of the revenue; which may appear extraordinary, but that I am assured that the Zemindars themselves too frequently afford them protection, and that the Ryots, who are the principal sufferers by these ravages, dare not complain, it being an established maxim with the Dakoits to punish with death every information given against them."

† The words of the recommendation are worth quoting: "That such of the Zemindars or farmers as shall be convicted of having neglected to assist the Foujdars in the execution of their trust, shall be made responsible for any loss sustained by such misconduct, or otherwise fined according to the nature of the offence; but that all persons, of whatever degree or profession, who shall be convicted of receiving fees or other pecuniary acknowledgments from robbers, knowing them to be such, or of abetting or conniving in any shape at their practices, shall be adjudged equally criminal with them, and punished with death; and that this be immediately made public throughout the province." —[*Warren Hastings*, 1774, *ut supra*.]

shadow of the vice-regal palace itself—"gang-robberies have increased to such an extent that a feeling of general insecurity has arisen in the minds of the people of these districts." These are the words, not of Warren Hastings, but of Lord Dalhousie. The Governor of 1852 only repeats the complaint of the Governor of 1774. The immunity which the landlords have enjoyed in the interval has been the main cause of the perpetuation of the evil. We have been much too slow in our interference with their vested interests in robbery and murder. Lord Cornwallis, when he re-organised the Police Department, in 1792, proclaimed that landlords, convicted of being accessories to the commission of a robbery, should be "compelled to make good the value of the property, stolen or plundered."* So that, even if the regulations had been put into effect against the Zemindars, it would have been merely a matter of calculation with them—a mere question of profit and loss—the balance being pretty certainly in favor of the former. It is not strange, therefore, that under such regulations the landlords continued to carry on the old trade, and to participate largely in the professional emoluments of the Dakoits.

Warren Hastings complained that the farming system had a tendency to extend and perpetuate this evil. And the same fact is insisted upon and demonstrated on the evidence of the Dakoits themselves, by the present generation of British functionaries. The small Moostajirs, indeed, are the great harborers of Dakoits—the great promoters of Dakoitee. "There could be no Dakoitee without the Moostajirs," was the statement almost in-

* "Landholders and farmers of land are not in future to be considered responsible for robberies committed in their respective estates or farms, unless it shall be proved that they connived at the robbery, received any part of the property stolen or plundered, harbored the offenders, aided, or refused to give effectual assistance to prevent their escape, or omitted to afford every assistance in their power to the officers of Government for their apprehension, in either of which cases they will be compelled to make good the value of the property stolen or plundered."

variably made by the approving Dakoits examined by Captain Marsh and other officers.* Old European residents in the Mofussil confirmed this testimony. "It is my firm opinion," wrote an Indigo planter of long standing in Purneah, "that each and every native Moostajir must of necessity be a Dakoit leader, because, in the first instance, he must know the character of residents in his villages, otherwise he would be constantly subject to have unprofitable tenants; and, secondly, because it is utterly impossible that large gangs could assemble and cross the country in different directions at night without being stopped by the heads of villages, and as the approvers themselves say that no gang will dare to move out without a Moostajir, it appears to me beyond all doubt that one or two Moostajirs are the actual leaders of every Dakoit-gang."†

It would seem, too, if the evidence of the approvers is to be trusted, that if there could be no Dakoitee without the assistance of the Moostajirs, neither could there be Moostajirs without the assistance of the Dakoits. "There is no petty Moostajir," said one man, "free from connexion with Dakoitee; and whoever has a repugnance so

* A few specimens of the evidence on this head, contained in the Official Reports, will suffice:

Question.—If the Moostajir be not in league, cannot the professional robbers practise Dakoitee?

Answer.—It cannot be done without the Moostajir.—[*Evidence of Hazaree Dhurkar.*]

Question.—Can there be no Dakoitee without Moostajirs?

Answer.—There can be no Dakoitee without Moostajirs, for, through their influence, the Thannah people cannot lay hold of us robbers from fear of the Moostajirs; and the use of the Moostajirs is this, that they find the robbers in food and clothes, and lend them money, and give them liquor, and in every way protect our families and ourselves. This is the use of Moostajirs.—[*Evidence of Suroofa Hulwaee.*]

Question.—Since the Moostajir knows he has robbers in his villages, does he make no effort to turn them out?

Answer.—If he gains much by remaining, why should he turn them out? He keeps them for his own benefit.—[*Evidence of Jhubban, approver.*]

Question.—Is this true, that without a Moostajir or Sirdar, no Dakoitee can take place?

Answer.—If the Moostajirs do not join, and there be no Sirdar, how could poor robbers commit *Dakoitee?* without the command of the Moostajir and the Sirdar no *Dakoitee* can be carried on. Under disguise of landholders the Moostajirs set *Dakoitee* on foot.—[*Evidence of Jhubban, Kuraria.*]

† Evidence relating to Dakoitee, printed in Calcutta.

to connect himself, will not take a Moostajiree." "Without being a rogue," said another man, "a Moostajir's profession could not be carried on. No class of rogues come up to the Moostajirs. . . . If there were no robbers in the village, then none would take Moostajiree, and now every class of men become Moostajirs in this hope that they may share in the spoils of Dakoitee." "Moostajiree of villages," said a third, "is taken for purposes of Dakoitee. . . . By becoming a Moostajir he cannot manage without forming a connexion with Dakoits." There is every reason to consider this evidence to be trustworthy, as far as it goes. It relates, however, almost entirely to a particular part of the country;* and the extent to which the evil prevails in other parts may not be safely predicated from it. But the complicity, after one fashion or another, of the landholders, whether Zemindars or Moostajirs, in the depredations of the Dakoits, is not local and accidental, but general and continual. The same system, with slight superficial variations, which prevails in Bengal, prevails also in Oude.† The landholders are the arch-offenders.

Associated with them, in the protection of the more active criminals, are the equally corrupt members of the police. This was no new discovery. Warren Hastings had as clear a perception of the fact as any Superintendent of Police in the present day. But although the Indian constabulary force has been modelled and re-modelled—though first one system has been tried and then another, every description of organisation that has yet been attempted has been found to be equally inefficacious for the

* The Purneah district.

† With certain variations, of course dependent upon the nature of the landed tenures. In the example, which we have quoted from the evidence of a Budduck practising in Oude, the protecting landlord was a powerful Zemindar. In the instances cited by the Khejucks of the Purneah district, the territorial offenders were principally small *Moostajirs*, or Revenue-farmers.

protection of life and property, and the detection and punishment of crime. Instead of protecting life and property, these men, under whatever name they draw a certain amount of salary, whether they belong to the regular police, or are the village watch, only protect rapine and disorder. To such at least point their own unaided instincts; but European superintendence, though powerless hitherto to convert the Indian police into an effective body, has done something to control its excesses. There is still much more to be done. It is the weakest point of our Indian administration. But to break up a gigantic league of this kind, a confederacy between the landlords and the police so contrived, so glossed over—each playing into the hands of the other—as to baffle almost every effort to convict the suspected offenders of actual participation in the delinquencies of the Dakoits, is a work of no very easy accomplishment for a handful of European strangers. The network of this foul conspiracy stretches up to the very doors of the magistrate's cutcherry. It embraces all classes, from the wealthy Zemindar and the influential Amlah to the ill-paid and insignificant village watchman, who, perhaps, is a member of a robber-caste.* The more intricate the machinery

* See the following evidence of a Dakoit approver:

Question.—What class of people become *Chokeedars* (watchmen)?

Answer.—Dosaud, Hurree, Kurraria, &c., &c. (robber-castes); these principally furnish the *Chokeedars*.

Question.—In the course of the month what does such person realise?

Answer.—Two rupees a month for each *Chokeedar* is levied on the Ryots; and they (the *Chokeedars*) realise a great deal from thieves and robbers and *Dakoits*, and this is the real reason why they undertake to be watchmen—to feather their own nests—else no one would willingly undertake so detestable an occupation.

Question.—Do the *Chokeedars* ever go on *Dakoitee*?

Answer.—No: they do not go on Dakoitee, but know all about the *Dakoits*. Whoever leaves his house for *Dakoitee*, he does so with the knowledge of the *Chokeedars*; and they do not go on *Dakoitee* for this reason, that in a village all kinds of people dwell; if any person should be discovered absent by the *Naka-Buskundaz*, he would be reported to the *Thannadar* (native police superintendent), therefore, the watchmen at night do not leave their village, but go on the rounds and set robberies on foot, and take share from robbers and Dakoits.—[*Evidence of Bokai, Mistry, taken by Captain Marsh, July* 19, 1842.]

Again:

Question.—Are the Chokeedars of your caste (Hurree) all thieves?

Answer.—They call themselves Cho-

of our own law-courts, and the more extensive our police establishments, the more subtle become the contrivances by which the conspirators endeavour to cloak the crimes which they are all interested in concealing. Eighty years ago, Warren Hastings regretted that "the regularity and precision which have been introduced into our new courts of justice," should be "among the causes of the increase of robbers." It is not to be doubted, I fear, that in these days the more complicated machinery which we have introduced in furtherance of the improved administration of justice has had a tendency to raise up so many screens or barriers between the eye of the British functionary and the crimes which are committed around him.

Upon this subject, in its general bearings, important as it is, I cannot now afford to enlarge. But this is the proper place in which to speak of the effects of our present system upon the great crime of Dakoitee. It is a distinguishing feature of the practice of these professional depredators that they adapt their ways, with wonderful precision, to the legal machinery which is brought to bear upon them—that they even turn the very engine which is designed for their destruction, into an instrument of defence. They adapt their organisation to our own, and the more intricate it is the greater are their chances of evasion and escape. "The English," writes an officer of great intelligence and experience in the intricacies of these criminal leagues, "having divided the country into districts and Thannas, the robbers have made it a fundamental maxim and *sine quâ non* to attach themselves by divisions to Thannas, in order to bribe every man of real and actual influence over the villagers to enter into a league with their paymasters—their principle being to sacrifice much in order to retain

keedars, and by this deceit engage in robbery and Dakoitee; all the Chokeedars of the Hurree caste are robbers and Dakoits. — [*Evidence of Jhoomuk, Hurree, taken by Captain Marsh, July 20, 1842.*]

a little in certainty and safety. Now the two classes which have supreme actual influence among the village population are the Thannadars (with their myrmidons) and the Revenue-farmers (with theirs). These then are the persons held in the pay of the Dakoits. To ensure regularity in this necessary particular, a robber-division is attached to a Thanna, and a subdivision to a particular form. This robber-division is under a Sirdar (or chief) of robbers; and it is among the first of his duties to pay monthly with his own hand the shares respectively of the Thannadar and the Revenue-farmer."*

Nor does the corruption, as I have already intimated, stop here. "The Sirdars," says another writer, an intelligent and zealous magistrate, "are men who travel in their *palkis* (palanquins), and arrange all these little affairs first with the local police, next with the magistrate's Amlah, and eventually with the Sessions' Amlah and the law officer."† "In short," to use the comprehensive words of another civil officer, the highest authority on such a subject in Bengal, "the whole plan has been got up to meet our rules of evidence, and it is carried on with the help of our ministerial and police Amlah."‡ Whatever we have done, indeed, the Dakoits have turned our doings to their own uses—our revenue system, our police system, our judicial system, have all been impressed into their service. Whatever may have been our administrative organisation, they have adapted to it, with consummate skill, the organisation of their criminal leagues, and out-manœuvred us at all points.

Nor did the triumphs of these astute criminals stop short

* *MS. Correspondence.*—The same writer thus calculates the number of robbers located within one Thanna (or police division):—"I calculate to every Thannadar four Revenue-farmers resident in a Thanna; on every Revenue-farmer's farm four *Sirdars* (or chiefs), with their respective divisions of robbers. To every Sirdar four *Naib-Sirdars* (or captains), and to each *Naib-Sirdar* four burglar gangs, and to every burglar gang five men each. Thus, $1 \times 4 \times 4 \times 4 \times 4 \times 5 = 1280$ members of the depredational league in one Thanna."

† *MS. Correspondence.*

‡ *Ibid.*

even at the doors of the Sessions Court. They reached to the very judgment-seat. So protected by the Amlah, it would have been hard if the Dakoits could not have brought into court any amount of false evidence to secure their acquittal. It never, by any chance, happened that all, or even the most influential, members of a robber-gang were arrested; and they who were at large never failed to exert themselves to obtain the liberation of their more unfortunate comrades who had fallen into the grasp of the law. False witnesses were readily obtainable from among their own people, willing and able to swear him off. The manner in which this evidence was got up was often very clever and ingenious. "It is quite out of my power," writes Mr. Wauchope, magistrate of Hooghly (of whose services I shall come to speak presently), to the Superintendent of Police in the Lower Provinces, "to describe on paper the delight with which the Dakoits with me talk about their exploits—of the pleasure parties which Kartich Koura, a famous Sirdar, used to take from Calcutta to his native village, whence they never returned without committing one or more Dakoitees; how on one of these occasions their Sirdar had three of his fingers cut off; how he was arrested and committed to the sessions; or the roars of laughter with which they give the details of the trial before the judge, where he was acquitted on the evidence of a most respectable Brahmin, and a still more respectable Kait—the first being Sirdamund Thakoor, a first-rate leader in the gang, and the second Syud Mytee, now an approver with me, and only lately sentenced to transportation for life."*

A system so complete in its organisation as this was not to be put down by the ordinary judicial machinery applied to accidental offences, and by the ordinary ministers of the law. It was apparent that, as in the

* *MS. Records.*

case of Thuggee, a necessity existed for the adoption of specific measures of a more stringent character, and of a less regular type. Neither the law courts nor the law officers, as then constituted and appointed, were sufficient for the suppression of an evil so complex and so extensive. Something more required to be done.

It was in the month of April, 1837, that the first attempt was made to suppress Dakoitee by means of special measures directed to that one end, and a special machinery employed for their execution. Sir Charles Metcalfe was, at this time, Lieutenant-Governor of the North-Western Provinces. The subject had been for some time pressing urgently upon the consideration of the authorities, and the time had now come for action. A Commission for the suppression of Dakoitee was established; and Mr. Hugh Fraser, a civil servant of good capacity, was appointed Commissioner, with a liberal staff of auxiliary subordinates. Special powers were conferred on him. Throughout the whole of the North-Western Provinces he was invested with magisterial authority. All the magistrates were instructed to co-operate with him, and the police were directed to render every possible assistance to his agents. But the year and a half, during which the Commission was in operation, were distinguished by no important results. There was an attempt rather to strike at accidental symptoms, than to probe down to the seat of the disease. It aimed rather at the conviction of Dakoits than the suppression of Dakoitee. The great subject itself, in all its length and breadth—in all its intricacies and complexities—was not sufficiently studied. But Sleeman had reduced Thuggee to its elements, and he was obviously the proper man to submit to a similar process the kindred crime of Dakoitee. He had already, indeed, acquired much available information regarding the professional robber-castes; and his associates in the

Thuggee Department had approved themselves to be men of the right stamp to co-operate with him. The union of the two offices of the General Superintendent of measures for the suppression of Thuggee and the Commissioner for the suppression of Dakoitee, seemed, indeed, to be recommended by many important considerations, not the least of which was the peculiar fitness of the man who had long held so worthily the former appointment; and now Lord Auckland, at the end of the year 1838, being at Simlah, and holding in his own hands the government of the North-Western Provinces, determined to unite the two offices under the superintendence of Colonel Sleeman. At the commencement of the following year the junction was formally effected, and from that time all the measures for the suppression of Dakoitee under the Bengal Presidency, with the exception of those in the Lower Provinces, which were conducted by the "Superintendent of Police," were under the direction of the man who had done so much to root Thuggee out of the land.

The same system now which had been employed so successfully for the extirpation of Thuggee, was brought into play against the great fraternities of Dakoits. Sleeman's head-quarters were to be in Rohilkund. His assistants were spread out all over Upper India. The plan now to be pursued was simply, as described by Sleeman himself, to hunt down the Dakoits by a simultaneous, vigorous, and well-sustained pursuit throughout all parts of India, and thereby to break up their little communities, and compel them to blend with the rest of mankind in public service or private industry, and by degrees to lose their exclusive feeling, and forget their exclusive language. And this was to be done, firstly by the agency of informers, who were to set our officers on the track, and enable us to detect the offenders; and secondly, by specific legislative enactments, to enable us to punish them.

There was no scarcity of informers. Our gaols were

full of Dakoits. It was astonishing what a mass of serviceable information was locked up within our prison-walls. The whole art and mystery of Dakoitee was there to be had for the asking. Professors proud of their knowledge, and rejoicing in the opportunity of giving free vent, in voluble discourse, to the cherished reminiscences of bygone days, talked without stint to the British officers about their depredational achievements, and openly avowed the eagerness of their desires to be again at the exhilarating work. They could not understand that their profession was not as honorable as it was lucrative and exciting. They had no shame, and they had no remorse. They gloried in their exploits as sportsmen do, and talked over a successful gang-robbery with its attendant murders as our European gentlemen talk over their boar-chases or tiger-hunts. "Whilst talking over their excursions," wrote one of Sleeman's assistants,* "which were to me really very interesting, their eyes gleamed with pleasure, and beating their hands on their foreheads and breasts, and muttering some ejaculations, they bewailed the hardness of their lot, which now ensured their never being able again to participate in such a joyous occupation." It was a pleasant life, and a lucrative employment, beside which the hard labor and slender earnings of honesty cut but a sorry figure in the eyes of the work-eschewing Hindoostanee. When asked, after many years spent in prison, if he would not on regaining his liberty betake himself to honest courses, the gaol-bird would always return the same discouraging answer: "No, no," shaking his head and laughing, "that would never do. Why should I become an honest man—work all day in the sun, rain, and all weathers, and earn what? Some five or six pice a day! We Dakoits lead very agreeable

* Capt. W. M. Ramsay. See Colonel Sleeman's Bhudduck Report. Calcutta, 1849.

and comfortable lives. When from home, which is generally only during the cold season, we march some fourteen or sixteen miles a day, for perhaps a couple of months, or say four at the outside—commit a Dakoitee, and bring home money sufficient to keep us comfortable for a year, or perhaps two. When at home we amuse ourselves by shooting, and visiting our friends, or in any way most agreeable—eat when we please, and sleep when we please—can what you call an honest man do that ?"*

But however discouraging all this may have been viewed with regard to any hope that may have been entertained of the reformation of Dakoits, the freedom with which the convicts spoke of their professional achievements promised well for the success of our endeavours to root them out of the land. The Dakoits, indeed, were not to be reformed—they were to be extirpated. It was characteristic of English benevolence that we should have been slow to resort to such a remedy as this—that we should have sought rather to convert these depredational tribes into industrial classes by holding out to them sufficient inducements to honest exertion. But all such projects were seen, upon a closer examination, to be worthy only of an Utopian country, and a Saturnian age. People talked about buying up Dakoitee —about sending out a general invitation to these hereditary robbers to come and settle upon grants of land appropriated to them by Government, and to live a life of peaceful integrity for the remainder of their days. But "the difficulties and risks of such a measure were," as Colonel Sleeman well remarked, "little understood. Our territories did not contain one twentieth part of the great body which we should have had to collect; and we should have found it impossible to collect them by mere invitation, without offering them as little labor, and

* Substance of conversation held with Captain W. M. Ramsay.

as much luxury, as they then enjoyed in their wild state, with all the same hopes of rising to wealth and distinction. We should have had to give a leader of robbers and murderers, with his four or five wives, more pay than we give to a native commissioned officer, who had served our Government faithfully thirty or forty years, who had his breast covered with medals, and his body with honorable scars. Had we at any time increased the labor from absolute idleness, or diminished their subsistence from absolute luxury, they would have been off to their native forests and ravines."*

All this was undeniable. The arguments against so wild a project as the establishment of colonies of reformed Budducks, to be supported at the expense of the industrious inhabitants of the country, were so conclusive, that the scheme was soon reasoned down. Indeed, we had begun to discover by this time that humanity, like ambition, sometimes "overleaps itself, and falls on the other side." Nothing is more remarkable in the history of Dakoitee than the fact of the large number of notorious offenders who have escaped conviction and punishment, partly through the agency of false witnesses and the corruption of the native officers of our law courts, and partly through the unwillingness of the European judicial functionaries to convict and punish, except in cases substantiated by the clearest possible evidence of the commission of a specific offence. The judicial axiom that it is better that twenty guilty men should escape than that one innocent man should be punished, however sound it may be in the abstract, had not certainly, in its application to the case of these great depredational leagues, any tendency to advance the interests of mankind. Such tender mercies as were exhibited, with the best possible intentions, by our enlightened European functionaries, were in effect cruel. Seventy years before, Warren Hastings had clearly

* *Colonel Sleeman's Report. Calcutta*, 1849.

discovered the impossibility of suppressing Dakoitee by judicial proceedings in harmony with our refined English ideas of justice, and a strict observance of rules of evidence as recognised in our English law courts. He saw that such mercy was in effect unmerciful, and that there was no real humanity but vigor. As time advanced, and the machinery of our law courts became more complicated, and our European law officers became more and more the representatives and exponents of the high abstract principles of Western civilisation, it was not likely that the scruples which stood in the way of a larger growth of real justice and humanity should have been less influential upon the decisions of our judicial tribunals. The Dakoits, indeed, from generation to generation, laughed at us and our law courts. "Do you think that we shall succeed in extirpating you?" asked Captain Ramsay. "If you go on in the way the Thugs have been put down," was the answer, "you certainly will; but in the customary way, that is, requiring proof to convict of specific acts of Dakoitee, never—it is impossible—we should go on increasing from year to year."

These words, which were spoken in 1839, contain the pith of the whole question of Dakoitee-suppression—the evil laid bare and the remedy suggested. But it was not until 1843 that the remedy was applied. It has been seen that in 1836 an act was passed for the suppression of Thuggee, declaring that any one proved to have belonged at any time to a gang of Thugs should be liable to conviction and punishment on the general charge, and now it was proposed that a similar exemption from the necessity of convicting for specific offences should be applied to the case of professional Dakoitee.* "It is

* The preamble of the Act stated "professional Dakoits, who belonged to certain tribes, systematically employed in carrying on their lawless pursuits in different parts of the country." The reader, bearing these words in mind, will perceive that the specification contained in them subsequently

hereby enacted," said the new Act—No. XXIV. of 1843—"that whosoever shall be proved to have belonged, either before or after the passing of this Act, to any gang of Dakoits, either within or without the territories of the East India Company, shall be punished with transportation for life, or with imprisonment for any less term with hard labor." The Act at the same time gave general jurisdiction to all magistrates to try offences of this class wheresoever committed, without the formality of "any Futwa from any law officer." It was impossible that such a law as this should not be productive of salutary effects. The difficulty of conviction of a specific offence was great to a degree not readily appreciable in this country. For these gangs of Dakoits, for the most part, depredated at a distance of some hundreds of miles from their homes; and the necessity of bringing witnesses from remote places to give evidence in our law courts was an evil of so intolerable a nature, that, whatsoever might have been the sufferings of men, whatsoever their hopes of justice or their desire after revenge, they shrunk from the long journey to the distant tribunal, and silently submitted to their wrongs.*

Nor were these the only legal measures adopted for the suppression of the great crime. Dakoitee was not an enormity peculiar to the Company's territories. On the contrary, both Thuggee and Dakoitee had thriven with peculiar luxuriance in the native states. Oude, indeed, had long been the hot-bed of both. It often happened that in these native states prisoners had been tried, convicted, and sentenced, as Thugs and Dakoits, but had subsequently contrived to escape; and, having escaped,

embarrassed the Bengal Government, and compelled the passing of another Act, generalising the application of the former one.—See *post*, page 409.

* "To avoid the great loss and inconvenience which the necessity of this attendance involved, it was found that the sufferers did all in their power to conceal their sufferings, and often denied that they had ever been attacked, when the dearest members of their family had been killed or wounded, and all they had in the world been carried off."—[*Sleeman's Budduck Report*, 1849.]

had not only returned to their old trade of robbery and murder, but had fearfully persecuted all who had contributed to their previous detection.* An Act was therefore passed, declaring that all prisoners convicted in native states by a tribunal in which an European covenanted servant was one of the presiding judges, might be received into our gaols to undergo their sentence."† It is a feature, indeed, of our English administration in India, that, in all our humanising measures for the suppression of Suttee, Female Infanticide, Thuggee, Dakoitee, and other kindred abominations, we have not stopped short on the borders of the provinces subject to our own regulations. We have exerted our influence to the utmost to indoctrinate the native courts with our own views, and have seldom failed to elicit their acquiescence and assistance. Grudgingly, perhaps, these may have been given. The zeal with which such measures have been prosecuted by the native princes has fallen greatly short of our own. But we have had British officers at their Durbars to see that their promises are fulfilled, and in reality the measures which they have authorised have been practically our own.‡

* "Either," says Sleeman, "from the negligence or connivance of the guards, or the wish of the officers of such courts to avoid the cost of maintaining them."

† Act XVIII. of 1843.

‡ Since the British Government in India have entered more heartily into the great work of extirpating Thuggee and Dakoitee, and have not only issued specific enactments, but appointed an especial and independent Department to carry out these enactments, the native princes and chiefs have rendered us more assistance than they were wont to do, when the detection and apprehension of Thugs and Dakoits was left to the ordinary civil establishments. Indeed, before the adoption of these special measures, it was often found a work of difficulty to obtain the hearty co-operation of a British Resident at a native Court, who felt that to communicate with the Court respecting the contemplated seizure of a gang of Dakoits was to thwart the undertaking (for if the Court knew, the Aumils knew; and if the Aumils knew, the Dakoits knew what was going on), and yet was unwilling to co-operate without the consent of the Court. An example of this is worth giving. In 1822, the widow of a jemadar of Dakoits went to the judge at Cawnpore, and stating that she had been refused her legitimate share of the plunder taken by her late husband's associates, boldly denounced the gang to the British functionary. A certain village in the Oude territory was named as the place in which property captured in several Dakoitees would be found, and the houses of the receivers were indicated by the woman. Immediately afterwards the judge, under cover of a tiger-shooting expedition, visited the village pointed out to him, and the truth of the woman's story was confirmed.

Thus aided by special legislative provisions, Colonel Sleeman and his colleagues set to work as vigorously for the extirpation of the Budduck, and other professional robber-gangs, as they before had done for the extirpation of the Thugs, and, learned in all the mysteries of the craft, and aided by professional approvers, they hunted down large gangs, culled new approvers from the list of detected culprits, and carried on the war with remarkable success. And whilst in the upper provinces of Bengal these energetic officers were thus vigorously employed, in the lower provinces Mr. Dampier, the Superintendent of Police, with one or two of the old assistants in the Thuggee Department, were about the same excellent work. But although the haunts of a large number of robber-gangs were beaten up, and Dakoits were captured and catalogued by hundreds, Dakoitee was not suppressed. I do not underrate the services of Sleeman and his detective police. Those services were very great. An immense deal of good was accomplished. If they did nothing else, they drew away the veil which shrouded the mysteries of Dakoitee. We have advanced a long way towards the cure of a disease when we have learnt thoroughly to understand it. I believe that Dakoitee is now thoroughly understood. But the "Department" did much more than this—they actually captured (as I have said) and either punished or turned into approvers vast numbers of Dakoits.* But, like all men of earnestness and enthusiasm, they were run away with by an idea. The idea was a new and a striking one. It was

On returning to Cawnpore the judge, eager to turn the information he had obtained to good account, wrote to the Resident at Lucknow, suggesting to him to send out a detachment of local troops to aid the agents of the civil officer in the capture of the gang. The Resident consented not without some scruple, and the Nazir was sent with the woman to accompany the party and point out the offenders. But the detachment had not proceeded far, when the Resident's heart failed him, and after a march or two the detachment was recalled.—[*MS. Notes.*]

* The approvers themselves are convicts. Sentence is passed upon them, but not carried into effect. They are indulgently treated, but of real liberty they have none. They are, in fact, prisoners at large, for life.

the great idea of the hereditary robber-tribes of India. It was a very important and a deeply-interesting subject, but they gave themselves too exclusively to it. This matter of the professional robber-castes was a great feature of Dakoitee, but it did not in itself constitute Dakoitee. Sleeman and his associates struck at the robber-castes, and I believe that they were well-nigh extinguished. At all events, as great brotherhoods of crime, they were utterly broken up and dispersed.

Still Dakoitee was not suppressed. Subdued in one form and in one part of the country, it seemed to take a new shape and to break out in another place. The general effect of such measures is to urge the evil, against which they are directed, into more remote demonstrations—to drive the offenders into distant parts of the empire, to carry on their depredations beyond the reach of central supervision. Thus, some little time ago, when there was a great outcry against the practices of the London beggars, and these professional mendicants were, for a time, hunted out of the metropolis, it was observed by all dwellers in the home counties that there was a vast increase of rural mendicity. But in Bengal the effect was directly the reverse of this. Dakoitee, like Government, began to centralise itself, and Calcutta was surrounded by banditti. The men constituting these gangs did not apparently belong to the hereditary robber-tribes of India. They seemed rather to make up an indistinct and heterogeneous *posse comitatus* than a great homogeneous guild or brotherhood. Whether these gangs were partly composed of men who had lost their occupation in the provinces, and, unable any longer to preserve their aristocratic exclusiveness, had fused themselves into the general mass of Dakoitee,* and resigned themselves to the usual conditions of that misfortune

* It would appear from Mr. Wauchope's last report, which I had not seen on writing this, that they were.—See p. 412.

which is said to bring together strange bed-fellows, I do not pretend to know; but I grieve to say that an alarming *increase* of Dakoitee in the lower provinces of Bengal has recently manifested itself, and that only last year gang-robbers were swarming, in a state of intense activity, under the walls of the Supreme Court of Calcutta.

It was at the commencement of the year 1852, that the Superintendent of Police in the lower provinces of Bengal submitted to Government a letter received from Mr. Wauchope, magistrate of Hooghly, "forwarding a list of 287 Dakoits concerned in 83 Dakoitees." In this letter the magistrate reported that the 287 Dakoits mentioned by his approvers were connected with only three gangs; and he added, that he knew at least thirty-five gangs committing similar depredations within fifty miles of Calcutta. Of the Dakoits whom he had catalogued his approvers could give him no detailed account; unlike the Budduck and Khejuck approvers, they seldom knew the parentage or caste of their confederates; but it was ascertained that, for the most part, they had come from some Mofussil village, which they occasionally visited, and located themselves in Calcutta or Chandernagore. To arrest the progress of the evil, it was now suggested by the Superintendent of Police that a Commissioner for the suppression of Dakoitee in Lower Bengal should be appointed, armed with special powers, to operate under the provisions of the Act (XXIV. of 1843) for the suppression of professional Dakoits, belonging to certain tribes systematically employed in carrying on their lawless pursuits. "I feel perfectly convinced," he added, "that unless the Thuggee system is brought into operation against these gangs, we shall fail in putting them down."

Fortunately, it was not difficult to name an officer well qualified for the performance of this important work. The Hooghly magistrate, who had sent in the list of 287

Dakoits, was just the man for such an enterprise. Mr. Wauchope, an officer of rare energy and intelligence, had studied well the habits and practices of the Dakoits, and had a large acquaintance with the personal composition of the principal gangs in the neighbourhood of his court. On one occasion a notorious Dakoit chief was brought up before him under an assumed name. The man loudly declared his innocence—protested he had never been concerned in Dakoitee of any kind, or even suspected of such an offence. Mr. Wauchope heard him out, and then laughingly replied that the story was doubtless a very good one, but that it was not good enough for him—that he knew something more about the matter; that the man, to his certain knowledge, had been arrested under such a name, as concerned in such a Dakoitee, by the magistrate of the twenty-four Pergunnahs, and again in Howrah, under another name, for participation in another Dakoitee; that his real name was so-and-so, but that, to distinguish him from another Dakoit of the same name, he went by a certain nickname in the gang—and by that nickname Mr. Wauchope called him. Astonished and alarmed by this display of knowledge—all his secret history thus laid bare by one whom he had thought to cozen in the old way, by hard lying—the unhappy man felt that he was at the mercy of the English magistrate, and cried out, "Pardon me, my lord; I am ready to tell you all I know."

It was plain that this was the kind of man to deal with the old Bengal Dakoits, of whom it was truly said that "they would never confess unless they saw that they were in the hands of a man from whom there was little or no hope of escape." So Mr. Wauchope was recommended for the office of Special Commissioner for the suppression of Dakoitee, and Government sanctioned the appointment.* But although the man was ready, the

* The appointment was made on the 26th of April, 1852, experimentally for one year, to be reported on at the expiration of that period.

Act was not. A question had arisen, in the course of the preceding year, as to whether Act XXIV. of 1843* could be brought into operation against the Dakoit bands of Lower Bengal; for although the wording of the two first sections was of a general character, and seemed to include in their provisions all kinds of Dakoits practising in the Company's territories, the preamble only specified certain tribes of professional robbers; and to these, therefore, the operation of the Act, strictly interpreted, might be limited. The principal judicial authorities were at variance on the subject, and the supreme Government had expressed its unwillingness to alter the existing law unless it were clearly shown by a judicial decision that its provisions were insufficient. It was proposed, therefore, that the legality of the application of the Act in question to the case of ordinary Dakoits should be tested by certain trials in the Hooghly Court, and the decisions of the Sudder thereupon. This, however, did not go far to solve the ambiguity. One man was tried under the doubtful Act, and the Sudder Court sentenced him to be transported for life. But it was understood that the judges were not all of one opinion on the subject; and it was possible, therefore, that the next case might meet with a different fate.

In the mean while, however, the attention of Government had been called, through another channel, to the alarming increase of crime in the lower provinces of Bengal. A petition had been received from several respectable inhabitants of the districts of Burdwan, Hooghly, and Kishnaghur, setting forth that thefts and gang-robberies had increased to such an extent that there was a general feeling of insecurity throughout the country—an evil mainly to be attributed to the inefficiency of the police, and especially the village watch. This was not an appeal likely to be disregarded. An Act

* See *ante*, page 404.

"for the further repression of Dakoity and other crimes in the lower provinces of Bengal" was drafted, and read for the first time on the 27th of June, 1851. The preamble set forth that, "whereas Dakoitees and other heinous crimes are of frequent occurrence within certain zillahs of the Presidency of Fort William, in Bengal, and whereas it has been doubted whether the laws in force against Dakoits and professional robbers can be put in force, except in the case of those who belong to certain tribes referred to in the preamble to Act XXIV., 1843, and it is expedient that such doubts be removed, and that further provision be made for the more regular and due appointment of the village watchmen;" and the first section decreed that "the provisions of Act XXIV., 1843, shall apply to and be put in force against all persons belonging, or who have at any time belonged to, or robbed in company, with any gang of persons associated for the purpose of practising robbery or extortion, and every such person shall be deemed a Dakoit without reference to the tribe or caste to which he belongs."

The results of Mr. Wauchope's appointment, as far as they are yet apparent, are of the most satisfactory kind. He was appointed provisionally for a year, and ordered to report progress upon the expiration of it. In the mean while the accounts, which he has furnished to his immediate superior, are of the most satisfactory complexion. He reports, within the first six months of his operations, a very large diminution of crime. He has hunted down and broken up some extensive gangs; and the immediate result of his active measures is, that the number of ascertained cases of Dakoitee within his jurisdiction are shown, in 1852, to be only one-half of those which were committed within a corresponding period of the preceding year; and seventy-five per cent. less than those, within a similar space of time, just before his assumption of office in the spring of last year. But there