



The description of the governments, principalities, and tribes of Central India would be incomplete without an account of the Bheels who inhabit the wild and mountainous tracts which separate Malwa from Nemaar and Guzerat. This extraordinary class of people merit more than a cursory notice. They are as singular in their origin as their habits; but, while every thing connected with them excites curiosity, their dispersion over rugged mountains, their extreme ignorance and prejudices, and their repugnance to confidential intercourse with all except their own tribe, present serious obstacles to our obtaining a full and correct knowledge of their history.

It will be sufficient for the present purpose, to offer some conjectures regarding the origin and progress of the tribe; to notice the classes into which they are divided; and, in conclusion, to give as much of the local history of one or two of their most remarkable chiefs, as will elucidate their past and present condition in that quarter of Hindustan.

The Bheels are quite a distinct race from any other Indian tribe, yet few among the latter have higher pretensions to antiquity. The adoption of their usages and modes of life by other classes of the community, and the fruit of the intercourse of their females with both Mahomedans and Hindus, have led to the term Bheel being applied as a general name to all the plunderers who dwell in the mountains and woody banks of rivers in the Western parts of India; not only Bheelalahs and Coolies, who have an affinity to them, but many others* have been

* The plundering tribes of Meenahs, Moghees, Ramoosees, and Gonds, are often classed with Bheels.



comprehended in this class. But these are in no manner (beyond the common occupation of plunder) connected with the real Bheels, who have from the most remote ages been recognized as a distinct race, insulated in their abodes, and separated by their habits, usages, and forms of worship, from the other tribes of India.

The account given by their modern genealogists and minstrels, differs from what we learn of this race in ancient Hindu works;* but the popular tradition, though fabulous as to their origin, may perhaps, as far as relates to their more recent history, be considered the most authentic. According to it, Mahadeo, when sick and unhappy, was one day reclining in a shady forest, when a beautiful woman appeared, the first sight of whom effected a complete cure of all his complaints. An intercourse between the god and the strange female was established, result of which was many children; one of whom, who was from infancy alike distinguished by his ugliness and vice, slew the favourite bull of Mahadeo for which crime he was expelled to the woods and mountains; and his descendants have ever since been stigmatized

* In the celebrated Hindu poem of the Mahabharatha, which is certainly a work of a remote era, the Bheels are not only minutely described, but a long fabulous account is given of their origin. The story related in the text is an allegory, implying that their ancestor, owing to the original depravity of his nature, was guilty of a violation of justice, for which he was, by the wrath of God, driven from the abodes of civilized men. In the eighth chapter of Menu, v. 16, (Sir W. Jones's translation,) it is stated that "the divine form of justice is represented as *Vrishā*, or a bull; and the gods consider him who violates justice as one who slays a bull." The slaying a bull is considered by the Hindus as one of the most heinous crimes, and only exceeded by that of killing a Brahmin.



with the names of Bheel* and Nishada,— terms that denote outcasts.

The same tradition lays the scene of their first residence and exploits in the country of Marwar, or Joudpoor; whence, driven South by other tribes, they settled among the mountains that form the Western boundary of Malwa and Candeish, in the lofty ranges of the Vindhya and Satpoora, and the woody and rugged banks of the Mhaee, the Nerbudda, and the Taptee; where, protected by the strong nature of the country from the oppression which had driven them into exile, they have since dwelt, subsisting partly on their industry, but more on the plunder of the rich landholders in their vicinity.

The truth of this account of their emigration from Joudpoor† and Odeypoor, is supported by the local history of the Rajpoot princes of that quarter, which states that the lands were conquered from the Bheels; and by the fact that almost all the revered Bhats, or minstrels, of the tribe, still reside in Rajpootana, whence they make annual, biennial, and some only triennial visits to the Southern tribes, to register remarkable events in families, particularly those connected with their marriages, and to sing to the delighted Bheels the tale of their origin, and the fame of their fore-fathers. For the performance of these rites and duties there are fixed dues; but the Bhat, when a man of sanctity and reputation, receives

* The common appellation of this race is Bheel, but they are also termed Nishada. Major Henley mentions the common application of this term to one of the tribes on the Nerbudda.

† The countries of Joudpoor or Odeypoor are usually termed in Indian history, Marwar and Mewar. I use, to prevent mistakes by the English reader, the more recent names of these countries, taken from their present capitals.



from the Turvees, or chiefs he visits, presents that have no limit, except the ability of the donor.

The Bheels of Malwa and neighbouring provinces have no record of ever having possessed the plains of that country; but they assert, and on authentic grounds, that they long maintained exclusive possession of the hilly tracts under their leaders, many of whom were as distinguished by their character as by their wealth and power. The accounts we have of the comparatively recent conquest of Doongurhpoor, Banswarra, Jabooah, Burwancee, and other principalities, fully establish the truth of this pretension.

The Bheels have, by the various changes in their condition, been divided into distinct classes, which may be denominated the village, the cultivating, and the wild or mountain Bheel. The first consists of a few, who from ancient residence or chance have become inhabitants of villages on the plain (though usually near the hills), of which they are the watchmen, and are incorporated as a portion of the community: the cultivating Bheels are those who have continued in their peaceable occupations after their leaders were destroyed or driven by invaders to become desperate freebooters: and the wild, or mountain Bheel, comprises all that part of the tribe, who, preferring savage freedom and indolence to submission and industry, have continued to subsist by plunder.

The peculiar usages of these classes will be noticed in another part.* Here no more of their respective

* This subject belongs to a future chapter, which will treat of the character and usages of the inhabitants of Central India.



history can be given, than that each has alternately decreased, or increased, in its numbers and character, according to the fluctuations in the neighbouring Governments. When these have been strong and in prosperity, the village and cultivating Bheels have drawn recruits from their wilder brethren ; while weakness, confusion, and oppression have had the usual effect of driving the industrious of this tribe to desperate courses ; but amid all changes there is always a disposition in every branch of this community to re-unite, which is derived from their preserving the same usages and the same forms of religion.

There can be little doubt, from what has been stated, that the Bheels of this quarter, originally driven South by the Rajpoots who were expelled by the Mahomedans from Hindustan, have, within two or three centuries, lost many of the petty principalities they had established in the hills ; but another great change in this community has been the consequence of these revolutions. The relations of the petty Rajpoot princes have increased beyond the power of the heads of their family to provide for them. Bred to no occupation but that of arms, many of them have adopted desperate courses, and associated in their predatory life with Bheels ; they have intermarried with that class, and hence have originated a number of tribes, among which the Bheelalah is the principal. This part of the subject will be noticed hereafter. It will in this place be sufficient to make a short mention of some of the principal Bheel leaders in Malwa and Nemaar, and the present condition of that class.

The fastnesses between Báglee and Mundleysir are



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chiefly inhabited by Gonds; but the plundering class, who lately occupied them, had amongst their followers men of desperate fortunes from Hindustan and other quarters* of India. Along the Vindhya range from Jaum to the Westward of Mandoo is wholly inhabited by Bheels, a considerable part of whom have, for more than a century, owned allegiance to the family of Nadir Singh, a Bheelalah chief. He is the fourth in descent from a person who obtained power from the favour of a royal governor of Mandoo, to whom his spirit and enterprise had been useful in punishing a tribe of plunderers called Mounkur. The history of Nadir's ancestors presents the same vicissitudes as that of other predatory chiefs; his own life, from having been passed during the late troubles of Central India, has been the most remarkable. He had fixed his residence at Jaumniah, a small village of his father's, near Mandoo; but he attained little celebrity till the death of his uncle, Jessoo Potail: upon that event (which took place sixteen years ago) Nadir came forward as the chief plunderer of the Vindhya range. He was courted and favoured by Jeswunt Row Holkar; and it was not till after his death that Nadir issued from the mountains, and began to plunder and lay waste the plains. His name, when the English entered Central India, was the terror of the Southern parts of that country; and when the present cantonment was established at Mhow, which is on the very verge of his mountains, he had about two hundred horse, and between six and seven hundred foot. The history of this

* Some Native soldiers who had deserted from the Madras army ten years ago, were found in the service of these freebooters. They gave themselves up, and were forgiven, but expelled the country.



freebooter, henceforward, is short: he was compelled to conform to the change that had occurred; and while he was deterred, through a dread of the power of the British Government, from continuing to plunder, he was invited by its liberality to place himself under its protection. Almost all his adherents, who were from distant countries, were discharged, and a number of his Bheels were taken into the English service. His nephew and son were placed in command of them; and the members of this formidable plunderer's family as well as his followers, were through these means gradually familiarized to an intercourse with that community, from which they had been long separated, and of which they had been the bane.

The progress of Nadir Singh's reform was slow, for he was personally very dissipated, and of rooted bad habits; but this every day became of less consequence, as the intercourse with his dependents weakened his power. Many of his crimes subsequent to his submission were pardoned; but a deliberate murder of some unarmed travellers, committed by his orders, put him beyond farther toleration or indulgence. He was, at the time his guilt was discovered, on a visit to his Bheelalah relations, the chiefs of Sillanah; where he had gone, attended by five hundred armed adherents, to celebrate the marriage of his son, Bheem Singh, with a daughter of that family. A mandate* to his former associates was received at the very moment when the marriage was completed, directing his seizure. The order was obeyed;

* When I issued this mandate to Nadir Singh's relations and chief officers, I took care that some British troops should be prepared to enforce the order if disobeyed; but they were not required to act.



he was brought to Nalcha, where his guilt was investigated and proved before the assembled Zemindars* and Bheel chiefs of the neighbouring country. The mild sentence of banishment for life was passed upon him; and he is now a prisoner at Allahabad, while a son, a fine lad† of fourteen years of age, has succeeded to his authority. No event was ever more conducive to the tranquillity of a country than this act of justice. There is no part of Central India where life and property are safer than amid the late dreaded Bheels of Nadir Singh. Some of this race have not yet abandoned their habits; but their robberies are upon a very limited scale to what they were a few years ago, and measures are in progress that will, it is expected, soon complete the reformation of a class of men, who, believing themselves doomed to be thieves and plunderers, have been confirmed in their destiny by the oppression and cruelty of neighbouring Governments, increased by an avowed contempt for them as outcasts. The feelings this system of degradation has produced must be changed; and no effort has been left untried to restore this race of men to a better sense of their condition than that which they at present entertain. The common answer of a Bheel, when charged with theft or robbery, is, "I am not to blame; I am Mahadeo's thief." In other words, my destiny as a thief has been fixed by God. It is this superstitious impression which offers a great, but not insurmountable obstacle (as it has been too rashly termed) to their reform.

* For all the particulars of this remarkable transaction, vide my letter to Mr. Secretary Metcalfe, 9th May, 1820.

† Bheem Singh resided, for three years, almost entirely at my headquarters, where his education was carefully attended to.



From what has been effected, we may pronounce with confidence that they will be reclaimed to good order and industrious habits; but we must expect this result through means that elevate, rather than depress, this singular race of human beings.

Enough, however, has been said to illustrate the local history of the Bheels; their character and peculiar habits will be treated of in another place; but it is impossible, from the prescribed limits of this work, to give so complete a description as could be desired of a class of men, who, whether we consider their well-founded pretensions to remote antiquity, their remarkable separation from the other tribes of India, or the importance of withdrawing them from habits which render them the enemies of order, merit the minutest attention of the English Government.



CHAPTER XII.

Government of the States of Central India.

THE established government in Central India during the reign of the kings of that country, and from their fall till the invasion of the Mahrattas, was of the same form as that of other parts of India under the Mahomedan sway.

The province of Malwa, which was one of the greatest Soobahs or divisions of the empire of Delhi, was under a Soobahdar, or viceroy, who had a Dewan or minister, and other officers of his petty court and army; while the country was managed by Collectors, and all the other inferior officers belonging to the Moghul system.

The government of the Mahrattas was, both in shape and substance, taken from the institutions of their own country, and from those they found established in the countries which they conquered; but to understand the form of their administration, as it exists at this moment, it will be necessary to give an account of each part of which the whole is constructed, from the Mahratta chief and his principal officers, civil and military, down to the individuals who constitute the ancient and respected municipal establishment of the smallest village.



The governments founded by the families of Sindia, Holkar, and the Puar, have nearly the same form: they consist of a chief or ruler, to whom no fixed title has yet been given, different members of the same family having assumed various designations.* In theory, the power of the ruler is absolute; but with the most revered Hindu writers† it is not deemed of divine origin.

* Madhajee Sindia styled himself Potail. His successor is called both Maharaja and Alijah, Hindu and Mahomedan titles, the first signifying Great Prince, and the latter, The High in Dignity. Mulhar Row Holkar was called Soobahdar, or governor, of Malwa; his successors have contented themselves with the Hindu title of Maharaja, which, though in fact high, is through courtesy become very common.

† The duties of kings, their dues and origin, are described in the following passage of the Mahabharatha, one of the most sacred of the Hindu volumes. Bheeshma said,—“Without a ruler no country can prosper; health, virtue, &c., are of no avail; two will invade the property of one, and many again will attack two: thus men will eventually destroy each other, as the various species of fish. A Raja protects the people as a large fish the smaller. In this manner mankind were continually oppressing each other, when they went to Brahma to give them a ruler. Brahma directed Menu to become their Raja. He replied, I fear a sinful action. Government is arduous, particularly so among ever lying men. They said unto him, Fear not, you will receive a recompense, of beasts a fiftieth part, and thus also of gold: we will give you a tenth of corn, increasing your store, a becoming duty of damsels, and on disputes and gaming. Men exalted in wealth or science shall be subordinate to you as gods are to the great Indra: thus become our Raja powerful and not to be intimidated; you will govern us in peace, as Koorun does the Yukshus. Whatever meritorious actions are performed by subjects protected by the Raja, a fourth part of the merit shall belong to you. Thus, let those who desire advancement hold the Raja superior to themselves (as he defends the people), as a disciple the religious instructor, as the gods the divine Indra. Let them, when in his presence, adore the man who is Raja. The Raja despised by other is a cause of pain to all; therefore let them give him the



According to these authorities, a Raja, or ruler, was first created, and since continued, because men, when they fell from good ways, required a head or chief; but this relation to his people is described in his being termed their defender and protector, for which he is said to be entitled to a revenue; and the tribute to which he has a claim for the duties he performs, is stated generally in the sacred volumes of the Hindus; but, on the other hand, none of these have any passages which imply a check, or limit, beyond those of a moral or religious nature, on their Rajas; and, consistent with this theory, the heads of the Mahratta Governments in Central India are, like other Hindu princes, deemed absolute.

Although the Mahratta chiefs of Central India are absolute, they practically exercise their authority under many restraints. The first founders of the Mahratta Governments were military leaders; and though habituated to the exercise, and often the abuse of arbitrary power, still they were men tutored and corrected by the vicissitudes they had experienced. They professed themselves, and to a certain degree were, till lately, under the

"canopy and umbrella, clothes and ornaments, food and drink, dwellings, seats, couches, and all accommodations.

"Goodhista asked Bheeshma,—What is the reason that a Raja, who in his birth, life, death, members, &c., resembles all other men, should be as it were adored and respected by powerful heroes, and all mankind, and that on his happiness or misery that of all those depends? Bheeshma replied,—I will relate the institution of government. There was not, either governor or government, judge or judgment; men with justice mutually protected each other; they became weary of this, and practised partiality, and their understanding was darkened by sin and passion, &c." The sage proceeds to state that this condition of affairs produced the necessity for a Raja or king being nominated as the head of a distracted community.



control of the Paishwah. They preserved the plain habits of their nation, and were connected by the ties of blood and familiar intercourse with many of their principal officers, a great proportion of whom, and particularly those employed in civil duties, were, from their being of the sacred order of Brahmins, considered as exempted from the punishment of death.

The principal Mahratta rulers in Malwa belong to the Sudra tribe; and this circumstance, as it associated them with the lower orders, has perhaps had a salutary effect in mitigating the exercise of despotic power. Though often marked by cupidity and rapacity, there are rare instances of their being cruel, and they have uniformly shewn attention to the established forms and institutions of the countries they have conquered; but the restraints imposed by such habits and considerations, though great, are not of that obligatory nature to alter the character of their power; the chief or ruler, as before stated, being in fact, in his person, the government. The principal officers employed by the Mahratta chiefs in Central India take both their name and duties from those established at Poona.

The Dewan, who may be termed the prime minister, has the superintendence and chief control over every department in the State.

The head civil officer is the Furnavese,* (a term almost synonymous with that of minister of finance), who

* The name of Furnavese used by the Mahrattas is a compound of the Persian term, Ferd Navese, or the writer of sheets, *i. e.*, by implication, official documents. The names of all their other principal officers are Persian compounds, expressive of the duties each has to perform.



receives the accounts of the renters and collectors of revenue. It is not only his duty to exhibit schedules of the actual revenue, and to form estimates of probable receipt and expenditure, but also to inspect all accounts of public disbursements of every description, which he regulates, and upon which he is a check. It is his duty to prepare in his office all Sunnuds or grants of Jahgeers, Enam lands, &c., and commissions to officers appointed to any public situation.

The Mozumdar is next to the Furnavese; his department may be termed a register-office, in which all Sunnuds, grants, or commissions,* are regularly entered.

The Chitnavese is a secretary of State, in whose office is carried on all political correspondence, as directed by the prince, either public or confidential.

The Siccanavese is keeper of the seal of the prince, which he affixes to all letters, orders, and grants, keeping in his office an exact register of all such documents.

The Potanavese is the treasurer; in his office are kept all accounts of sums received into the State treasury, as well as of all disbursements.

The Dufturdar is the keeper of State papers, relative to the receipts and disbursements of the revenue. He is also an intendant of finance; and though some of his duties are distinct, he may perhaps be deemed a deputy of the Furnavese, to whose department he belongs.

* These commissions, after being made out in the office of the Furnavese, are sent to the Dewan, in whose presence the date and seal are affixed. They are then returned to the Furnavese, who writes upon them the word "Roojoo," or "Shew," and are finally brought to the Mozumdar, who writes upon them in Mahratta "Udnia Purwana," or "By order."



All revenue accounts, as well as disbursements of every description, are forwarded direct to the Dewan, who sends them to the Furnavese, by whom they are given over to the Dufturdar, who, after examining them, submits them to the inspection of the Furnavese, to whom it is his duty to point out what appears correct and admissible, or otherwise.

The Dufturdar has in his office a great number of Moottasuddies, or clerks, the principal of whom are employed in an office* where abstract statements are formed of the whole public accounts of the Government, and in which all matters regarding its finances are brought into as clear and general a point of view as possible.

The keeper of this office is next in rank to the Dufturdar. In it the statements termed Turjooma, from the Persian word signifying explanation or rather translation, are made; also the abstracts termed Khutounee, or exact and arranged accounts of expenditure during the year.

The above chief civil† officers of the State have under them a number of assistants and writers, termed Kar-koons, Moottasuddies, agents and clerks, to aid them in the duties of their departments.

In the Mahratta armies, the prince is deemed the Sirdar or commander; next to him is the Buckshee or

* This office is termed the Ek Burjee Duftar.

† The rank and precedence of these civil officers exist only in the theory of the Mahratta Governments. The talents of individuals and the favour of princes often exalt a person at the head of the lowest of these offices to the highest consideration. For instance, among these civil officers at Sindia's court, the Siccanavese has most influence, and the minister is not at the head of any office, nor even styled Dewan, but is called Mookhtarkar, or the head of the administration.



paymaster, who is vested with the principal charge and responsibility, and is considered accountable for all military expenses and disbursements. This trust confers influence on him, if not authority,* above those military chiefs who are occasionally put in command of forces, and upon whom his department is always a check. It must here, however, be noticed, that this officer is only responsible for payments and the interior economy of the troops that receive their pay direct from the treasury of the State. He has no concern with those who are in the service of chiefs or commanders, who have Jahgeers, or lands, and maintain their own contingents.

The officers under the Buckshee, as well as almost all the officers who hold situations in the civil administration, are Mahratta Brahmin Pundits, or writers. These sometimes rise from their individual merit, but more generally from hereditary claims, the most prejudiced attention to which pervades the whole system of Mahratta Government.

The usual military grades† in the cavalry and infantry of the Mahratta chiefs in Central India are the same as in other Indian armies; but the persons of most influence in these bodies are a host of Karkoons, or agents of the Buckshee, to whom their pay and accounts are exclusively intrusted: one of these is attached to

* The Buckshee possesses sometimes also the complete military command, as well as the civil arrangements of the army with respect to finance.

† These are, Sirdar, Tokdar, and Rissaldar in the cavalry, and Soobahdar, Jemadar, Havildar, and Naick in the infantry: latterly the imitation of English discipline introduced English names to different ranks, and it was not unusual to hear of a Colonel Doorjun Singh, Captain Mehrab Khan, and Adjutant Shaik Ahmed.



every detachment and corps, and from their duties they become the superiors of the military officers, whose actions they not only usually control, but direct.

There are many other officers* in the Mahratta Governments in whom great trust and responsibility are vested; who, however, are considered more as belonging to the household of the prince, than to the State, and who have little concern (except what his personal favour may give them) with the general administration of its affairs.

The employment of that singular description of officers called *Huzooriah*, or servants of the presence, by the Mahratta princes of Central India, has been borrowed from the usages of the Poona court. *Huzooriahs*† are personal attendants of the chief, generally of his own tribe, and are usually of respectable parentage; a great proportion of them are hereditary followers of the family of the prince they serve, and whose confidence they are supposed to enjoy. They are the usual envoys to sub-

* This class of officers includes the heads of the following departments :—

The *Jamahdar Khanah*, or wardrobe department.

The *Jowaher ditto*, or jewellery ditto.

The *Sillah ditto*, or armoury ditto.

Furrash ditto, or camp equipage ditto.

Feel ditto, or elephant ditto.

Tope ditto, or ordnance ditto.

Shooter ditto, or camel ditto.

The *Havildar* and *Naib Havildar* of the *Pagah* or household troops of the ruler are officers of rank. The horses in this corps being all the property of the prince, makes it considered as quite distinct from the army of the State. The *Pagnavese*, or keeper of the accounts of this body of troops, is deemed a situation of trust and consequence.

The office of *Khasjee Walah*, or chief steward of the Prince's personal property and possessions, is one of high confidence.

† Derived from the Persian, *Huzoor* implying presence.



jects on occasions of importance, and are considered as the representatives of their master. Their appearance supersedes all other authority, and disobedience to the orders* they convey is termed an act of rebellion.

There formerly existed in the Poona State an officer, who was nominally at the head of the administration of justice, and was entitled Ram Shastree. Under him were a number of local judges, called Neeâee Des.† This system was never introduced by the Mahratta leaders who formed governments in Central India. The ruler and his chief officers have in those States reserved to themselves the exclusive regulation, if not the administration of justice, which has at times been as profitable as any source of revenue they enjoyed.

The exercise of judicial authority over districts distant from the capital devolves much on civil officers called Komisdars, or collectors (a name given whether they manage or rent the country to which they are nominated); but to these are always attached deputies from the Dewan, the Furnavese, and each of the other high functionaries of the State, and this deputy takes, in the district in which he is employed, the name of the head of his department.

A Komisdar (or collector), whose authority extends over many districts, appoints from himself separate Komisdars to the head of each, sending with them

* To enforce these orders, when the party does not attend to them, the Huzooriah at the last extremity burns his turban; an act which usage has rendered tantamount to proclaiming the disobedient person traitor.

† This word is a compound of Neeâee, justice; and Des, country; and signifies "a local judge."



persons* to perform the duties of each distinct office, who are skilled in the proper mode of keeping the accounts according to prescribed forms. In each of the different Tuppahs, or circle† of villages, the deputed Komisdar keeps a Karkoon,‡ or agent, if they are under management. If rented, the whole is left to the renter, with whom, unless in extreme cases, the Government officers do not interfere.

A Jahgeerdar, or proprietor, to whom lands have been granted, whether for service or in free gift, exercises civil and military jurisdiction over his own domain, and has, to aid him, officers§ of similar names and duties with those of the prince who is his paramount lord.

When troops are sent to a distance on service, they are generally placed under a distinct Sirdar, or military commander, with a Karkoon, or agent, from the office of the Buckshee, who keeps the accounts and regulates the pay. If there is any part of the Pagah, or household troops, a person|| from the Pagnavese¶ office attends

* This class of petty revenue officers has no connexion with the persons deputed from the heads of the Government.

† This varies from seven and eight to twenty and thirty villages, sometimes more.

‡ Karkoon is a Persian compound, signifying literally a doer of business, or agent.

§ The civil officers employed in management of countries, &c., are known under the name of Mamlutdar, or local officers, while the State officers at the seat of Government, and those they depute, are by the Mahrattas termed Daruckdar, or the executive officers of the ruler. Both these terms are adopted by the Mahrattas from their Mahomedan predecessors, most of whose forms they have preserved in their administration.

|| This officer is at once a paymaster and accountant.

¶ Vide note, page 437.



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them; and the troops of Jahgeerdars, when employed, are provided with their pay, and have their accounts settled by officers whose name and duties are the same as those serving under the prince.

It has not been unusual, particularly when the country was in a state of confusion, to depute officers high in the State (generally military leaders) to govern large tracts of territory, in which either the revenue of lands, the tribute of Rajas, or the receipts of collectors, were assigned to them for their current and extra expenditure. But these leaders, who have always taken advantage of the times to usurp as much power as they could from the Government which employed them, cannot be classed among its officers, or considered as belonging to its regular system of administration.

When part of the army of a Mahratta prince is serving with a Collector for his protection or support, he gives instructions to the commander; he also makes advances on account of the pay of the troops, but has no concern with its distribution, nor, indeed, with any interior arrangements. The Sebundy, or revenue corps, necessary for the country, are maintained entirely by the Collector, who charges for their support against the revenue of the countries under his management; with these troops the Government has no direct concern.

The collector is aided by one or more Zemindars of Pergunnahs. They have separate officers, at the head of whom is the Canoongo, who is next to the Zemindar, and like him belonging to the land on which he has dues. In the office of the Canoongo of the Pergunnah, or district, the records of every village, including its



inhabitants, lands, and every thing relating to its interior administration and revenue, are kept.

In the Mahratta Governments of Central India, the pay of each officer, from the Dewan, or minister, to the lowest rank, is upon a calculation of his current and contingent expenses. The minister, for example, receives pay for a palankeen, for an elephant, for State servants, and is allowed a certain quantity of provisions. He has, besides, fixed pay in money for his personal salary and support. It is usual to commute the latter allowance for a Jahgeer* or estate, which is, however, seldom, if ever, made hereditary.

The Dewan has, independent of this pay from the prince, certain claims on the collection of every district. He has a due, called Bheit,† of two rupees each harvest (or four rupees per annum) from every village‡ in the country. He has also in some places an anna, or sixteenth part of a rupee—in others, half that amount—from the pay of the Sebundies, or militia of the country.

The Buckshee is paid in the same manner as the Dewan, but has no Bheit, or due, from the villages, though he has a right to small stoppage§ from the troops, which makes his avowed income very large.

* Tantia Jogh has two villages (one in Indore, and the other in the Deypalpoor Pergunnah) in Jahgeer, as a commutation for his pay as Dewan. Their aggregate value is about twenty thousand rupees per annum.

† Bheit is, in its original meaning, a present to a superior.

‡ This means a registered village, which sometimes contains several hamlets or small villages, called Dependencies.

§ Every horseman who rides his own horse has a stoppage made of one rupee per mensem for his pay, as the due of the Buckshee.



The Furnavese has an allowance for a palankeen and a horse, with a smaller establishment of servants and less pay than the Dewan, or Buckshee; and his due from each village is exactly one-half of the minister's, or two rupees per annum. A similar amount from the same sources is collected by the Mozumdar, or registrar; but that officer, though he has an equal due, has less pay and establishment than the Furnavese, whose deputy he may be termed. The whole of the officers in the civil and military employment of the State are paid in this way; the amount varies, but the principle is the same. The collectors of districts, besides an establishment and a pay proportioned to their charge, have a Bheit on each village of two rupees per annum; and their petty Dewan, Furnavese, and Mozumdar, besides their pay, share in the collections under this head.*

This notice of the mode of paying Mahratta officers was necessary, as it explains much of their system of internal administration. It connects them with every village, and opens a wide door for abuses of all kinds. It need not be added, after the account which has been given of the Mahratta families who have exercised power in Central India, that neither the chiefs of that nation nor their subordinate officers, have ever limited themselves to their ordinary allowances; but still they have been uniformly particular in recognizing such as the amount to which alone they were justly entitled.

* Zemindars and officers of this class have also claims to Bheit, and in many parts of Malwa the villages are assessed as high as twenty and twenty-one rupees annually for this one demand of public officers.



When the Mahrattas became masters of Central India, they preserved some of the forms, but set aside, or left to perish from neglect, the most useful establishments of the Moghul Government. Among these fell every institution for the administration of justice; and though in a few principal towns, of which a proportion of the inhabitants were Mahomedans, a Cazi, or judge, was continued, his duties were limited to drawing up contracts of marriage, or writing and registering bonds and deeds of sale in his own tribe. It was thought that as all the civil officers employed at court, or in the management of countries, were well-educated Brahmins,* they would, aided by the municipal officer of the country, be quite competent to the judicial as well as the revenue administration. But the fact was (as has been before stated), that, with the exception of Ahalya Bacc, justice became, from the first establishment of the Mahrattas, a source of profit to those who had power for the moment, from the military prince upon his throne, to the lowest Brahmin, who, as a delegated Karkoon, or agent, tyrannized over his village.

Before an account is given of the mode of administering what remains of the forms and substance of justice in the Mahratta Government of Central India, it will be necessary to take a view of the construction of their power in their country, where there are many chiefs, who, though subject to the general authority of these Southern invaders, and recognizing different leaders of that nation as their superiors, are yet independent

* These, with hardly one exception, were from the Deccan and Concan: numerous hordes of this tribe having followed their successful countrymen into Central India and Hindustan.



within their own limits, and exercise sovereign sway over their respective possessions and subjects.

Bhopal, which is the only Mahomedan Government of any consequence in Central India, has always till very lately been more or less under Mahratta influence, though it never formally recognized the supremacy of that nation. Its Nabobs have preserved the usages of the Moghuls, both in the name and duties of its officers. The minister is termed the Dewan—his office the Dewan Dufter. The principal revenue and registering officers are called Mustoffee, and their offices Mustoffee Dufter. There are in this petty State a Mooftee Cazi, and other officers of justice, and the civil managers are known by the name of Amil, and the military leaders by the same appellations as were applied to the commanders of bodies of equal numbers under the Delhi Government.

The tributary princes and chiefs of the Rajpoot tribes, though they acknowledge Mahratta rulers, as their lords paramount, have distinct jurisdiction within their respective limits, and a separate form of administration, which it will be necessary to describe.

The Hindu head of a principality is an hereditary and absolute prince. He is, in general, the chief* of his clan, which, in some respects, extends his power, but in others limits and checks it. The principles of his rule over his own tribe and his other subjects, are quite distinct. His relations and kindred, who are termed Thakoors, have

* A Hindu prince in Central India is called Rawul, Rana, or Raja. His common appellation in his tribe is Bapjee, or father; and he is sometimes flattered with the name of Purthi Nath, or lord of the earth.



in general independent estates,* for which they pay a certain sum, or give military service (sometimes both) to their superior. They preserve, however, the exclusive management of their lands, but with limited authority, which does not extend to life; and there is a check on their mal-administration, from an acknowledged right of appeal, on the part of their subjects, to the prince or paramount lord.

The principle of this part of a Rajpoot principality differs little from the feudal system which formerly existed in Europe, and is liable to the same vicissitudes in the relations and powers of the respective parties. The theory is, that, though the Raja has general supremacy, the Thakoor owing him service and allegiance is master of his own soil and subjects, with the limitations stated; but it is a remarkable part of this construction of government, that the transfer of the revenue of these Thakoors to another sovereign does not necessarily imply a transfer of their allegiance.

The Rajpoot princes in Central India who held their lands from the Moghul Government, gave service for them; but this was commuted by the Mahratta leaders for a money tribute. Service, it is true, may still be given from the ability of the Mahratta chief to exact it, or a desire of the Rajpoot to obtain favour by volunteering it; but both parties are quite agreed that it is not a right; and it happens frequently that, when a Mahratta leader attacks a Rajpoot prince, the Baeebun-dee, or "bond of kindred," makes those who pay tribute to the former send aid to the latter, if they owe him

* The estates of Rajpoot Thakoors of this description are called Kotrees.



allegiance; nor would it be deemed a just act to punish a person for granting such aid.

The Thakoors of the Rajpoot States, like ancient barons, claim a right of advising their prince; and, when his measures are in their opinion ruinous, they often assemble, and endeavour to sway him to a contrary course, or, in extremes, to oppose him. Their being, indeed, on an equality with their princes in birth and tribe, when combined with the possession of a stronghold, gives a character of rude independence to these chiefs, which keeps them in a state of constant warfare with the prince to whom they profess allegiance.

The eldest son of a Rajpoot prince is called Kowur, and is very frequently employed as a vicegerent† by his father.

The principal Rajpoot princes have, for the conduct of their government, a Kamdar, or minister, whose duties correspond with those of the Dewan of the Mahratta

* The Raja of Rutlam, when threatened in A. D. 1818 by an attack from Bappoo Sindia, was joined by numerous younger brethren of his family, which included several subjects of Sindia, Holkar, and the Puar Raja of Dhar. I remonstrated, but was told that the persons in question were neither prohibited by law nor usage from acting as their fealty dictated. I next specifically called upon two of these (the Rajas of Kutch-Barode and Moulton, tributaries of Dhar) to return to their homes: their answer was, "they would obey every order but one that condemned them to the disgrace of deserting their elder brother when in danger."

† This is at present the case in the Raj of Pertaubgurh, Baglee, and of Nursingurh. In the former two the princes employed have the entire confidence of their respective fathers: in the latter, Soobah Singh, having disqualified himself by constant intoxication for the functions of rule, has been compelled to resign them to his son; but he still preserves the name of Raja, with a liberal provision for his maintenance.



States. They have a Dufturree, or keeper of records, whose office is similar to that of the Furnavese. There is also a Moonshee, or secretary. There are many other public officers, some of whom hold their situations, as in Mahratta States, from hereditary claims; but this is not, in the instances of Dewan, and other offices of high trust, ever recognized as constituting a right to employment.

The officer who has charge of the pay and disbursements of their troops is called Buckshee; but much of the revenue of such States being paid in kind, the station of Kottaree, or keeper of the public granaries, (which is a trifling one in the Mahratta Government,) is, in many of the Rajpoot principalities, one of primary importance; and it is not unusual to combine the offices of minister and keeper of the granaries in the same individual.

The territories of the Rajpoot princes in Central India, with the exception of Kotah, are chiefly administered by the Thakoors, among whom they are distributed. Khalsa, or Government lands, are generally kept in the hands of the minister, who commonly manages such parts as he does not rent, through the heads of the villages, and deputes petty officers to collect the revenue, as occasion requires.

In the territories of Kotah, very nearly the same system of administration and the same gradations of rank exist among the Government officers* as in the Mahratta territories; but while all the officers of the other States

* The names of several of these officers are changed; for instance, Komisdars are called Billahdars in the Kotah country; but there is no essential difference in their functions.



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in Central India are paid by shares of grain and fees from the villages, the superior wisdom of Zalim Singh has in some degree banished from his prosperous country these ill-defined exactions, and a regular salary in money is given from the treasury to all persons in his employment.

The Rajpoot chiefs employ their own tribe in the army,* but seldom, if ever, in civil stations. If the authority of a prince of this tribe is vested in a Rajpoot chief, the person so elevated is termed Foujdar, or commander; but this is only a temporary office, created generally for a particular service which the prince cannot conduct in person. When a noble is raised by his favour to power, but without distinct office, he is termed a counsellor† or mediator; such person being generally deemed a channel of intercourse between the prince and his subjects.

The reason for not employing Rajpoots in the civil offices of these petty Governments is, in the first place, their unfitness from want of education; and in the second, their insubordinate and ambitious spirit. These stations (but particularly that of Kamdar, or minister) are generally filled by Brahmins, Bunnias (merchants), or persons of the Kaith, or writer tribe.

The lowest Grassiah, or plundering chief, in Central India, has his minister, and other officers proportionate to his lands and followers; and his authority over his

* In the army they hold the first commands. Rajpoot rulers, who, though of the small revenue, have high rank, like the Raja of Rutlam, have a hereditary leader of the Herawul, or van-guard, (the first rank in the army,) as well as one of the Chundawul, or rear-guard.

† The Hindu name of this officer is Bhanjgurree.



adherents is, in theory, as absolute as that of the highest prince; but in the exercise of it he is more restrained: for, being weaker, he is in greater danger of defection or opposition, or of those feuds which any attack upon life among the military tribes never fails to occasion.

The principal chiefs of the Bheels, who are usually termed Bhomeahs, are almost all of the Bheelalah* tribe. They exercise the most absolute power; and their orders to commit the most atrocious crimes are obeyed by their ignorant but attached subjects, without a conception on the part of the latter that they have an option, when he whom they term their Dhunnee (Lord) issues the mandate.

During the examination into the guilt of Nadir Singh, when taking the evidence of some female prisoners, it appeared that the father and husband of one of them, a girl about fourteen years of age, had been instruments in committing the murder of which he was accused. She was asked if they put the deceased to death; "Certainly they did," was her firm reply; "but they acted by the Dhunnee's, or lord's order." "That may be true," it was remarked, "but it does not clear them; for it was not an affray, it was a deed perpetrated in cold blood." "Still," said the girl, "they had the Dhunnee's order." The person† conducting the examination shook his head, implying it would not be received in justification. The child (for she was

* The Bheelalah claim a descent, by their father, from the Rajpoots, their mother being of the Bheel tribe.

† I superintended the trial of Nadir Singh, aided by one of my assistants, Captain T. D. Stuart, who noted the expressions in the text in the proceedings.



hardly more) rose from the ground where she was sitting, and, pointing to two sentries who guarded them, and were standing at the door of the room, exclaimed, with all the animation of strong feeling, "These are your soldiers; you are their Dhunnee; your words are their laws: if you order them this moment to advance and put me, my mother, and cousin, who are now before you, to death, would they hesitate in slaying three female Bheels? If we are innocent, would you be guilty of our blood, or that of these faithful men?" After this observation, she re-seated herself, saying, "My father and husband are Nadir's soldiers."

The Bheel chiefs have a power over the lives and property of their own subjects; but this the construction of the community compels them to exercise with caution; and the rights of the different tribes or families, of which the force of the principal chiefs is formed, are defended by an hereditary Turvee, or head, to whom they owe obedience, and who, though he may become the subject of a principal chief, maintains an independence proportionate to the strength and attachment of his followers. There is seldom much revenue, except plunder, in one of these Bheel chiefships; but even in this matter they have a rude species of government, for which there are officers* distinct from those Turvees, or heads of

* Nadir Singh, the principal Bheel chief of the Vindhya range, had the following officers:

A Dewan or minister, who kept the few records of this barbarous petty State.

A Collector of dues from hamlets. This officer also received all cattle and plunder that were stolen, and distributed the shares according to established usage; he also served out grain, &c., from the chief's stores to men proceeding on plundering expeditions.



families, who with a certain number of men are bound to attend him.

The form of government of every community in Central India having been generally described, it is next necessary to notice the judicial and military systems of the various rulers and chiefs who exercise authority in that country.

The municipal and village institutions of India are competent, from the power given them by the common assent of all ranks in the country, to maintain order and peace within their respective circles. These local authorities have been cherished or neglected, according to the disposition of the sovereign. But, as far as we can trace the history of Central India, their rights and privileges have never been contested, even by the tyrants and oppressors who slighted them; while, on the other hand, all just princes have founded their chief reputation and claim to popularity on attention to them.

The police now existing in Central India merits but a short notice. It is solely regulated by the Collector of the district, who intrusts it to petty officers, termed

A Havildar, or commander of horse, whose duty, independent of his military command, was to take charge of cattle at the time they were captured, and make them over to the Collector, who never went on such expeditions.

A head executioner. This man always attended the chief.

A keeper of prisoners.

An intelligencer and road-watcher, whose duty was to obtain information of unprotected villages and travellers. This was an office of much trust.

All the officers of this plundering chief had their pay in established shares of the scanty produce of the few fields they cultivated, and of the booty taken.



Thannahdars, who are posted in different places with small parties, and whose duty is to apprehend murderers, thieves, and other delinquents. In large and populous towns, where a good police is of most consequence, it is placed under an officer called the Cutwal, who has an establishment of armed men for the apprehension of malefactors and offenders of every description. A discretionary power of fine, imprisonment, and slight punishment, is vested in this person. The character of the police in the principal towns of Central India, under the Mahratta Government, may be judged, when it is stated, that the office of Cutwal is publicly rented, and that the police is considered as a source of profit, not of expenditure, to the State. It would be useless to make farther observations upon a system which must be more directed to private gain than to public good. It is proper, however, to state, that this shameless traffic in justice is of late introduction, even among Mahratta princes, and is chiefly limited to them. In the territories of Zalim Singh, the ruler of Kotah, a good and efficient police* has been established; but this extraordinary personage has for more than forty years added to his other functions that of chief magistrate of his own territories.

In each of the towns of Central India, there is a Zemindar, who is considered as the head of the landholders and cultivators; a Chowdry, or head of the Bunnia or

* Zalim Singh has formed a very extended system of espionage throughout his territories by the means of a large and well-educated corps of Brahmin Herkarrahs. There is a most remarkable connexion, both in the formation and employment of his corps of spies, with that formed in Mysore, which is fully described by Colonel Wilks in his Report on that country.



mercantile tribes; and a Mehtur, or head of every other class of the inhabitants down to the lowest: these are hereditary offices, and, though instances frequently occur where bad conduct causes the party to be superseded, it is always by one of the same family, and the measure generally originates with the class of which they are the head, not with the Government.*

The above persons, who are paid by a share in the land, or by dues or fees from their respective tribes, exercise a jurisdiction in their different classes, and settle, by their own decision, or by the aid of a Panchayet, or court, all disputes they can adjust, without reference to the officers of Government. In all cases of serious disputes or crimes, impartial collectors of districts, or governors of towns, invariably call to their assistance the heads of the caste to which the complainants and defendants belong; and it may be stated that, in proportion as justice is administered through this channel, or otherwise, it is popular, or the reverse, with the people. The Zemindars, Chowdries, and Mehturs, though they are deemed the natural protectors and advocates of their tribes, are also the supporters of order and authority, and, as such, bound to prosecute and punish offenders.

Criminal cases are referred to the Prince of the country, unless under circumstances where prompt military execution is deemed necessary. No officer under the rank of a Sir Soobah, or governor and commander of a pro-

* The interference of Government is regarded with great jealousy, and is never exercised without causing much discontent; besides, the object is not answered, for it is the confidence of those under him that gives weight and influence to the head of the tribe, and that confidence will never be given to the creature of authority.



vince (who has had specific power delegated to him), can inflict the punishment of death.

If a murder or robbery be committed, the party or parties suspected are apprehended and examined by the manager of the town or district, who either hears the case himself, or calls in the aid of a Panchayet, or tribunal of not less than five of the principal public functionaries or inhabitants, to investigate the circumstances. The local officers of Government, the Farnavese of the district, the Zemindar, and the Canoongo, or keeper of the land records, are invariably members of this court of inquiry, for so it may be called.

An abstract of the evidence and opinion of this description of Panchayet, which often conducts its proceedings in the presence of the Collector, is transmitted to the Dewan, who, after receiving the orders of the Prince, directs either that the prisoner be released, or punished. These Panchayets are called by petty Mahratta collectors, more, perhaps, for their own safety, than from any regard for the form or substance of justice. The tribunal is chiefly resorted to by persons who desire to avoid the complaints and accusations to which they would be exposed, if they decided on capital crimes* without having

* A report was made to me, that a murder was imputed to a Fakeer at Nolye. I stated that, as it had occurred in Sindia's country, I could have no concern with it, and requested the Collector of the district in which it occurred to proceed in the usual course. A Panchayet was appointed; and on my expressing the wish, the following copy of the proceedings sent to Dowlet Row Sindia was transmitted to me:

"Tarjumah, or abstract of the proceedings of a Panchayet held at Nolye, as registered in the Komisdar's office at that place.

"A Fakeer, called Gool Shah, inhabitant of Nolye, gave his daughter in marriage to Emam Khan, a young Patan of Bhopal, having sti-



recourse to it. Powerful governors of provinces are not so guarded, and often determine without any reference. Punchayets are seldom called in criminal cases, when the offence is committed in the capital, or its vicinity: but even in such cases they are at times assembled; and when the abstract of proceedings is submitted to the Prince, he takes the opinion of a Shastree, or learned Brahmin, regarding the sentence that should be awarded, and the punishment is usually in conformity with the Hindu law.

In offences of a spiritual nature, when the case is clear

"pulated that the youth was to turn mendicant: this he agreed to, and both drank sherbet from the same cup, one of the ceremonies of initiation. It appears some garden-ground and a well were given as the bride's portion.

"Gool Shah had three Chelahs, or disciples, Emam Shah, Madoo Shah, and Goolzar Shah: these people being envious that Emam Khan should be preferred to them, determined to take his life, but failed in the first attempt by his refusing to eat some poisoned sweet-meats. Upon this they attacked and wounded him so severely with a sword, that he died ten days afterwards. The Chelahs fled, and all search for them proved ineffectual; but the Fakeer was confined six months; when a Punchayet was assembled, consisting of the heads of tribes and people of respectability in Nolye, who came to the following decision:

"That, as no proof had been obtained of Gool Shah being concerned in the murder of Emam Khan, he should be released from confinement; but, should the Chelahs who have absconded be hereafter laid hold of, and confess that they acted by order of Gool Shah, then he is to pay the price of blood." (This is the literal translation of the expression used.)

"Dated 22nd Mohurram 1228 Fasilee, 9th Cartick 1878 Sumbut.

(Signed) "KAZEE MAHOMED FUZZIL U DEEN.

"BIN MAHOMED OMAR, on the part of the Mahomedans.

"LUCKMEER CHUND, Chowdry, on the part of the Bunnias.

"LETCHMUN DOSS, Chowdry, on the part of the Zemindars.

"OUKAR MUL, Chowdry of Zemindars."

and the facts undeniable, the most learned Brahmins are called to aid, by their advice, the judgment of the Prince; but where the facts are disputed, there must, if justice is not disregarded, be a Punchayet; and though that is also chiefly composed of religious men, some Government officers, the Zemindar and Canoongo of the town or district (whether Brahmins or not), attend the trial.

The same rules apply to Caste disputes: when the case is clear, the heads of the caste decide; but, when doubtful, a Punchayet is assembled with the usual officiating officers, aided by a Punj, formed of the heads and most respectable men of the class to whom the accusers and accused belong. Cases of disputed debts and property are usually settled among the parties; but when referred to Government, Punchayets sit upon them, and a reluctant party is often compelled* to submit to arbitration, and to abide by the award, which, if he be found guilty, is sometimes imprisonment, but more frequently the seizure and sale of his property to satisfy the demands against him.

The Potails aid the police in seizing criminals, and they have a limited jurisdiction of a similar character to that exercised by the heads of castes in towns. It is their duty to punish slight offences, to settle all trifling disputes, and, where they conceive their personal decision will not be satisfactory, to call a Punchayet, which is composed of the most respectable inhabitants, who are often, if the case be of any consequence, aided

* This is done by a process called Tuckâza; a word which, in its literal sense, means "dispute," but which in law signification means as much force as can without violation of usage be adopted, to force a defendant to meet the appeal of a plaintiff.



by the Panchayets and principal men of the neighbouring villages.

The general object of these village Panchayets is to accommodate matters between the parties, as it is their interest to prevent the interference of the Government officers as much as possible. Where, however, the affair is serious, the Putwarry, or accountant of the village, notes the particulars, and sends a copy to the Collector. In cases where the interests of the State are at all concerned, it is deemed a punishable crime in the Potal to suppress them. Disputes about boundaries* are never

* The most common cases of litigation among villagers are about boundaries and claims to lands. Upon these they are too violent to settle them among themselves, and they are invariably the subject of the longest and most intricate investigation by Panchayets: but as such must always include men who have some interest in the question, their decisions are seldom satisfactory. Oaths, ordeals, and every mode is resorted to, to accommodate or decide these disputes. The following account of a boundary settlement made by Captain A. MacDonald, my assistant, will explain the extraordinary manner in which these are sometimes adjusted.

"Himmat Singh and Sheo Singh, Thakoors of Gorbeylee and Burkairee, had a dispute regarding a tract of ground, part of which had been long cultivated by the latter, who during the last year farther encroached on it by ploughing up more of the land in question.

"At the instigation of the Collector of Narraingurh, Himmat Singh caused cattle to be driven into the fields of the disputed tract, with a view to injure the crops. The latter, however, resorted to precisely the same means for retaliation, and the crops both of Burkairee and Gorbeylee suffered slightly from the cattle grazing upon them.

"The Collector of Narraingurh, ostensibly to settle the quarrel, but most probably to aid Himmat Singh, sent some Pagah horse, who, advancing with a show of attack, received some shots from the matchlock-men of Sheo Singh, and two men were wounded for their audacity.



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settled by the village authorities. In all differences between individuals respecting debts and petty thefts, the decision of the Bace is sufficient. There is a right

"A stony ridge, of easy ascent from the West, and abrupt from the East, nearly equidistant from the two villages, would seem to mark their natural boundaries. This ridge runs about three coss nearly North and South; on the West is Burkairee, on the East Gorbeylee. On the Burkairee side also is the small disputed tract separated from the other fields of the village by a narrow, stony, barren strip of land, and from those of Gorbeylee by a broader strip of the same nature.

"Along each of these barren spots are shewn small heaps of stones piled up, running nearly parallel with the ridge, and denoting lines of demarcation; that of the two lines chosen by each chief as the true boundary, being the one most distant from his own village, in order that the disputed lands might be brought within his own limits. It was agreed, therefore, that each party should produce five men acquainted with the local merits of the question, who should decide upon the true line by taking a solemn oath. The first five that were brought by the Gorbeylee chief, on being questioned, denied all knowledge of the subject which they were to swear to illustrate. But an equal number were soon forthcoming from Gorbeylee and neighbouring villages. The oaths were administered, and each party swore to the identity of that line which was in favour of their chief. Thus failed the first attempt at adjustment.

"The parties were now asked, if they would acknowledge that to be the true line which should be traced by a respectable man wearing the hide of a newly-killed buffalo. To this proposition both willingly assented. Dullah, Potal of Burkairee, having been approved, a buffalo was killed and its head placed on a heap of stones, which Sheo Singh declared to be his Northern boundary. When the skin was stripped off, Dullah covered himself with it, and proceeded, followed by the parties, from the spot where the head of the animal was placed, in a direction nearly South, and taking a new line a few yards nearer to Burkairee, but to the East of the disputed tract, thus giving up the cultivated lands to the Burkairee chief."

It is curious to observe, that the local officers of Holkar and Ghuf-
foor Khan, who were present at the settlement of this dispute, were,



of appeal; but this, when the judgment is supported by a Panchayet, is seldom made, except there is a very glaring partiality or oppression.

Jahgeerdars, who have the exclusive administration of their own lands, can decide all cases that are not capital; and even in these they have the power of putting to death the offender, if he is of a tribe of noted and avowed thieves (of which there are many in Central India); but not if he belongs to an industrious class; and, above all, they cannot punish capitally any Wuttundar, or hereditary village-officer.

The above observations shew that the Mahratta princes of Central India, when their possessions were in a settled state, observed in their administration of criminal and civil justice the same system as the Paishwah and other Hindu rulers; and within the last two years the Panchayets have been generally revived in the States of Holkar, of the Puars of Dhar and Dewass, and in several of the districts of Sindia. Indeed, there are some of the

as well as all the other parties, perfectly satisfied with the result of this last and most solemn appeal which can be made by Hindus in such cases.

Vide Captain MacDonald's letter to G. Wellesley, Esq., 25th October, 1820.

Major Henley, in his Notes, observes upon this practice, which is as common in the Eastern as the Western parts of Malwa, "that after the Potail, or other respectable man, has walked the boundary, his family and cattle are watched for several days, and if any thing that has life, and was in health when the ceremony was performed, dies before the fixed period of probation (which is generally written) it is deemed a judgment upon falsehood; the man is disgraced, and the settlement rendered null and invalid."



latter, in which these established and respected courts have never been wholly disused.*

The principal Rajas of Central India have the same forms of justice as the Mahrattas. With both, however, the punishment of the most heinous crimes in men of high rank is seldom carried farther than a confiscation of their lands. This lenity, which usually proceeds from fear, or from political motives in punishing capital offences, has conduced much to the continuation of those feuds which pervade the whole Rajpoot country, in which murders in retaliation are very common.

The police of Zalim Singh, the regent of Kotah, has been noticed. He is himself the head civil and criminal judge of his country; but, though always stern and rigid, his decisions (where policy does not interfere) are remarkable for their wisdom and justice. He substitutes at his court (to which he brings all cases except the most trifling) a few men of high character and knowledge in the place of Punchayets. To these persons, who are in his service, he usually commits the investigation of every case of consequence, and, after receiving their report, is aided by their knowledge and experience in giving his own judgment.

A mode of having select individuals who form a permanent Punchayet, or special court, to aid the prince, prevails in several large towns of Central India. In

* The rich districts of Mundissor and Katchrode have, under a family of hereditary Rentars, enjoyed comparative quiet; and in them, as well as Nolye and other provinces, Punchayets have always existed.



Rutlam* this duty is deemed hereditary in some of the principal families, and is considered a high distinction ; and those enjoying it are regarded with veneration by the people.

* Particular persons, who enjoy a high character, are always as a matter of course members of Punchayet courts in many of the large towns of Malwa. The names of men who in better times performed this duty in the town of Oojein and Indore, are still cherished ; and at present there are in Rutlam some of the principal inhabitants, who have in the revered character of Punch, or belonging to the Punchayet, gained much celebrity. The Punch of Rutlam may, in fact, be said to form a constituent part of its government, and they exercise a right of defending its inhabitants from oppression, as well as of adjusting its disputes. This is in some degree to be referred to a considerable part of its population being formed of settlers from the neighbouring towns of Tandla and Peeplawud, who fifty years ago fled from violence and oppression to Rutlam, then ruled by the virtuous Rani Amrut Bae, from whom they obtained a kind of charter, in which their immunities were specified. The heads were as follows :

" 1st.—That no dispute among themselves should be carried out of their own society to the Government officers for inquiry or decision.

" 2nd.—That they should be exempt from the power of any officer of the Government, or of any Sepoy, coming to their houses to summon them as delinquents, or criminals.

" 3rd.—That if their women had illicit intercourse (with men not their husbands or protectors), they should not be held as having committed any offence against the Government ; nor be punishable in any manner by the Government for such crimes."

The chief persons of this colony became the Punch, or magistrates of their own people ; and as disputes occurred between them and others of the inhabitants, the heads of the latter were nominated to sit in Punchayets with them to adjust these differences. This duty has become hereditary in several families, and the punchayet court of Rutlam has, and still maintains, a just fame for its integrity and wise decisions. The principal persons are called Mookhs, or presidents ; and one of these is so respected, that his house is a sanctuary for criminals.

In the administration of criminal justice among the Rajpoots of Central India, the ruler or lord is deemed absolute; but in some cases of murder, theft, burglary, or of persons entering a house secretly with any design against the honour of the females of the family, the master of the house may slay the party without being accountable to his chief. In common cases the murderer is seized and brought for examination before the prince, or his minister, who acts sometimes from his own judgment, but oftener with the assistance of a Punchayet, consisting of Government officers and heads of classes, as has been described under the Mahratta system of administration. Punchayets are employed in the Rajpoot States in all civil matters of importance; nor would a decision, where property was concerned, be deemed satisfactory or just, unless the chief had resorted to the aid of one of these courts composed of the most respectable of the inhabitants of the country.

The nearest relations of a murdered person, or the man who has suffered loss by theft, are at once the complainants and accusers. On every occasion the prisoner is allowed the aid, if he desires it, of a friend; in civil cases both the plaintiff and defendant may have persons to assist them, should they be unequal to advocate their own cause; but there are never any Vakeels,* or lawyers, in these Punchayets. The aid of Shastries and Mookhs, or

* There is no part of our administration that is regarded with more alarm by Natives than that branch of our system of justice which establishes Vakeels, or renders them necessary. They argue, with prejudice, but not altogether without reason, that this artful class promotes a spirit of litigation, and that their being necessary is a proof of the too great length and perplexity of our regulations.



men learned in the law, is called for, if he requires it, by the prince, when he pronounces judgment; and in cases where the Punchayet has to award, the members are usually chosen from men who have knowledge both of Hindu law and usage; and if those require assistance, they can always have it by calling in learned persons.

Witnesses are not sworn by Punchayets, unless doubts are entertained of their credibility; they are cross-questioned and threatened, but seldom, if ever, punished. A prisoner's confession is invariably received as the best and most positive proof that can be obtained of his guilt.

In every case a person tried by a Punchayet may appeal to the Raja, or chief, who can reverse the decision, and order another Punchayet: such instances are, however, rare; but the accused or condemned person may, even after the chief's decision, appeal to the ordeal, which generally requires that he should put his arm into boiling water or oil, or have a red-hot iron placed on his hand, a leaf of the sacred Peepul* being first bound upon it. If he is scalded by the liquid, or burnt by the iron, he is guilty, and the sentence is carried into execution. If unhurt, the miracle is received in testimony of his innocence; the man is considered a favourite of the Divinity, and not only released, but generally receives presents. These appeals are not unfrequent, and culprits, aided by art, or the collusion of those who have the conduct of the ordeal, sometimes escape.

In both the territories of the Mahratta and Rajpoot rulers of Central India, the supposititious crime of witchcraft is punished with more severity than any other;

* *Ficus Religiosa*.



but the punishment is almost always inflicted by the prince, by individuals, or by the rabble; and there is seldom any reference to a Panchayet, for even the forms of justice are in such cases neglected. This subject, however, belongs more to the superstitious usages than to the institutions of the country, and will be fully noticed hereafter. The forms of Panchayets differ in many places, but the principles by which they are regulated are every where the same. These courts, as they now exist in Central India, may be divided into two classes: the first, (composed of Government officers and heads of caste) who aid the prince, or his chief functionaries, in investigating civil and criminal cases; and the second, Panchayets of arbitration. The former are mere courts of inquiry, which have little, if any fixed character; and as they depend, both in their formation and proceedings, on the will of the prince and his delegated officers, they can hardly be deemed an established and recognized part of the Government. Courts of arbitration may be termed public and private. When the parties are at issue on any case relating to property, and appeal to the ruling authority, a Panchayet sits, in which each is entitled to name an equal number, and the Government appoints an officer as umpire, who presides. Those concerned have, however, a right to object to this president, if they deem him partial; and, as the court is one which cannot be constituted but through their own assent, the objection, if persevered in, compels the nomination of another. In private arbitration the Government is not appealed to; but in all cases where the parties refer by mutual consent to a court of arbitration, they bind themselves (as has been stated) to abide by its award.



When a party complains to a prince, or the local officer, against a debtor, or a person that has injured him, a Punchayet (should his complaint be deemed just) is generally ordered, and the Government interposes to compel* the defendant to answer.

The members of the Punchayet are selected by the general suffrage of their fellow-citizens ; and, whether in the lower or higher ranks, a person, who has once established a reputation for talent and integrity in these courts, is deemed a permanent member. It is a popular distinction, and becomes, therefore, a point of fame. A person is estimated in proportion as he is free from suspicion of being actuated by influence or corruption ; and to have fame as a Punch† is an object of ambition with the poorest inhabitant of the hamlet as well as the highest and wealthiest citizen. To sit upon these courts is conceived a duty which every man is bound to perform. The members receive no pay ;‡ their attendance

* This is done by the Tuckāze, as explained at p. 456.

† To be an established member of the Punch, or court, gives distinction ; but to be the Mookh, or president of the court of Punchayet, is the highest distinction a citizen can have. Madhoo Seit, the opium-merchant, was long Mookh of the Punchayet courts of Oojein, and had great fame. Those who now preside over this court in Rutlam have been mentioned.

‡ Major Henley, who has had recourse to these courts at Shujahal-poor, makes in his notes the following observations upon these points :

" At first the persons summoned as members of these courts noticed the expense they incurred by being called from their families and homes ; and a small per diem allowance for subsistence was in consequence granted for a short time. Afterwards it occurred that the persons employed had been without an exception either Potails or Putwarries, which classes of village-officers being liberally endowed by the State in both Pergunnahs, it would seem Government



is regulated with attention to general convenience ; but, after consenting to sit, it is not to be evaded, and Government sometimes interferes to supersede by its authority frivolous excuses for absence.

There must be five persons, as the heads of a Panchayet ; the other members are indefinite, being more or less, according to the case and the convenience of the parties. The junior members come and go during the examination, and sometimes, if the trial is long, absent themselves for days or weeks ; but the principal persons who have been originally nominated give an undivided attention to what is before them ; and their authority among the other members is proportionate to their reputation ; and in cases of arbitration, relative to land or property, they may be deemed judges, while their assessors are not unlike a jury. The Panchayet is expected to be unanimous in its award, but it is not indispensable that it should be so. A very large majority* is, however, required to make its opinion or decision respected ; and the power it has, with the concurrence of the Government officer, to expel any obstinate or contumacious

" had a right to claim their occasional services under such circumstances as those here stated. This was explained to them, and the allowance rescinded. The decisions of a Panchayet thus composed " have invariably proved satisfactory."

* Major Henley, speaking of these courts, states in reference to usage in the Eastern parts of Malwa : " The decision is, *prima facie* required to be unanimous, but, should one member of the court persist in objecting, his protest is to be recorded. In the event of two members dissenting, the proceedings are nullified. The decree passed is subscribed by the court, the Government officers in attendance, and lastly by the parties themselves ; its execution is then ordered by the appropriate authority, and the document recorded in the office as a bar to renewed litigation on the same subject."



member, generally secures unanimity, which is very essential to the continuance of an institution of its character.

The Governments in Central India have settled fines and fees upon all cases brought before a Panchayet, which vary according to the nature of the case and the wealth of the parties. The fine which is levied* on the person who loses the cause, is the heaviest; while the fee† from the party who gains it, is proportionably light. This practice, and the shame of being found with a bad cause by the most respectable men of their own tribe, check a spirit of litigation, which would not appear to have ever been very prevalent in this country.

Fees were never given as a matter of course to the members of Panchayets in Central India: such gifts would, according to the answer of many old and respectable inhabitants (who have been referred to), have soiled their proceedings. But it is here necessary to state that the natives of this province have been for the last twenty years so exposed to an arbitrary military power, under which every form of justice was condemned, that they may be disposed to exaggerate the merits of a system, which is, in many districts, like a tale of other times. It cannot, however, be against the character of such an institution,‡ that its merits are over-rated, and that it

* This fine is called Goonahgaree, or "penalty for crime."

† This fee is termed Shookaranna, or "an offering of gratitude."

‡ Nothing can exceed the feelings which the Natives both of high and low rank express regarding courts of Panchayets. I was appealed to in a case of some consequence from one of Dowlet Row Sindia's civil officers, to allow such a court to sit at the British cantonment of Mhow; which I declined. Indore was next proposed; I desired the parties to go there, and directed his agent with me to write to Tantia



is cherished in the memory of those for whose benefit it has been established.

Punishments beyond those awarded by Panchayets were entirely at the discretion of Government; and throughout Central India, with few exceptions, this power has been exercised for the emolument of the ruler and his officers. Murders are usually atoned for by heavy fines; and of late years not only crimes, but disputes between any two parties, have been openly regarded, at the principal Mahratta courts, as sources of revenue. When any party engaged in such contentions applies for justice, the quarrel is considered not as to its merits, but as to what it is likely to produce; and shamelessly given, or sold, to a person* who is nominated by the prince to

Jogh, the minister of Holkar, that I hoped the proceedings of the Panchayet would be just and impartial. The following is his answer :

"The general has sent Kurreem Borah and Adam Borah here, that there may be a Panchayet on the management of Puangurh and Dohud. Here every thing of the kind is, and must be correct. Besides, in a Panchayet, partiality to father or son is quite impossible : how can it be evinced towards others ?"

This, it may be said, is mere profession ; but it shews the respect and veneration in which even those who exercise almost absolute power hold, or pretend to hold, this institution.

* A Huzooriah of Sindia's brought me a letter from the acting resident at Gualior, and one from Hindee Row Ghatkia, begging my support to the son of Bajee Row Jeswunt, formerly a Soobahdar of part of Malwa, in an affair in which his interference could not be admitted without creating dissension in a family. On being asked if this was not known at Gualior, the Huzooriah replied, "Certainly they knew it very well, but this *Tunta Punta* (dispute) has been given to Jeswunt Row's son, and beyond such jobs he has only one poor village to subsist himself and adherents." I, however, prevented any profit upon this occasion, as such could only be obtained by



examine and decide upon the contested cause. A favourite Huzooriah is sometimes deputed; and in such instances, whether the case be decided by the local manager, or a Panchayet, the fees and claims to remuneration of the "servant* of the presence" are distinctly specified, and must be defrayed. This practice, which was, during the disturbed times of the province, very general, is now much limited to the Government of Dowlet Row Sindia.

The Bheels, and other classes of noted thieves, being unable to ransom their lives, generally suffer for capital

throwing a family, that had been reconciled with much trouble, into disorder again; and Sindia's right to interfere in their affairs rested on very slight grounds.

Vide private letter to Captain J. Stewart, 12th September, 1820.

* The following is a literal translation of an order, with the seal of D. R. Sindia, brought by one of his Huzooriahs, who was sent to aid in establishing claims of a complainant. It specifies all his fees.

(Seal of D. R. Sindia.)

"Dowlet Row Sindia to Bhojah Bugwan, inhabitant of Rutlam.
(Arabic year Soorsum 1231.)

"Hurchund Seit, of Oojein, has claims against you, of which you decline coming to a fair arrangement: so it is represented. This order is in consequence given, that on receiving it you may come to a fair adjustment. For this purpose the Sircar has deputed Govinda Munguttia, Huzooriah, whose Mussallah (*douceur*) is fixed at five hundred rupees, and a Kummer Kholah of a hundred rupees, besides his daily subsistence at five rupees in money. The maintenance of him, a Jawos (Hirkarah) who attends him, and his horse, is also to be given. A daily payment is also to be made to him as a farther house expense of two rupees and a quarter. Given in the month, &c., &c."

N. B.—Mussallah is, literally, a compound of spices, or seasoning. It is here used metaphorically for *douceur*. Kummer Kholah means ungirding the loins, which the Huzooriah will not do till this fee is paid.



crimes. They are usually hung, or beheaded. Imprisonment is common; and State prisoners, who it is desired should not live, are sent to an unhealthy hill-fort, where either the climate, starvation, or slow poison, terminates their existence. Hindu rulers, though often cruel, are seldom sanguinary, and public executions are rare; but torture is a common expedient, sometimes to discover the guilt, but oftener to compel men to reveal wealth. Neither rank, sex, nor caste, has guarded individuals from its infliction, as is fully shewn by many examples in the history of this country.

Capital punishment among the petty Rajpoot States is unfrequent, in the ratio of the weakness and poverty of these princes: a fear (particularly when the culprit is a man of rank, or belongs to a strong family or tribe) to incur by an act of power, the resentment of the friends and relations of the criminal, combined with a desire of obtaining money, makes them in most cases commute the punishment (however atrocious the guilt) for a fine.

When petty Rajpoot princes desire the death of either a guilty or innocent individual, they have recourse more usually to secret assassination than to public execution. Robberies, like murders, are seldom openly punished with death, except when the robbers are poor, and hardened offenders; restoration of property almost always obtains pardon. The character of the different classes of the inhabitants of Central India will be hereafter given; and it will be found, that the commission of crimes of a capital nature is much limited to particular tribes.

The Bheels have a rude system of justice. Their



chiefs punish, more or less, according as their power renders them indifferent to the opinion of their adherents; but the first among them are too dependant on the attachment of the Turvees, or heads of families, who support them, to venture often on arbitrary acts of violence with their own people. If a murder, robbery, or theft, be committed, the chief, or family of the sufferer, demands reparation. If refused, immediate resort is had to acts of retaliation or reprisal; and, as this provokes farther violence, it often happens that several lives are lost to avenge a single murder, or fifty heads of cattle plundered in consequence of one having been stolen. These proceedings are, however, only the effusions of sudden rage; and the elders of the tribes, when that is cooled, interfere, and in all quarrels or disputes, great or trifling, they have resort to Punchayets. These often consist of several hundred members, as every person connected with the plaintiff or defendant sits upon them: they generally assemble under the shade of a tree, and settle the terms on which the murder, robbery, or theft is to be compounded. Fines, in cattle or money, are high upon murders; but Bheel Punchayets never inflict death. If the crime committed be of so atrocious a nature as not to be compounded or forgiven, the culprit is pursued and destroyed by those whom this act has made his enemies; but he must be put to death in what they term an affray, that is, in warm blood;—to take the life of each other coolly, is revolting to their usages.

The proceedings of Punchayets of the Bheels are not written; but the memory of the most remarkable of the awards is long preserved in the tradition of the



tribes concerned, and they are quoted on the authority of their elders as precedents for future decision. When one of these rude courts meets, a buffalo and a large quantity of liquor are made ready; and the moment the ceremony of breaking a stick, or throwing a stone into a revered stream, announces that the feud is stanchd, or the dispute settled, the buffalo is slain, and the copious draughts of liquor which are liberally taken by all parties, make them soon forget that they were ever enemies.

The military branch of the Government of the Mahratta chiefs in Central India has been described. The system differs in no degree from that established in the Deekan and every other quarter. Their cavalry are divided into the usual classes. First, Pagah, or household, which means horses belonging to the chief, rode by his relations, hereditary servants, or hired men, called Bargeers. Secondly, Sillahdars, or persons who find their own horses, and serve at a certain sum as an average pay per month. There has hitherto been, as described in the historical part of this work, a third class with these Mahratta armies, who served for booty; but they are now almost extinct, and can never be revived but by the return of those times of anarchy and general plunder in which they originated. All these bodies are governed by a very loose discipline; and the demands they have against their leaders (for they are always in arrears) create continual mutinies, which weaken the little subordination that exists. The consequence is, that, unless in extreme cases, any punishment beyond discharge from the service is very unfrequent; but when these do occur, they are quite arbitrary, depending upon the will



of a commander, who seldom or ever observes even the form of a trial.

The infantry of the Mahratta Governments in Malwa are of two descriptions; the first (which was for a long period the only kind in the service of the chiefs) is the common irregular matchlock-men, either of the country or foreigners: Mewatties, Patans, Mekranies, Sindies, and Arabs, who are hired on higher pay, on account of their supposed superior courage, particularly the last, who have a just reputation for their valour and skill in defending forts and walled towns. The control of these loose bodies of irregular infantry is left to their respective leaders, who manage them agreeably to the established usages of their tribe; and offenders are punished according to the custom of the class to which they belong.

Besides these troops, the Mahratta chiefs of Central India had numerous corps of regular infantry and parks of cannon, which have been before described; these, which were long under European officers, were clothed, disciplined, and governed, as far as the constant interference of the Mahratta superiors with the officers and the want of regular pay would admit, upon the same principles as an European army.

The army of the Nabob of Bhopal has been noticed: the troops maintained by the Rajpoot princes and chiefs (with the exception of Zalim Singh, who has a military establishment not dissimilar to that of the Mahratta chiefs) were in common times their relations and personal retainers, who generally served on horseback for the lands they enjoyed. On an emergency, these petty rulers also hired foreign mercenaries. The former were



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GOVT. OF THE STATES OF CENTRAL INDIA.

ruled by the usages of the tribe to which they belonged ; the latter were under their respective leaders ; but the want of ability of the princes, who entertained these bodies at a moment of necessity, to pay them, generally subverted all order, and in many instances led to these professed servants of the State becoming its real masters, and the cruel oppressors both of the chief and his subjects. In such cases, it is superfluous to add that little subordination or military discipline remained, beyond what the concurrent voice of the officers, who became a species of military aristocracy, thought essential for self-preservation. These bodies of irregular and turbulent foreign mercenaries have been all expelled from Central India ; and the military branch of the Government of the Rajpoot chiefs is now (with few exceptions) intrusted solely to their own tribe and immediate dependants.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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