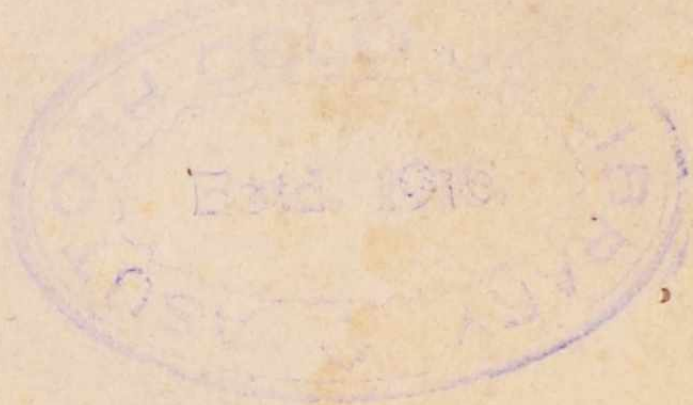


THUG  
OR  
A MILLION MURDERS



AUTHOR OF

TALES OF A SHIKARI, OR BIG-GAME SHOOTING IN INDIA  
FIRST PRINCIPLES OF TACTICS AND ORGANISATION  
ETC. ETC.



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# THUG

OR

## A MILLION MURDERS

BY

COLONEL JAMES L. SLEEMAN

C.M.G., C.B.E., M.V.O., M.A., J.P.

*Knight of Justice of the Venerable Order of St. John of Jerusalem.  
Companion of the Order of the Sacred Treasure of Japan.  
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WITH A FOREWORD BY

BRIGADIER-GENERAL SIR WILLIAM T. F. HORWOOD,

G.B.E., K.C.B., D.S.O.

**K.K. Venugopal**



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To

MY GRANDFATHER

MAJOR-GENERAL

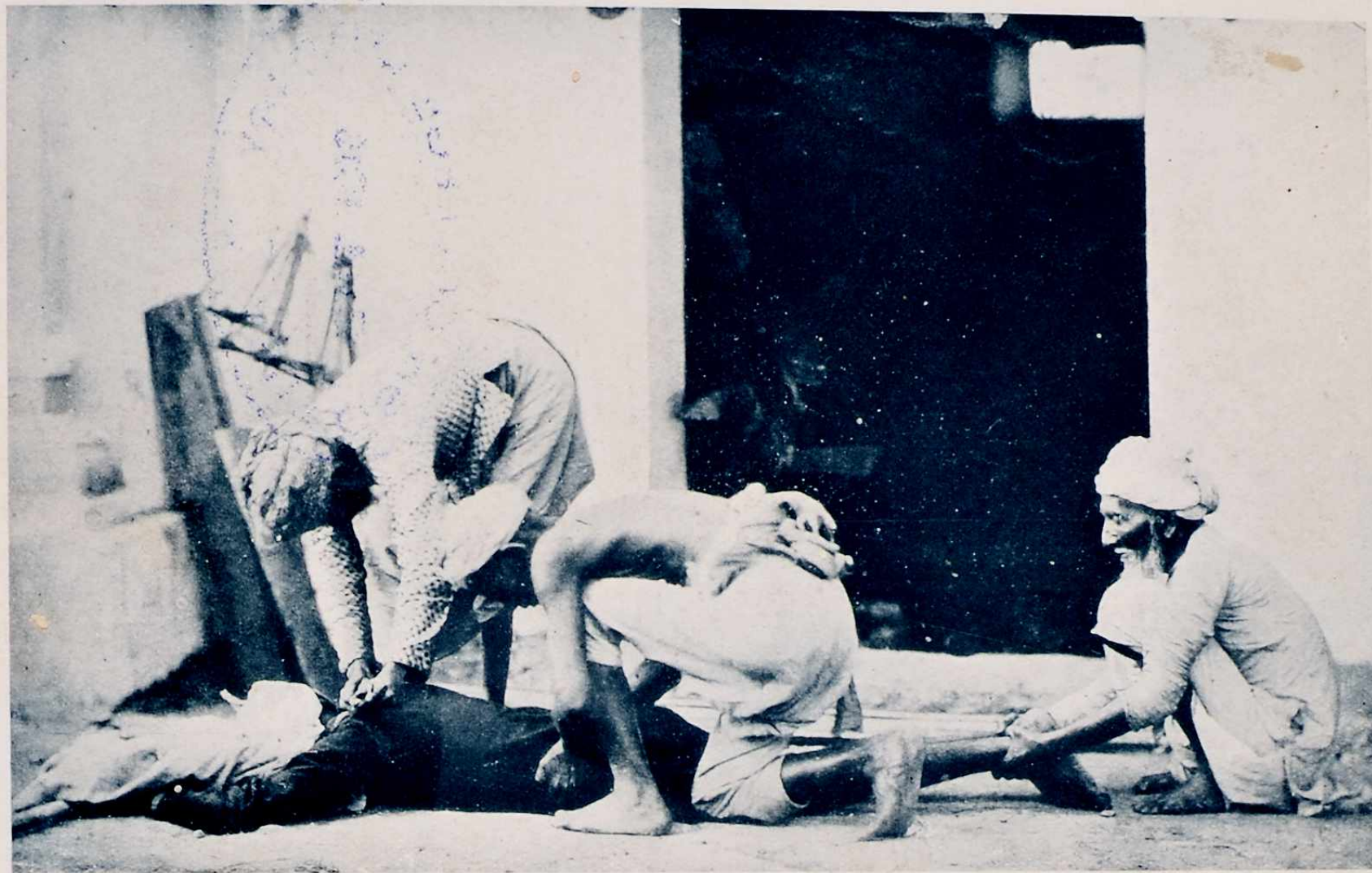
SIR WILLIAM HENRY SLEEMAN, K.C.B.,

THE SUPPRESSOR OF THUGGEE, WHOSE RECORD OF  
FORTY-SEVEN YEARS OF CONSECUTIVE  
SERVICE IN INDIA HAS SELDOM  
BEEN EQUALLED, AND  
NEVER SURPASSED

364

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CAPTURED THUGS DEMONSTRATING THEIR METHODS

A photograph of captured Thugs all of whom were convicted murderers whose lives were spared by turning Approvers, or King's evidence, giving a demonstration of their methods of strangulation whilst undergoing life imprisonment at Jubbulpore. Taken from a photograph of 1855.



## FOREWORD

by

BRIGADIER-GENERAL SIR WILLIAM T. F. HORWOOD,  
G.B.E., K.C.B., D.S.O.

*Late Commissioner of the Police of the Metropolis.*

OF all the benefits which British Rule has brought to India the suppression of Thuggee must, to the Indian, constitute one of the most outstanding.

For this hideous religion of murder was never known to kill a European, and relied for its victims upon Indians alone.

It is a happy coincidence that this very arresting tale of Thuggee should be told by the grandson of that most distinguished servant of State, Major-General Sir William Sleeman, K.C.B., to whose almost superhuman endeavours the suppression of Thuggee, after over three centuries of existence, was chiefly due.

The full story of that suppression is told for the first time exactly a hundred years after the operations described took place.

It revives once again, and at a most appropriate moment, an outstanding proof of British Justice, and tells of the manner in which a strong minority overthrew an evil majority, and how the most murderous organisation the world has ever known was finally killed.

To one who spent ten years of his life in command of the widest known centre in the world for the prevention and detection of crime; namely Scotland Yard, with its average of thirty murders per annum, the contents of this true

record is of overwhelming interest and will be so, I am sure, to thousands of my fellow countrymen who have spent many years in India, and also to others who, judging by the display of Detective Novels on Railway Bookstalls, are thrilled by works upon crime.



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# THUG

## CHAPTER I

### A RELIGION OF MURDER

“NINE hundred and thirty-one murders!” repeated the judge in incredulous tones. “Surely you can never have been guilty of such a number?”

“Sahib,” replied the benevolent looking native standing before him, in a quiet voice tinged with a note of pride, “there were many more, but I was so intrigued in luring them to destruction that I ceased counting when certain of my thousand victims!”

Were this fiction it would be extravagant, indeed unbelievable; but that it is fact must surely compel the most skilled and ruthless Chicagoan gun-man to feel the veriest amateur by comparison and to hand the palm for murder to the Thug of India.

The judge was Sleeman, the celebrated Thug-hunter, and the native on trial before him was the infamous Buhram, whose forty years of killing had left a record of nearly two victims a month throughout that period. Now under arrest, he had turned approver, or King’s evidence, rather than face death himself, and his interrogator was engaged in the difficult task of wresting from him and others the centuries-old secrets of Thuggee—that mysterious hereditary system of murder which had blotted the escutcheon of India for over three hundred years.



Few people looking into that small court-house on that night in an Indian hot-weather could have appreciated the immense issues of life and death entrusted to that solitary Englishman, who had been responsible for exposing this vile religion and was now engaged in its suppression. Still fewer, looking at the mild and pleasant Thug on trial, could have realised that he was a member of an organised band of the craftiest assassins ever known, whose suppression was to prove a gigantic and dangerous task. There was, however, nothing suggestive of judge and accused on this occasion, for Sleeman was endeavouring to worm out the secrets of Thuggee rather than try a man for his life. The cross-examination, indeed, was in the nature of a conversation between two fishermen, one trying to convince the other that he had caught an abnormal sized fish. By this time the Thug appeared to Sleeman not so much a murderer, as a man brought up in a faith which regarded the killing of men as a legitimate sport, both praiseworthy and lucrative, and though he spared no effort to bring these murderers to the gallows, his feelings towards them were influenced by this point of view.

And so, in the stillness of that stifling court-house, the silence broken only by the soft swish of the lazy punkah, the destiny of millions of human lives was being determined, the net drawing closer and closer around an organisation that had exacted such heavy toll of human life.

And if it were difficult to believe that the curtain was rising upon so hideous a drama, it would have been still harder to appreciate that this venerable native, with kindly face and white beard, had encompassed the death of a whole battalion of men, not by means of the ordinary weapons of assassination, but by the skilful use of the most harmless weapon in the world, the *ruhmal*, or strip of cloth, little bigger than a handkerchief. The use of this



was not a question of choice but of decree, for by the laws of the Thugs' satanic faith no blood should be shed during the process of murder: in fact Thuggee could not have existed for so long a time had its followers used knives or daggers.

If the onlooker had hoped to find on the old Thug's countenance some signs of remorse for a life spent almost entirely in treacherous murder, he would have been doomed to disappointment, for the old man positively beamed with pride and reminiscent delight while the story of his ghastly past was drawn from him by skilful questioning, literally smacking his lips when recounting some particularly atrocious deed which had necessitated the exercise of great cunning and inhuman deceit.

"Do you never feel remorse for murdering in cold blood, and after the pretence of friendship, those whom you have beguiled into a false sense of security?" asked Sleeman, after one of these periods of obvious exultation.

"Certainly not!" replied Buhram. "Are not you yourself a *shikari* (hunter of big game), and do not you enjoy the thrill of the stalk, the pitting of your cunning against that of an animal, and are not you pleased at seeing it dead at your feet? So with the Thug who, indeed, regards the stalking of men as a higher form of sport. For you, *sahib*, have but the instincts of the wild beasts to overcome, whereas the Thug has to subdue the suspicions and fears of intelligent men and women, often heavily armed and guarded, and familiar with the knowledge that the roads are dangerous. In other words, game for our hunting is defended from all points save those of flattery and cunning. Cannot you imagine the pleasure of overcoming such protection during days of travel in their company, the joy in seeing suspicion change to friendship, until that wonderful moment arrives when the *ruhmal* completes the *shikar*—this soft *ruhmal*, *sahib*,"—here the old man exhibited a



strip of coarse yellow and white cloth, the Thug colours, "which has terminated the existence of hundreds. Remorse, *sahib*? Never! Joy and elation, often!"

Such were the tales heard day after day during the suppression of Thuggee, varying little in detail, and always characterised by a total lack of feeling for the wretched victims. And Buhram, however vile, was sincere in his belief that he had been engaged in work, not only pleasurable and profitable, but, in addition, productive of great merit in the hereafter. Buhram does not stand alone in his prowess as a Thug, for several others ran him close in Thuggee history: Ramzam, for example, with a total of 604, and Fuddy Khan, whose 508 victims in twenty-one years, as compared with Buhram's 931 in forty years, would have put him at the top of his profession had he not been captured.

In an age when tales of crime prove so attractive and bookstalls groan beneath a wealth of imaginary horrors, these true tales of Thuggee must surely appeal to those who prefer fact to fancy, and if the strange history of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde is of interest, the actual dual personality of the Thug must surely be more so: that fiend in human form, luring his victims to their doom with soft speech and cunning artifice, committing the cold-blooded murder of every man he met, saint or sinner, rich or poor, blind or lame, during his annual holiday, and spending the remainder of the year as a public-spirited citizen of seeming respectability.

Thug, from the Sanskrit root *Sthag*, to conceal, is pronounced Tug, and Thuggee as Tuggee. It is a term often wrongly applied, particularly in the United States, to bandits or hold-up men, who do not attempt either concealment of their intention or strangulation. The Thug was a murderer by hereditary profession, who sincerely believed that he had a divine right to kill, and no other



class of criminal possesses the right to call itself by that name. Certainly not the modern type, for, contemptible and horrible as the Thugs unquestionably were, it is certain that they would be loud in their expression of horror at the deeds of these despicable ruffians in Western countries. However unscrupulous and treacherous the Thugs were, one thing at least stands to their credit, that while they sometimes killed women—though contrary to their faith—they never maltreated them beforehand. The taking of human life for the sheer lust of killing was the Thugs' main object: the plunder, however pleasant, being a secondary consideration. That robbery did not form the principal motive is clear from the fact that they made little effort to ascertain the wealth of those they put to death, and wretchedly poor men, their total worldly wealth less than sixpence, constantly appear in Thuggee records as having been added to the bag. The Thug, indeed, regarded his profession much in the same light as the sportsman: no motive was required for the murders they planned to commit; their prospective victims were unknown to them; and it mattered nothing whether they were Hindu or Mohammedan, for the Thugs had in their ranks members of both religions. All travellers were fish for their net, and they watched their growing toll of human life with exactly the same feeling of pride that the sportsman experiences when making his entries in a game book.

Here was no body of amateur assassins, driven to crime by force of circumstance, but men of seeming respectability and high intelligence, often occupying positions of importance and responsibility in their normal lives, secretly trained from boyhood to the highest degree of skill in strangulation. Each Thug had his particular job to do: to one fell the task of throwing the *ruhmal* around the victim's neck, to others the task of seizing arms and legs and giving those scientific wrenches and cruel blows at vital parts



which ensured his being brought down at the psychological moment. These arts were continually practised by the Thug in his off-duty moments, fathers teaching sons this foul work with parental pride, until all engaged in a Thuggee expedition became so expert that they could strangle their victims with the maximum of adroitness and in the minimum of time. Their art was carried still further, for other Thugs were specially trained to bury and conceal the murdered bodies with such skill that the ground beneath which they rested appeared undisturbed. In the hey-day of the organisation, these experts could bury the body within half an hour, with such success that even the Thugs themselves could only find the graves later by reference to landmarks.

The histrionic sense of the Thug was highly developed, many being remarkably good actors, and if they detected the slightest suspicion on the part of travellers they were attempting to ingratiate themselves with, they immediately departed and disappeared in another direction. No sooner were they out of sight, however, than messengers were sent to other gangs—for they quartered the ground like wolves—who caught up the travellers, primed with any information that the first Thugs had gleaned, and it was seldom that the quarry escaped death.

A rich merchant, for example, protected by an armed escort, would meet on his journey some seemingly poor men, who would ask permission to avail themselves of his protection. Being unarmed and few in number, this request would be granted and the party would proceed together for some days, the Thugs—for such they were—losing no opportunity of making themselves pleasant and useful, until the combined party journeyed together with a confidence born of friendship. Meanwhile other Thugs, apparent strangers, but actually of the same gang, would day by day be overtaken and allowed to join the party, this process



being repeated until at last the genuine travellers were out-numbered. Then the opportunity would come when two or more Thugs stood unobtrusively behind each traveller, waiting for the signal to kill. This was usually "*Tabac la ow*" (Bring tobacco), whereupon the *ruhmal*s were instantly thrown round the necks of the victims who were strangled so skilfully that they could neither escape nor fight for their lives. The bodies were then cut about to prevent swelling upon decomposition, which would raise the surface of the graves and so attract attention, and carefully buried at *beles* (permanent murder places) selected beforehand. These murders were planned with such forethought and accurate calculation that often these graves were prepared many days ahead. If there were people in the vicinity and it was dangerous to dig the graves in the open, the Thugs did not scruple to bury the bodies beneath their own tents, eating their food and sleeping on the soil without a qualm!

Many devices were adopted by the Thugs to make their murders easier, one favourite ruse being to feign sickness, the Thug selected for the part pretending to be taken violently ill. Others would attempt to succour him, but to no purpose—the pains growing increasingly severe. It was then pretended that a charm would restore him, and the doomed travellers were induced to sit around a pot of water, to uncover their necks, and to look up and count the number of stars. Having, in their superstitious folly, put themselves over so completely in the hands of the Thugs, the *ruhmal*s were about their necks in a trice and they were strangled with dispatch. The Thug's repertoire of such tricks was extensive, and he rang the changes according to the type of victim he was after. The *ruhmal* with which the murders were committed was some thirty inches in length, with a knot formed at the double extremity and a slip knot eighteen inches from it, giving the Thug



a firm hold. After the victim had been brought to the ground, the slip knot was loosened and the Thug then made another fold round the neck, put his foot against it, and drew the cloth tight—to quote the words of a Thug, “Just as if packing a bundle of straw.”

In former times the Thugs declared that their goddess, Bhowani, relieved them of the trouble of burying their victims by devouring them herself; but, in order that they might not see her doing this—a nicety not quite in keeping with her legendary character—she had strictly enjoined them never to look back on leaving the scene of a murder. On one occasion, however, a novice of the fraternity disobeyed this rule, and, imitating Lot's wife, looked back and saw the goddess in the act of feasting upon a corpse, which embarrassed her exceedingly, and as a punishment she declared that she would no longer devour those whom the Thugs killed. This was a great blow and they appealed to her mercy, with the result that she graciously consented to present them with one of her teeth for a pick-axe, with which she ordered them in future to bury those whom they destroyed.

This was the legendary introduction of the sacred *kodalee*, which became the chief part of the ritual which preceded every Thuggee expedition. In shape like an adze, five pounds in weight and seven inches in length, it had one point, and was consecrated with special devotion, after which it was called a *kussee* and given into the charge of the shrewdest and keenest Thug of the gang. Its wooden handle was thrown away the moment its use was ended, in order that the axe could be carried in the waistbelt without being seen or creating suspicion. During a Thuggee expedition the pick-axe was buried at nightfall in a secure place, with its point facing the way the Thugs intended to go next day, and they believed that, if another place would give them better sport, the direction of the point



would be found changed in the morning. Formerly this *kussee* was thrown into a well at night, and the Thugs firmly believed that it came up without human help when summoned on the following morning. Ridiculous as this sounds, Sleeman was often told with every evidence of sincere belief that they had seen the sacred pick-axe rise from a well of its own accord and come to the hand of its custodian. Some, indeed, stated that they had seen several pick-axes of different gangs rise from the same well simultaneously and go to their respective bearers! They further believed that the sound made by the *kussee* in digging graves was never heard by anyone but a Thug: that it was more sacred than even Ganges water or the Koran: and that a Thug perjuring himself by taking a false oath upon it died within six days.

Over seventy years later the grandson of Sir William Sleeman conducted tests in India which resulted in the introduction to the British Army of the entrenching tool carried by troops during the Great War. By a curious coincidence, and unknown to him at the time, this tool was almost identical in character with the *kussee* of the Thug, and while the latter had helped in the murder of countless thousands of people, the former saved innumerable lives.

In dealing with the beliefs of Thugs we have fortunately the advantage of documentary proof in the shape of the actual evidence of Thugs themselves, just as it was recorded a hundred years ago. It would seem incredible, otherwise, that anyone could genuinely possess such fantastic faith; but that the Thug did so is made manifest in these, as witness the following authentic conversation between Sleeman and the Thug Nasir:

*Sleeman*: "And you really believe that Bhowani sends you these signs to warn you of danger and guide you to your booty?"



*Nasir* : “Can we—can anybody—doubt it? Did she not in former days, when our ancestors attended to rules, bury the bodies for us and save us the trouble, and remove every sign by which we could be traced?”

*Sleeman* : “You have heard this from your fathers, who heard it from their fathers; but none of you have ever seen it, nor is it true.”

*Nasir* : “It is true, quite true; and though we have not seen this, we have all of us seen the sacred pick-axe spring in the morning from the well into which it had been thrown overnight, and come to the hands of the man who carried it at his call; nay, we have seen the pick-axes of different gangs all come up of themselves from the same well at the same time, and go to their several bearers.”

*Sleeman* : “Yes; and you have all seen the common jugglers by sleight of hand appear to turn pigeons into serpents, and serpents into rabbits, but all know that they do it by their skill, and not by the aid of any goddess. The man who carried your pick-axe is selected for his skill, and gains extra emoluments and distinction; and no doubt can, in the same manner, make it appear that the axe comes out of itself when he draws it out by his sleight of hand.”

*Nasir* (with great energy) : “What! Shall not a hundred generations of Thugs be able to distinguish the tricks of man from the miracles of God? Is there not the difference of heaven and earth between them? Is not one a mere trick, and the other a miracle, witnessed by hundreds assembled at the same time?”

*Sleeman* : “Sahib Khan, you are more sober than Nasir, have you ever seen it?”

*Sahib Khan* : “On one expedition only. During an expedition that I made Imam Khan and his brother carried the pick-axes, and I heard them repeatedly in the morning call them from the well into which they had thrown them



overnight, and I saw the pick-axes come out of themselves from the well, and fall into their aprons, which they held open thus" (here he described the mode).

*Sleeman*: "And you never saw any of your own gangs do this?"

*Sahib Khan*: "Never. I have Thugged for twenty years and never saw it."

*Sleeman*: "How do you account for this?"

*Sahib Khan*: "Merely by supposing that they attend more to omens and regulations than we do. Among us it is a rule never to kill women; but if a rich old woman is found, the gang sometimes get a man to strangle her by giving him an extra share of the booty, and inducing him to take the responsibility upon himself. We have sometimes killed other prohibited people, particularly those of low caste, whom we ought not even to have touched."

This admission is of interest, because the Thug invariably accepted their failure to observe the rules of their goddess as a reason for the downfall of Thuggee.

*Sleeman*: "Does Mahomet, your prophet, anywhere sanction crimes like yours: the murder in cold blood of your fellow creatures for the sake of their money?"

*Sahib Khan*: "No."

*Sleeman*: "Does he not say that such crimes will be punished by God in the next world?"

*Sahib Khan*: "Yes."

*Sleeman*: "Then do you never feel any dread of punishment hereafter?"

*Sahib Khan*: "Never; we never murder unless the omens are favourable; and we consider favourable omens as the mandates of the Deity."

*Sleeman*: "What deity?"

*Sahib Khan*: "Bhowani."

*Sleeman*: "But Bhowani, you say, has no influence upon the welfare or otherwise of your soul hereafter?"



*Sahib Khan*: "None, we believe, but she influences our fates in this world, and what she orders in this world, we believe that God will not punish in the next."

*Sleeman*: "And you believe if you were to murder without the observance of the omens and regulations, you would be punished both in this world and the next, like other men?"

*Sahib Khan*: "Certainly; no man's family ever survives a murder; it becomes extinct. A Thug who murders in this way loses the children he has, and is never blessed with more."

*Sleeman*: "In the same way as if a Thug had murdered a Thug?"

*Sahib Khan*: "Precisely; he cannot escape punishment."

*Sleeman*: "And when you observe the omens and rules, you neither feel a dread of punishment here nor hereafter?"

*Sahib Khan*: "Never."

*Sleeman*: "And do you never feel sympathy for the persons murdered—never pity or compunction?"

*Sahib Khan* (with great emphasis): "Never."

*Sleeman*: "And when you see or hear a bad omen, you think it is the order of the deity not to kill the travellers you have with you, or are in pursuit of?"

*Sahib Khan*: "Yes; it is the order not to kill them, and we dare not disobey."

*Sleeman*: "Do your wives never reproach you with your deeds?"

*Sahib Khan*: "In the South we never tell our wives what we do lest they should disclose our secrets."

*Sleeman*: "And if you told them, would they not reproach you?"

*Sahib Khan*: "Some would, and some—like those of other Thugs who do tell them—would quietly acquiesce."



*Sleeman*: "And be as affectionate and dutiful as the wives of other men?"

*Sahib Khan*: "The fidelity of the wives of Thugs is proverbial throughout India."

*Sleeman*: "That is among Thugs?"

*Sahib Khan*: "Yes."

*Sleeman*: "And the fear of the *ruhmal* operates a little to produce this?"

*Sahib Khan*: "Perhaps a little, but there have been very few instances of women killed for infidelity among us."

Now Nasir and Sahib Khan, the two approvers, proceed to give the opinion of the Thug regarding the possibility of Thuggee being suppressed, doubt having been expressed on this point at an earlier stage of the proceedings.

*Sleeman*: "Do you think that Thuggee can ever be suppressed in the Deccan?"

*Nasir*: "I think it never can."

*Sahib Khan*: "I do not say it never can. I say only that the country is very large and in every one of the five districts there are hundreds of Thugs who are staunch to their oaths and attentive to their usages; that the country is everywhere intersected by the jurisdiction of native chiefs who cannot be easily persuaded to assist."

*Nasir*: "Assist! (contemptuously). Why, when we go into their districts after a Thug, we are every instant in danger of our lives."

Here Nasir speaks as an approver, employed in giving away his brother Thugs, and somewhat sore at his former colleagues being so protected!

*Sleeman*: "And you think that all these obstacles are not to be overcome?"

*Nasir*: "I think not."

*Sleeman*: "That is, you think an institution formed by Bhowani cannot be suppressed by the hand of man?"



*Nasir* : "Certainly I think so."

*Sleeman* : "But you think that no man is killed by man's killing? That all who are strangled are strangled in effect by God?"

*Nasir* : "Certainly."

*Sleeman* : "Then by whose killing have all the Thugs who have been hung at Saugor and Jubbulpore been killed?"

*Nasir* : "God's, of course."

*Sleeman* : "You think that we could never have caught and executed them but by the aid of God?"

*Nasir* : "Certainly not."

*Sleeman* : "Then you think that so far we have been assisted by God in what we have done?"

*Nasir* : "Yes."

*Sleeman* : "And you are satisfied that we should not have ventured to do what we have done unless we were assured that our God was working with us, or rather that we were the mere instruments in His hands?"

*Nasir* : "Yes, I am."

*Sleeman* : "Then do you not think that we may go on with the same assurance until the work we have in hand is done; until, in short, the system of Thuggee is suppressed?"

*Nasir* : "God is almighty."

*Sleeman* : "And there is but one God?"

*Nasir* : "One God above all Gods."

*Sleeman* : "And if that God above all Gods supports us, we shall succeed?"

*Nasir* : "Certainly."

*Sleeman* : "Then we are all satisfied that He is assisting us and, therefore, hope to succeed, even in the Deccan?"

*Nasir* : "God only knows."

*Sahib Khan* : "If God assists, you will succeed, but the country is large and favourable, and the gangs are numerous and well organised."



This interrogation took place before the operations for the suppression of Thuggee were half-way through, and it is obvious that these Thugs were very doubtful about the possibility of its complete destruction. And yet, such was the indomitable character of the small body of British officials charged with this duty, that within seven years of this date Thuggee had ceased to exist in India.

The next extract illustrates the Thug's idea of the sanctity of human life.

*Sleeman*: "When you have a poor traveller with you, or a party of travellers who appear to have little property, and you hear or see a very good omen, do you not let them go in the hope that the virtue of the omen will guide you to better prey?"

*Dorgha*: "Let them go—never, never" (with great emphasis).

*Nasir*: "How could we let them go? Is not the omen the order from heaven to kill them, and would it not be disobedient to let them go? If we did not kill them, how should we ever get any more travellers?"

*Feringeea*: "I have known the experiment tried with good effect—I have known travellers who promised little, let go, and the virtue of the omen brought better."

*Inaent*: "Yes, the virtue of the omen remains, and the traveller who has little should be let go, for you are sure to get a better."

*Sahib Khan* (evidently a die-hard!): "Never, never! This is one of your Hindustanee heresies. You could never let him go without losing all the fruits of your expedition. You might get property, but it could never do you any good. No success could result from your disobedience."

*Morlee*: "Certainly not! The travellers who are in our hands when we hear a good omen must never be let go, whether they promise little or much; the omen is unquestionably the order, as Nasir says."



*Nasir*: "The idea of securing the goodwill of Bhowani by disobeying her order is quite monstrous. We Deccan Thugs do not understand how you got hold of it. Our ancestors were never guilty of such folly."

On reading through this to-day, the conversation might be that of members of a parish meeting discussing a rule connected with the village pump. And yet these mild, quiet, and venerable natives had between them encompassed the murder of thousands of inoffensive people.

After a murder the Thugs held a sacrificial feast of consecrated *gur*, unrefined sugar, which they believed not only increased their desire for Thuggee, but also made them callous to the suffering of their victims. It was a favourite saying of Thugs when standing their trial for life, that if anyone tasted this *gur* he would become a Thug for the rest of his life.

When Sleeman asked Feringeea, who had strangled a beautiful young woman, if he had not felt pity for her, he replied: "We all feel pity sometimes, but the *gur* of the sacrifice changes our nature. It would change the nature of a horse. Let any man once taste of that *gur* and he will be a Thug although he knows all the trades and has all the wealth in the world. I never wanted food: my mother's family were opulent, her relations high in office. I have been high in office myself and became so great a favourite wherever I went that I was sure of promotion; yet I was always miserable while absent from my gang, and obliged to return to Thuggee. My father made me taste of that fatal *gur* when I was yet a mere boy; and if I were to live a thousand years, I should never be able to follow any other trade."

To attain to the office of strangler a Thug had to serve on several expeditions during which he acquired by slow degrees the requisite insensibility to finer feelings. At first a novice was almost always shocked or frightened, but



after a time he lost all sympathy with the victims. Recruits were first employed as scouts (*bykureeas*), then as buriers of the dead (*lughas*), then as holders of limbs (*shumseeas*), and finally, if entirely satisfactory for such promotion, as stranglers (*bhurtotes*), the highest office of all. Like a good regiment, it was their system, their discipline and strictness of rules which enabled the Thug to hold out for so long a period. When a novice felt he had sufficient experience, he would beg the most experienced and reliable Thug of his gang to act as his *gooroo* and instruct him in the art of strangulation. If his request was granted, they then awaited a victim of not too great bodily strength for the first murder.

Although the law of Thuggee decreed that women should not be murdered, fear of discovery compelled the Thugs to break this law frequently, for few large parties of travellers consisted only of men, and to allow any possible witness to escape would have been a suicidal policy; but though many cases are on record where very young girls were saved and later married to Thugs, they were never maltreated. To quote Sleeman: "No Thug was ever known to offer insult, either in act or speech, to women whom they were about to murder." So even the callous, cold-blooded Thug set a higher standard in this respect than the youthful criminal of to-day!

The Thug was superstitious to a degree and believed that the wishes of Bhowani were expressed by the appearance or cries of certain animals and birds, from which they drew an omen and learnt her will. Ranging from jackals to lizards, from crows to cranes, so many and varied were the omens that a Thug's life during a murder expedition must have been one of continual anxiety.

The most astounding fact about the Thug is that, as a general rule, he was a good citizen and model husband,



devoted to his family, and scrupulously straight when not on his expeditions, presenting a complexity of character utterly baffling to a student of psychology. It was, indeed, essential to the safety of their criminal operations that they should pass as peaceful citizens. Their opportunities were great, for communications in India were then both difficult and dangerous and vast amounts of treasure were carried long distances by road by disguised treasure-bearers or escorted by armed guards. A rich merchant and his attendants, for example, would leave Calcutta for Poona and would, in the normal course of events, remain unheard of until his return home, perhaps six months later. A month after leaving Calcutta the whole party might be murdered and the booty divided among the Thugs concerned, who then scattered. In such a case there was not the slightest fear of the murder becoming known until many months later, when for the first time, the disappearance of the party of travellers would be remarked. By the time suspicion was aroused and enquiries made, it would be almost impossible to discover where and when they had disappeared, for the Thugs responsible had long since returned to their seemingly respectable homes. Not only had they left no trace behind of their foul deed, but they concealed their trail by every art and craft, and with ill-gotten rupees bribed officials, police and villagers, in whose territory the murders had occurred, to maintain an air of stolid ignorance if enquiries were made.

It is not, therefore, extraordinary that Thuggee remained a mystery: rather, it is remarkable that it was ever brought to light and eventually suppressed, and it is small wonder that it continued to exist for over three hundred years. And it is but right when British rule in India is so unfairly challenged and so unworthily attacked, that the extinction of this ancient religion of murder should be represented as yet another jewel in the crown of Empire.



## CHAPTER II

### THE ORIGIN AND CUSTOMS OF THUGGEE

THE origin of Thuggee is shrouded in obscurity, but is said to have sprung from the Sagartii, who contributed 8,000 horse to the army of Xerxes, and are described by Herodotus in the VIIth book of his History.

“These people lead a pastoral life; were originally of Persian descent and use that language; their dress is something betwixt the Persian and the Pactyan; they have no offensive weapons either of iron or brass, except their daggers; their principal dependence in action is on cords made of twisted leather which they use in this manner: when they engage an enemy they throw out these cords, having a noose at the extremity; if they entangle in these either horse or man they, without difficulty, put them to death.”

There is reason to believe that the descendants of these Sagartii accompanied a Mohammedan invader of India and settled in the neighbourhood of Delhi.

The earliest accurate Indian historical notice of Thuggee is the statement in Ziau-d din Barni's history of Firoz Shah, written in 1356, that about A.D. 1290 a thousand Thugs were captured at Delhi, but that the Sultan, with misplaced clemency, refused to sanction their execution, shipped them off to Lakhnaut, and there let them loose. No wonder Bengal was to become a hot-bed of Thuggee in later years! This places the antiquity of Thuggee at over five hundred years before it was suppressed. The next mention of Thugs refers to the reign of Akbar (1556-



1605), when some five hundred were captured in the Et-wah district, always notorious for crime. Later, in 1666, towards the close of Shah Jahan's reign, the French traveller Thevenot wrote as follows:

“Though the road I have been speaking of, from Delhi to Agra, be tolerable, yet hath it many inconveniences. One may meet with tigers, panthers, and lions upon it; and one had best, also, have a care of robbers and, above all things, not to suffer anybody to come near one upon the road. The cunningest robbers in the world are in that country. They use a certain slip with a running noose, which they can cast with so much sleight about a man's neck, when they are within reach of him, that they never fail, so that they strangle him in a trice. They have another cunning trick, also, to catch travellers with. They send out a handsome woman upon the road who, with her hair dishevelled, seems to be all in tears, sighing and complaining of some misfortune which she pretends has befallen her. Now, as she takes the same way as the traveller goes, he easily falls into conversation with her and, finding her beautiful, offers her his assistance, which she accepts. But he hath no sooner taken her up behind him on horseback, but she throws the snare about his neck and strangles him; or at least stuns him, until the robbers—who lie hid—come running to her assistance and complete what she hath begun.”

After the capture of Seringapatam in 1799 the attention of the East India Company's government was drawn to the prevalence of stranglers, and in 1810 the bodies of thirty Thug victims were found in wells between the Ganges and Jumna. During 1816 Dr. R. C. Sherwood, of the establishment of Fort St. George, wrote a valuable article upon Thugs, adding yet another contribution to the unsystematic and spasmodic efforts to expose and subdue their activities which had been made throughout the



centuries of their existence. All failed, however, owing to the fact that Thuggee was not appreciated for what it really was till 1829, when Sleeman revealed its true significance for the first time, his revelations arousing intense excitement in all India.

It has been shown that the Thuggee organisation is known to have existed from early in the fourteenth century, but the Thugs themselves maintained that sculptures in the Caves of Ellora of the *eighth* century depicted operations of Thuggee which they alone could correctly interpret.

In his *On the Suppression of Thuggee in India*, by Major-General Sir William Sleeman, K.C.B., there is the following verbatim conversation on this point between himself and the celebrated Thug chief, Feringeea:

*Sleeman*: "You told Mr. Johnstone that the operations of your trade were to be seen in the caves of Ellora."

*Feringeea*: "All! Everyone of the operations is to be seen there. In one place you see men strangling; in another burying the bodies; and in another carrying them off to the grave. There is not an operation in Thuggee that is not exhibited in the caves of Ellora."

*Sleeman*: "Does any person beside yourselves consider that these figures represent Thugs?"

*Feringeea*: "Nobody else, but all Thugs know that they do. We never told anybody else what we thought about them. Every one can see for himself the secret operations of his trade, but he does not tell others of them and no other person can understand what they mean."

*Sleeman*: "What particular operations are there described in figures?"

*Sahib Khan* (another Thug): "I have seen the inveigler sitting upon the same carpet with the traveller and in close conversation with him, just as we are when we are worming out their secrets. In another place the strangler has got his



*ruhmal* over his neck and is strangling him, while another is holding him by the legs."

*Sleeman*: "Have you seen no others?"

*Feringeea*: "I have seen these two and also the grave-diggers carrying away the bodies to the graves in this manner (describes), and the sextons digging the grave with the sacred pick-axe. All this is done just as if we had ourselves done it, nothing could be more exact."

*Sleeman*: "Who do you think could have executed this work?"

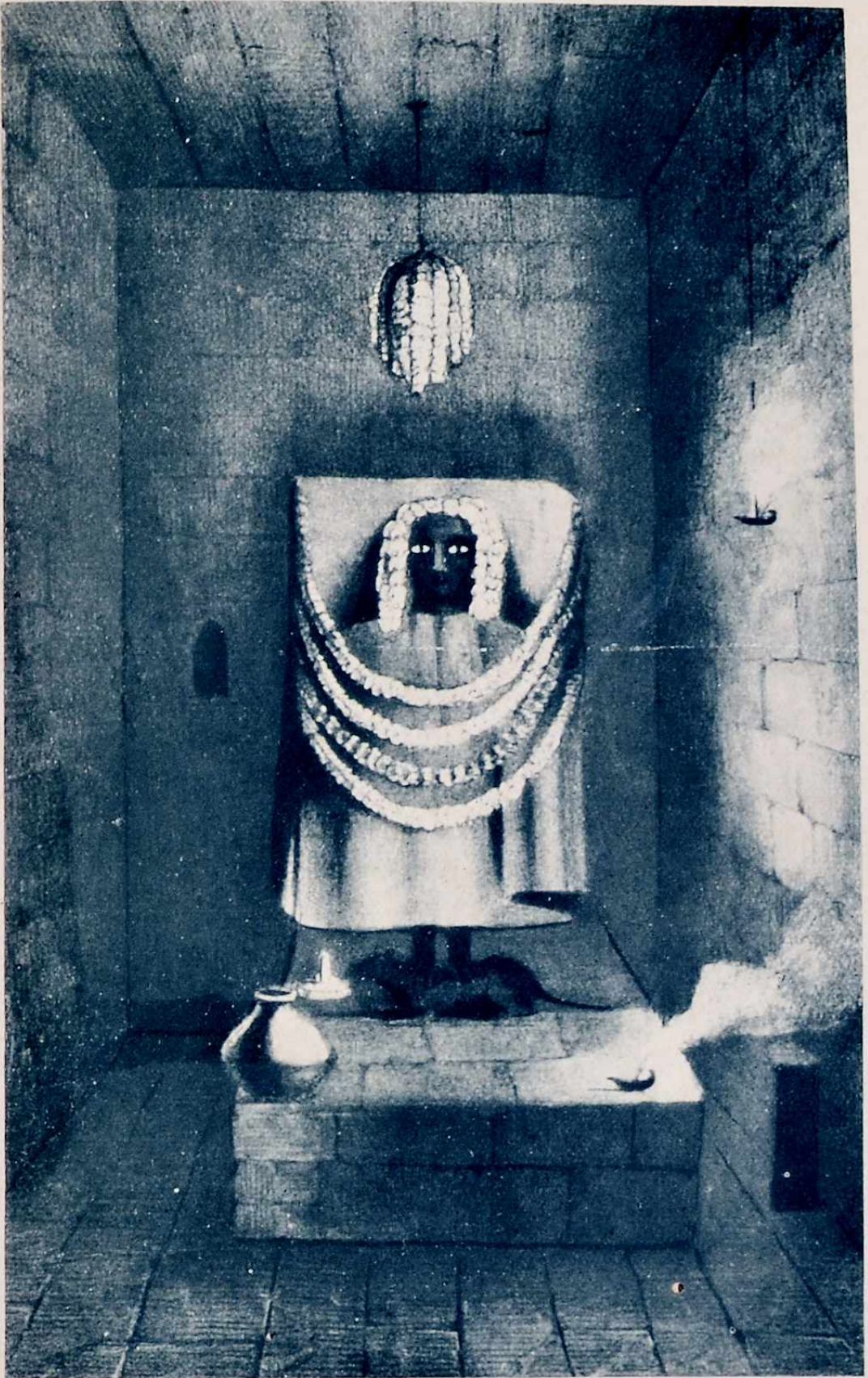
*Feringeea*: "It could not have been done by Thugs because they would never have exposed the secrets of their trade, and no other human being could have done it. It must be the work of the gods. Human hands could never have performed it."

*Sleeman*: "And supposing so, you go and worship it?"

*Sahib Khan*: "No, we go to gratify curiosity and not to worship. We look upon it as a mausoleum—a collection of curious figures cut by some demons who knew the secrets of all mankind and amused themselves here in describing them."

The legendary origin of this strange and horrible religion, according to the Thugs, dated back to a time when the world was pestered with a monstrous demon, so gigantic in stature that the deepest ocean reached no higher than its waist, who devoured mankind as fast as it was created. *Bhowani*, or *Kali*, as she is variously called, tried to kill this horrid prodigy with a sword, but from every drop of blood spilt there sprang a new demon, until the hellish brood multiplied to such a degree that she realised the impossibility of completing her task unaided. In this dilemma *Bhowani* brushed the sweat from her arm and from it created two men, to each of whom she gave a strip of cloth, torn from the hem of her garment, and commanded them to strangle the demons, thus overcoming the blood difficulty. These legendary progenitors of Thuggee worked





### THE GREAT GODDESS OF THUGGEE

The dreaded, revered and renowned Bhagwan, or Bhowani, the great goddess of Thuggee, in the Temple of Bindachun. (From a sketch by Mrs. Fanny Parks, made in 1844.)

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with such skill and vigour that soon all the demons were slain, and the goddess gave them the *ruhmal*, or strip of cloth, as a reward for their assistance, bidding them transmit it to their posterity with the injunction to destroy all men who were not of their kindred. There were, however, exemptions from this rule: it was unlawful to murder women, for instance, and also, among many others, religious mendicants, oilmen, potters, goldsmiths, mahouts, musicians, and dancing-masters. At first the Thugs were punctilious in obeying these laws, but later they became more lax, and it was to neglect of these regulations that they ascribed the decay of their awful craft.

Bhowani, or Kali, the Black Mother, who presided over Thuggee, was the wife of Siva, and Hindu mythology states that she first appeared on earth on the banks of the Hooghly, the exact spot being called Kali-Ghat (now Calcutta) in her honour. Here still stands her most honoured temple, in which the goddess of destruction is represented as a black figure with red eyes and hands, a loathsome sight with matted hair, fang-like teeth, and face and breasts besmeared with blood, to whom human sacrifices were made in the days of Thuggee. In 1929—exactly a hundred years after the beginning of the suppression of Thuggee—the author visited this temple, with its revolting beggars and pestiferous smells, the crowded courtyard packed to suffocation with fanatical pilgrims awaiting the slaughter of some terror-stricken goats whose blood was to be shed in honour of Bhowani, and which now take the place of former human sacrifice. At Bindachun, near Mirzapore, there is another famous temple built in honour of the goddess, a description of which is given by Mrs. Fanny Parks, who visited it in 1844: in her book: “Wanderings of a Pilgrim in Search of the Picturesque.”

“The temple which is built of stone is of rectangular form, surrounded by a verandah, the whole encompassed



by a flight of five steps. The roof is flat and the pillars that support it of plain and coarse workmanship. On the left is the entrance to the Hindoo holy of holies.

“The Brahmans begged me to take off my shoes, and then said I might then enter and see the face of the goddess. I thought of the Thugs, and my curiosity induced me to leave my shoes at the door and to advance about three yards into the little dark chamber. The place was in size so small that, when six people were in it, it appeared quite full; the walls were of large coarse stones. The worshippers were turned out of the apartment and they gave me a full view of the great goddess—the renowned Bhagwān! The head of the figure is of black stone, with large eyes—the whites of which are formed of plates of burnished silver. These glaring eyes attract the admiration of the Hindoos—‘Look at her eyes!’ said one. Thrown over the top of her head strings of white Jasmine flowers took the place of hair, and hung down her shoulders. If you were to cut a woman off just at the knees, spread a red sheet over her, as if she were going to be shaved—hiding her arms entirely with it, but allowing her feet to be seen at the bottom—making the figure nearly square, you have the form of the goddess.

“The two little black feet rested on a black rat—at least they called it so—and a small emblem of Māhadēo stood at the side. Six or eight long chaplets of freshly gathered flowers hung from her neck to her feet, festooned in gradation—they were formed of the blossoms of the marigold, the white jasmine and the bright red pomegranate. The figure stood upon a square slab of black stone. It was about four feet in height, and looked more like a child’s toy than a redoubtable goddess.

“I thought of the Thugs, but mentioned not the name in the temple: it is not wise to dwell in the river and be at enmity with the crocodile!



“In the verandah of the temple were two massive bowls of a metal something like brass. I can fancy terror acting on the Hindoos, when worshipping the great black hideous idol Kali Ma at Kali-Ghat near Calcutta; but this poor stump of a woman with quiet features, staring eyes of silver, and little black feet inspired no terror; and yet she is Bhagwan—the dreaded Bhagwan!

“The temple was crowded with men and women in great numbers, coming and going as fast as possible. The month of Aghar is the time of the annual meeting; it begins November 15th and ends the 13th of December. Therefore Bindachun must be full of rascals and Thugs at this present time, who have come here to arrange their religious murders, and to make vows and *puja* (prayers).”

A gang of Thugs usually numbered from twenty to fifty men, but was sometimes much larger, on one occasion a gang of 360 accomplishing the murder of forty persons. As a general rule they pretended to be merchants or soldiers, travelling without weapons in order to disarm suspicion, which gave them an excellent excuse for seeking permission to accompany travellers, for there was nothing to excite alarm in their appearance. Most Thugs were mild looking and peculiarly courteous, for this camouflage formed part of their stock-in-trade, and well-armed travellers felt no fear in allowing these knights of the road to join them. This first step successfully accomplished, the Thugs gradually won the confidence of their intended victims by a demeanour of humility and gratitude, and feigned interest in their affairs until familiar with details of their homes, whether they were likely to be missed if murdered, and if they knew anyone in the vicinity. Sometimes they travelled long distances together before a suitable opportunity for treachery occurred; a case is on record where a gang journeyed with a family of eleven persons for twenty days, covering 200 miles, before they



succeeded in murdering the whole party without detection. Another gang accompanied sixty men, women and children 160 miles before they found a suitable occasion to put them all to death.

The favourite time for murder was in the evening, when the travellers would be seated in the open, the Thugs mingling with their victims, and all talking, smoking, and singing happily together. But the Thugs' motto was, "There's no fun like work," and three of them would sit close to each prospective victim. On the signal being given, two would lay hold of his hands and feet, while the third manipulated the *ruhmal*, not relaxing his grip until life was extinct.

Many Thugs were influential citizens in ordinary life, amassing wealth from their murders with which to bribe those who might otherwise have given them away. Money counts in crime even to-day, West or East, and the Thugs enjoyed the countenance, protection and support of many ruling chiefs and powerful landowners in return for choice booty and renting land at extortionate rates. These influential Indians shared in the unlawful fruits of Thuggee expeditions without the slightest feeling of religious or moral responsibility for murders which they knew were perpetrated to secure them, and were content with the promise that the Thugs would not commit murder within their states and thereby involve them in trouble. Often the native police and villagers were also conciliated by bribes, as was shown on one occasion when Thugs bungled the killing of twenty-five travellers and were pursued to the village of Tigura, where the inhabitants came to their support and protected them against arrest. Indeed, during the operations for the suppression of Thuggee, it was found that some subordinate native police were actually practising Thugs, and that this was frequently the case with the *chaukidars*, or night watchmen, of villages and



houses. With such consummate scoundrels, such formidable protection, and such opportunities, small wonder that Thuggee flourished for centuries and accounted for many thousands of innocent lives during its long reign.

Sepoys proceeding home on furlough with their small savings were specially favourite victims of the Thug, because they were unlikely to be missed until some time after death, their relatives being ignorant of the fact that they had started for home, and the regimental authorities ascribing their failure to return to desertion. Certain gangs of Thugs, indeed, can be said to have specialised in sepoy.

Horrible as all this reads, it must be borne in mind that the Thugs considered their murders precisely in the light of sacrifices to their goddess. Not only did they plan and meditate over their murders without misgiving, but they perpetrated them without any emotion of pity. Their horrid treachery and cruel strangulations troubled neither their dreams and recollections nor caused them the slightest disturbance even in the hour of death. They considered, in fact, that their victims were killed by God, with them as his agents, their appointed job being to kill travellers—to quote the words of a Thug, “Just as a tiger feeds upon deer.”

In wading through the tragic and unsavoury records of Thuggee nothing strikes one more than the contrast between their devilry when engaged in their wicked hunting, and their trustworthiness in decent employment and real affection for their wives and children, which stand out saliently in pages of history blotted with hideous crime. To illustrate this double life, a case is on record where an Englishman, Dr. Cheek, had a bearer in charge of his children. The man was a special favourite, remarkable for his kind and tender ways with his little charges, gentle in manner and exceptional in all his conduct. Every year he obtained leave of absence for the filial



purpose, as he said, of visiting his aged mother for a month, returning punctually at the end of that time and resuming the care of his little darlings with his customary affection and tenderness. This mild and exemplary being was later discovered by Sleeman to be a Thug: kind, gentle, conscientious and regular at his post for eleven months of the year, devoting the twelfth to strangulation. Cold-blooded human beasts with a callous disregard for the sanctity of human life for one-twelfth of the year, and patterns of virtue for the remainder!

Just as locusts pass across a pleasant landscape leaving nothing but stripped trees and desolation behind, so the Thugs on their expeditions left a trail of death and misery. No feelings of shame, horror or remorse ever caused a Thug to lose a minute's sleep. On the contrary, just as sportsmen sit over the fire at night and talk with pleasure of the day's bag, so the Thug, when resting from his revolting labours, discussed his murders with equal pleasure, rejoicing over particular acts of treachery which had lured unhappy men and women to their doom.

The full horror of Thuggee can only be appreciated when one remembers that the Indian marries at an early age, which meant, at the time we write of, that many husbands had to leave their villages and endure privations in order to send back money to keep their homes together, only returning at long intervals to enjoy the society of their wives and children. It was upon these unfortunate men that the evil of Thuggee pressed most heavily, and Sleeman records in his memoirs that it was his daily duty to interview large numbers of anxious wives and relations enquiring about the fate of those whom they had lost. To quote his words: "Often in my court-house have I seen them listening with unobtrusive grief to a circumstantial detail of the murder of their parents, brothers, or children, from the mouths of these cold-blooded and merciless assassins,



while the tears stole down their cheeks; and, taking from my store of recovered property, some sad token in arms, dress or ornaments of the melancholy truth to take home to the widows and children of the murdered, who might otherwise doubt their tale of sorrow and retain some lingering but unavailing hope of their return."

When one reads extracts such as this, one realises that, if the only monument to British rule in India was the suppression of Thuggee, it is doubtful whether any other nation could show a finer. For it must be remembered that Englishmen themselves suffered no harmful effects from this malignant enterprise, and therefore no selfish motive prompted those who were responsible for suppressing this secret and age-old system of murder. Other parts of the world have seen native tribes punished, rightly or wrongly, for offences against white men, but what other men, of any other Western nation, have deliberately imperilled their lives for years on end in order to protect native life only? Murder was of such small account to Thugs that its grim history, packed as it is with melancholy repetition—for they reduced murder to a science—makes almost dull reading, the official records being little better than a bare recital of murders, jotted down much in the same way as a gamekeeper enters up the rabbits killed, or as a merchant records his ordinary business transactions. Several Thugs whose actual recollections and confessions will be given in these pages, had strangled many hundreds of persons, and been in at the death of thousands, during perhaps fifty years, and it will be appreciated, therefore, how difficult it was for them, with the best of intentions, to remember circumstantial details in connection with any one particular murder.

Such were the Thugs, and such the state of India, when the British Government started to clean it up and to preserve and safeguard the lives of a people tortured and abused for centuries.

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## CHAPTER III

### A THUGGEE EXPEDITION

THE description of a Thuggee expedition given in this chapter is not imaginary, but is compiled from extracts from the procedure of several Thuggee expeditions in order to give a correct idea of how they were carried out.

When, annually, the warning was sent out to Thugs engaged in respectable and responsible employment, that their gang would assemble on a certain day for an expedition, its members would make arrangements for a prolonged holiday, giving plausible excuses to employers or wives for such projected absence. This done, they would depart for the rendezvous in high spirits, and having assembled and exchanged compliments, the serious business would begin with elaborate ceremonial, after which the most experienced *Jemadar* or chief Thug was selected as leader. After careful consultation and observance of the omens, he would define the day and hour for the start and the direction the expedition would take.

Let us now imagine that we are actually present at a Thuggee expedition.

On the day appointed, the leader, holding in his hands a brass jug of water, some coins, and the sacred pick-axe, turns in the chosen direction and says, with great devotion and uplifted eyes, "Great goddess, universal mother, if this our meditated expedition be fitting in thy sight, vouchsafe us a sign of thy approbation." All present repeat this



satanic prayer and join in the praise of Bhowani, after which they wait for the *pihao*, or omen, which will send them on their murderous way. While waiting for the sign the Thugs are tantalised by the sight of travellers passing on their several occasions, including a caravan of camels, well laden with merchandise, upon which they gaze hungrily. Will they, or will they not, precede them on the road they are to follow, is the question passing through the mind of every Thug. Next comes a blind man led by a small boy—game scarcely worth the killing, yet helpful practice for the novice, for rich or poor, strong or weak, maimed or halt, all classes of mankind are game for the *ruhmal*.

The excitement is intense. For weary months all had looked forward with joy to this occasion, and the Thugs are now straining at the leash for what they regarded as the highest form of sport—the killing of their fellow-men. Presently, away on the left, is heard the shrill cry of a crane, and every face lights up with expectation. The silence which follows can almost be felt—the fate of dozens of human beings hangs on a thread. An hour passes without the necessary answering cry, and dejection settles on the company, and then the cry is repeated, this time from the right, and there is general rejoicing. Their cup of happiness is indeed full, for this is the best omen of all, promising both prosperity and safety for their coming expedition. Woe betide any unfortunate traveller met with from now onwards, for no carnivora of the jungle is more bloodthirsty than the Thug returning to Thuggee after long absence: not the senseless killing of the human degenerate, but intelligent men trained in the art of lulling a victim's fears, until an opportunity occurs to kill. That this is not an exaggeration is shown by the following conversation between Sleeman and a notorious Thug he had captured:



*Sleeman*: "How can you murder old men and young children without some emotion of pity—calmly and deliberately—as they sit with you and converse with you, and tell you of their private affairs, of their hopes and fears and of the children they are going to meet after years of absence, toil and suffering?"

*Sahib Khan*: "From the time that the omens have been favourable, we consider them as victims thrown into our hands by the deity to be killed, and that we are the mere instruments in her hands to destroy them; that if we do not kill them she will never be again propitious to us, and our families will be involved in misery and want."

*Sleeman*: "And you can sleep as soundly by the bodies, or over the graves of those you have murdered, and eat your meals with as much appetite as ever?"

*Sahib Khan*: "Just the same, unless we are afraid of being discovered."

If nothing else the Thug was certainly honest in one respect, namely in regard to liking his murderous profession; for in all conversations such as this he never hesitated to show that murder, to him, was the finest sport imaginable.

To understand Thuggee properly, those unfamiliar with India must know that the highways that traverse its vast and shadeless plains are intersected at intervals by groves of trees, or *topes*, planted by pious Hindu well-wishers in the past, who believed that their souls received benefit from the gratitude of those who enjoy the fruits of their labour during their brief sojourn on earth. Little did those pious benefactors realise the use to which their shady groves would be put! Studding the roads along which travellers pursued their hot and dreary way, they offered tempting shelter from a cruel sun, wells of cool water, and suitable camping sites, forming an oasis in almost desert-



like country. Even if the traveller knew of the danger that lurked within these groves, he was forced to camp in them, for water and shade are essential for man and beast in the stifling heat of an Indian summer. As a consequence these groves proved murder traps, affording, as they did, certain cover for the Thugs to draw, and countless thousands of travellers entered them never to be seen again. Certain of these groves were peculiarly suitable for their practices and were known to the Thugs as *beles*, or fixed murder places, whither every effort was made to lure the unhappy traveller, and which became in course of time actual charnel houses.

The gang of fifty Thugs we are accompanying in imagination did not proceed along the road all together, for that in itself would have been suspicious. First two astute Thugs, dressed as beggars, versed in every art and craft of their calling, left the rendezvous and were given two hours' start. After them went eight others, disguised as sepoys, and three hours later a larger body, representing merchants bearing articles of commerce, followed at intervals by other parties, until at last the gang is dotted along some twenty miles of road. Small is the chance of any traveller caught within the meshes of this far-flung Thuggee net, each component so skilled in the part it has to play that it is impossible to pierce its disguise. When a forward party was delayed in the process of deceiving its victims, it was caught up and passed by the others without any sign of recognition; not even the closest scrutiny by suspicious people would detect that they had ever met before, let alone were actually confederates. And so this slowly moving and well-equipped procession of assassins stretches for miles along a road, with few villages to offer shelter or protection. The time is noon on an exceedingly hot day, and few travellers are likely to be found outside the groves of trees. Reaching one



of these, the leading Thugs turn aside to see if it shelters any likely victims. They are in luck, for, seated on the ground engaged in cooking their chupatties, are two old men of humble circumstances. "It is a hot day, brother," says a Thug, in friendly notes. "It is indeed," replies one of the travellers. "And God be praised that benefactors have blessed us with such pleasant shade." "That is so," answers the Thug. "And it is delightful to find companions, for the roads are dangerous and we, who are unarmed, find great confidence in the presence of others." "One consolation of poverty," says one of the two doomed men, "is that it does not tempt the robber, for we two poor men have nothing worth the taking." "We, too, are poor," replies the Thug. "But there are some upon the road to-day, as everyone knows, dressed in humble rags in order to disguise the fact that they are carrying treasure of gold and jewels. Doubtless, brothers, you are well known in this neighbourhood, and for that reason will not be mistaken by robbers for such treasure-bearers; but we, strangers from afar, fear being set upon and murdered by mistake." "There you are wrong," replies the old man. "For we also have travelled a great distance on the sacred pilgrimage to Benares, and it will be two months before we can reach our homes and those we love." "Yet, surely, such experienced travellers as you must know someone in this district who can inform you of its dangers?" asks the Thug.

It is a vital question, and the lives of the aged travellers depend upon the answer; but the tired old men, secure as they think in their poverty, fall into the trap so skilfully set, and the reply makes the Thug's eyes sparkle with horrid exultation. "No, we are quite strangers here; indeed, we know no one for many a long days' march, and can only place our trust in Providence."



By these simple questions the Thugs have now obtained the information they required: that the old men were unknown in the district, so that their murder would not be discovered for some time, and that therefore there was small danger in despatching them. Bravery, however, was seldom the strong suit of the Thug, and old as their victims were, even numbers were not enough, so they now make a fire, and smoke, eat and chat pleasantly until others of their gang arrive. Late that evening, when fifteen Thugs in all are assembled, the travellers are invited to join in a meal. Three Thugs take up their position behind each of the victims, and on the signal—*Tamakhu kha lo*, begin chewing tobacco,—the *ruhmal* is thrown about their necks and the two ancient pilgrims pass to their last account.

The Thugs had a faint hope that these men might prove to be treasure-carriers in disguise after all, but they had been truthful regarding their poverty, eight annas, less than a shilling, and two brass bowls being the sum total of their worldly possessions. Although unsatisfactory from a pecuniary point of view, the motto of the Thug is that "Every mickle makes a muckle," and they are jubilant at having killed so early in the expedition.

Deep gashes are now made in the bodies, the knees are disjointed and the legs turned back over the body, to enable the corpse to be buried in the smallest possible space: operations carried out with a precision and celerity which would have been praiseworthy in a better cause. After work comes refreshment, and the leading Thug now makes a hole in the ground into which he pours a little *gur*, or unrefined sugar, then kneels, clasps his hands in prayer, and says: "Great goddess, as you vouchsafed one *lac* of rupees (100,000) to Joorā Naig and Koduk Bunwaree in their need, so we pray thee, fulfil our desires." In this impious devotion all join fervently, water is sprinkled over



the sacred pick-axe and *gur* given to each Thug qualified to strangle. The signal for strangling is then given, much in the nature of hunt cries at a Hunt Ball, after which there is silence while the privileged Thugs swallow the precious consecrated sugar, which they firmly believe charges the human batteries with lust for murder, being watched with envy and admiration by those of lower degree not qualified to kill. So India—with more than two hundred castes—found that, even in Thuggee, a caste system was necessary.

Too excited to sleep, most of the night is given up to talk upon the four principal subjects which constitute the average conversation of a native of India—rupees, water, food, and women. With that signal capacity which they enjoy of being able to converse in shrill tones the whole night long, without apparent strain, except to the unwilling listener, the grove is scarcely silent until the first streaks of dawn appear. Long before then the Thugs have been preparing for departure, for an Indian hot-weather behoves one to finish the daily march before the atmosphere becomes like an inferno.

One Thug has a son who had completed his initiation and is ready now for actually committing murder, and during the first halt next day the opportunity is taken of preparing him for the ordeal which, even to Thugs, proved formidable. The youth had developed a sufficient degree of insensibility to human feelings to enable him to perform without shrinking that which he had learned to contemplate without horror, for he had been “blooded” young. He had already witnessed and assisted at many murders and, although at first frightened, was now beginning to show an intelligent interest in Thuggee. This day has been selected for his full initiation because the Thugs have found an old man camping in a grove, so worn and infirm as to render the task of murdering one of ease and



simplicity: the type of victim generally selected for a novice's first essay in strangulation. The Thuggee *gooroo*, or novice master, with four other Thugs first take the pupil away from the others and invoke a favourable sign from Bhowani, half an hour being allowed for an expression of her wishes, which will show that the goddess regards the promotion of the young Thug with satisfaction. If, however, the sign is unfavourable, the ambition of the novice must be deferred and the destined victim dispatched by the hand of another.

The fates are most propitious on this occasion, for within five minutes a crow flies upon a tree nearby and starts cawing—a most favourable omen. The *gooroo* now takes a twisted handkerchief, in one end of which he ties a knot enclosing a rupee, and hands it to his pupil, who receives it with all the reverence which would be accorded to a sacred relic. The little group of assassins then return to where the traveller is, the young Thug attended by an experienced holder of hands. Meanwhile the old man, entirely unconscious of his impending fate, is enjoying to the full the courtesy and conversation of such delightful men, practised conversationalists, replete with a fund of anecdote. It is difficult, however, to strangle a man lying down, and everything now being in readiness, a Thug suddenly pinches the victim's leg and cries out that he has been bitten by a snake. The wretched old man jumps up in alarm, the trembling novice casts the noose about his neck, and death soon follows: one human being has passed into eternity, another has taken the first step in a life of murderous infamy. The horrible work over, the young Thug, far from being overcome by sensations of pity, feels that he has tested the strength of his nerve, the weakness of his moral perception allowing no feeling other than gratified ambition. With sincere gratitude he approaches his *gooroo*, bowing before him and touching



his feet in token of the deepest respect, for the affection of the pupil for his master was always a characteristic feature of Thuggee. The newly-admitted strangler now undoes the knot in the *ruhmal*, takes out the rupee, and presents it with other money to the *gooroo* for the purchase of *gur* with which to celebrate the occasion—all so reminiscent of the reward to a gillie after a successful stalk or the gaffing of a good fish. With an experienced Thug—doubtless as a mark of his college education—the end of the *ruhmal* was concealed within the knot: the tyro left it out—a delicate point of Thuggee etiquette, akin to that of a public school.

No other travellers are encountered that day, but dawn on the morrow brings a stroke of luck in the shape of a party of six men, cloth merchants, with three wives and four small children. They emerge from a side road ahead of our party of Thugs disguised as merchants, who anxiously watch to see the direction that they will travel. Thanks be! they turn in the same direction as themselves, and from that moment their doom is sealed. As the nearest town is far distant and these unfortunate men will be at their mercy for some days, it is decided to make no attempt to gain touch with them at once, but to allow time for the rest of the gang to arrive. Maintaining this cunning policy, they camped in the same grove that night but displayed no interest in the strangers, who, if suspicious at all, were certainly not so when the time came to take the road next morning. These tactics were adopted because, while it was not difficult to overcome the suspicions of men, if women were in the party far greater delicacy and cunning were required to establish the necessary degree of confidence, the Thug recognising their superior intuition.

Three days were spent in ingratiating themselves by slow degrees with the travellers, by small acts of courtesy



to the women, little presents for the children, and by imposing upon the vanity of the men—always a strong feature of Thuggee subtlety—by deferring to their opinion on every occasion, until the ground was prepared—in both senses of the word—and the time for murder at hand. This brought into prominence the problem, so largely responsible for the killing of most women by the Thugs, how to separate the men from their wives and children without exciting suspicion. Several expedients were tried without success but, masters of cunning as they were, the difficulty was finally overcome by the Thugs representing that a fair was being held at a town they were approaching and that, if the men were to travel fast, they might get there in time to enjoy the amusements and sell their goods. After weeks of dreary travel this prospect seemed alluring and, perhaps because they would be less restricted if unaccompanied by their wives, or else—to be more generous in our interpretation of their motive—to spare them the discomfort of fast travel, the men of the party fell in with the suggestion and forged ahead. This created the opportunity required and when several miles separated the two parties, the six men were put to death and quickly buried in graves previously prepared and their goods distributed. This accomplished, the Jemadar Thug returned to the wives, with a fictitious message from their husbands that information had reached them which necessitated returning home at once, and that in order to spare the women a double journey, they were to travel on until the men rejoined them. This message seemed so reasonable that it created no suspicion, and the poor deluded widows and children retraced their steps as directed, never to see husbands, property or Thugs again.

In this case a week of waiting passed before these women became anxious and instituted enquiries; but women were of small account in India, and, surrounded by strangers

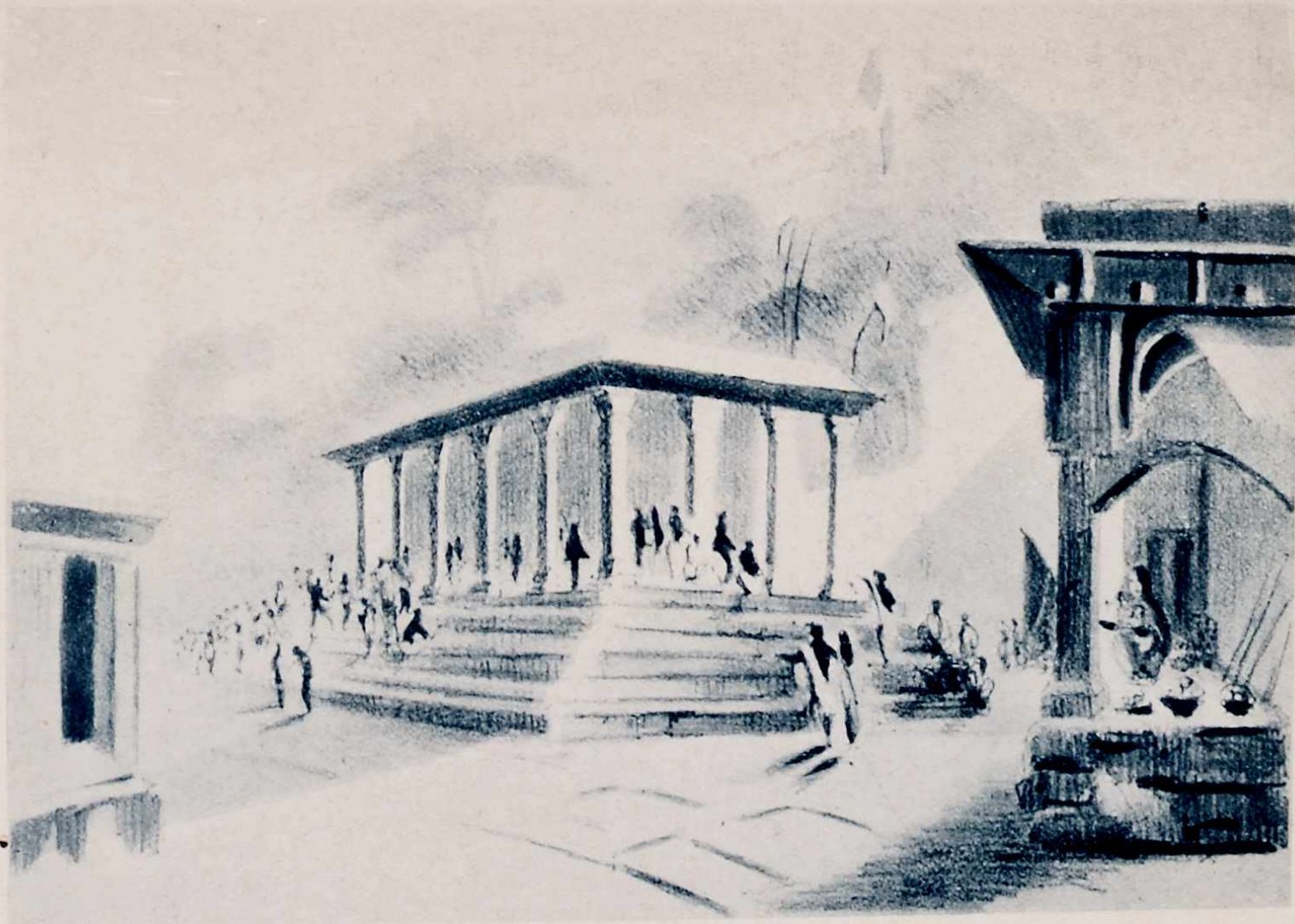


who cared nothing for their anxiety or sufferings, there was not the remotest chance of tracing either the murdered or their assassins.

Three days later the Thugs encountered four men, two women and a boy of five, but as they were now passing through well-populated country, additional precautions were necessary and four days passed before an attempt was made to murder them. But though by this time the Thugs had succeeded in ingratiating themselves with these unfortunate people, they had failed to overcome their anxiety regarding the dangers of the road, and no attempt to separate the women from the men proved successful. At last it became clear that, if they persisted in their endeavours to this end, suspicion would be aroused, and the Thug conscience, never delicate, stiffened to a conviction that they must kill the women also. The boy, however, was an intelligent little fellow and they determined to spare his life in order that he might be adopted by a Thug and brought up in their murderous faith. Accordingly his pony was led some distance ahead, and when the horrid deed was done he was told that his parents would rejoin them presently, and that meanwhile he was in their care. The possession of a son is highly prized in India where childless marriages are so frequent, and there are many cases on record of Thugs adopting sons of people they murdered, many of whom became notorious Thugs themselves.

With almost a monotonous regularity these incidents of a Thuggee expedition were repeated for a further three weeks, resulting in forty-six poor travellers falling victims to the gang, from whom plunder to the value of 14,000 rupees in specie and 18,500 in merchandise had been acquired. Enriched by this loot, one party of Thugs now travelled on horse back, its leader posing as a person of consequence attended by his servants, the better to ingratiate





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#### THE TEMPLE OF BHAWANI AT BINDACHUN

The famous temple of the goddess of Thuggee, drawn by Mrs. Fanny Parks in 1844, to which she adds; "The temple was crowded by men and women coming and going, as fast as possible, in large numbers. The month of *Aghar* is the time of the annual meeting; therefore Bindachun must be full of rascals and Thugs at this present time, who have come here to arrange their religious murders, and to make vows and *puja* (prayer)."



himself with rich travellers who would not be interested in casual strangers of low degree. This bait had the desired effect when contact was made with eleven merchants travelling with twenty servants, with bullock carts heavily laden with costly silks and silver ware. In this case the Thug leader suggested that they should join company in order to gain mutual support against the dangers of the road, and since he appeared to be eminently respectable, this was agreed to.

For nearly a week the parties travelled together, the Thugs proving delightful company, past masters in the art of beguiling a tiresome journey with story and song. Meanwhile, as the Thug liked at least a proportion of three to one in his favour, the gang had been gradually reinforced until ninety-four Thugs were assembled by the sixth day when the party camped in a favourite Thuggee *bele*, where graves had been dug two days before and all arrangements completed for the murder. Shortly after midnight the Thugs woke the somewhat bemused partakers of a rich banquet telling them that dawn was approaching and that it was time to resume their journey: a favourite trick of the Thug in days before watches were common, which gave him time to get rid of all traces of murder before other travellers were likely to be astir. The unsuspecting merchants immediately got ready for the road and were then invited to join their co-religionists in prayer for a safe and successful journey—a far longer one than they expected, for as they knelt down, they were set upon and strangled. Some 4,000 rupees, as well as pearls, diamonds, and gold ornaments worth ten times that sum, were the fruits of this murder. The bodies were buried so rapidly that within an hour, the wretched victims having yoked up their oxen before being attacked, all the merchandise was on its way to be sold at the nearest town, for the Thug retained nothing which might connect him with a crime.



That night they camped in a grove where an English officer and his wife had pitched their tents. Both were perfectly safe, for the Thug did not kill Europeans, partly because their usual tactics would not have availed, and partly because their disappearance would be quickly noticed. And so these representatives of India in its days of lawless disorder, and of England which was to convert it to just and peaceful government, spent the night together. Next day the Thugs again separated into small bodies, one party overtaking two holy-water carriers who were induced to travel in their company. In the course of the day they crossed a wide, dry river-bed, the loose sand making walking difficult, and mid-way the water-carriers, exhausted by long travel, became overcome with fatigue and sat down to rest. This was an unforeseen opportunity not to be missed, and while some of the Thugs pretended to amuse themselves by playfully throwing sand at each other, the rest—merry, gruesome devils!—dug a deep hole with apparently childish abandon, the travellers, poor fools, watching with amusement, little knowing it was destined to be their grave. This completed, and scouts on both banks of the river having signalled that no one was in sight, the boisterous fun quickly changed to treacherous tragedy, the water-carriers being strangled and buried within a few minutes. From a monetary point of view it was a disappointing murder, yielding but three rupees, but it is a true story which was often recounted by the Thugs as a most amusing episode.

A day later the same gang decoyed two Brahmins and two other travellers from Muttra, killing them that night quite close to a village. The next day they were resting by a large tank when four travellers came up, to pay with their lives for twenty-four hours of pleasant entertainment. Being too close to a village to make burial safe, their bodies were thrown down a well—a favourite



method in such circumstances. Sport was, indeed, brisk, and the Thugs, greatly elated, started off next day in the best of spirits, shortly afterwards meeting a *pundit*, or learned man, and three others, all of whom they strangled, but without much benefit in the way of wealth.

The expedition had now been out for seven weeks and the majority of the Thugs were compelled to return home. Due ceremony and pious thanks to Bhowani terminated this successful expedition, and after sharing out the loot, the gang split up and went their several ways to enjoy the fruits of their ill-gotten gains while living as respected citizens.

In recording this Thuggee expedition, one would much like to be able to add that *en route* some fell into the hands of other Thugs and were successfully decoyed and *ruhmalled*. Unfortunately, however, Thuggee was a highly organised trade union, and its followers could always recognise each other by secret word, sign or mode of attire.



## CHAPTER IV

### TALES OF THUGGEE TOLD BY THUGS

SINCE Thuggee was a hereditary religion it was essential, when the work of its suppression started, that every Thug at large should be accounted for: a difficult task when exterminating any secret organisation, but immensely so when dealing with such past masters in the art of deception. Were any to escape capture, there would be the danger of the seed of murder germinating and growing into a powerful plantation. To ensure this record being made, Sleeman prepared with almost superhuman care and labour a genealogical tree of the Thugs, in the compilation of which certain of the leading Thug Jemadars, or chiefs, he had captured were permitted to help by turning King's evidence, or approvers. From a historical point of view this was fortunate, for Sleeman, with his flair for accuracy and justice, cross-questioned and examined each approver separately, piecing together and checking each confession, recorded verbatim, like the irregular pieces of a picture puzzle. This record now proves of enormous value, for the author, his grandson, to-day possesses this unimpeachable evidence of voices speaking from their dishonoured graves of almost exactly a hundred years ago.

In the foregoing chapters an effort has been made to describe the procedure of Thuggee, based upon these confessions; but in an age when imagination plays such a large part in literary work relating to crime, this is insufficient testimony to the cold-blooded disregard shown



by the Thug for human life. Most of the approvers were celebrated Thugs with hideous records, and to prevent any feelings of sympathy for these unscrupulous scoundrels, let it at once be said that, far from thinking their conduct in any way obnoxious, they entered into the duty of giving away their fellows with something approaching zest, once they realised that Sleeman had obtained possession of their secrets and that they could save their own skins by turning traitor. If the Thug was callous in his murders, he was indeed equally horrible in his treachery.

Let us now listen to one relating his experiences on Thuggee expedition.

*The Burwaha Ghat murders.* Being the depositions of Thugs Moklal, Jonooa, and others, taken at Saugor in 1831 and examined by Captain W. H. Sleeman.

“About six years ago I, Bukhut Jemadar and others left our homes at Poorah on a Thuggee expedition, and, after taking the auspices, crossed the Nerbudda river and encamped outside the village of Cheepanere, where we found a gang of fifty Thugs. The next morning we proceeded to Borhanpore, where we were joined by another gang of fifty-six, making in all 112 Thugs. We set out together, and on reaching the Taptee river were resting and smoking, when two Mussulmen travellers came up on their way to Aurungabad. Roshun Jemadar won their confidence and they sat with us and smoked the hookah, and were given food to eat. After resting we went on with them and encamped at Tankolee. After dinner some of us engaged the travellers in conversation, and, while thus occupied, they were both strangled upon their beds by Khoda Buksh, a Mussulman, and Bukhut, a Brahman, assisted by others. We got from them 150 rupees, two matchlocks, one pony and some other articles. Being so many we got one rupee only in the division. Next day we were encamped outside the town of Edulabad



when eight treasure-bearers armed with matchlocks, and two camel drivers arrived from Bombay carrying Spanish dollars to Indore. They lodged in the bazaar and next morning set out, followed by our spies. Hearing later that they had gone towards Borhanpore, four Jemadars and fifty Thugs went there, but did not find those we were in search of. They returned and reported this, and we then sent Khuleel, Monohur and Mudara to trace them, offering one hundred rupees reward over and above their share of the booty. The next day when we reached Asseer these Thugs returned and told us that they had seen the travellers settling their duties at the customs house. On learning this we were much gratified, and leaving them to watch their movements, we went on to Boregow to intercept them. A little after the spies brought the information that the treasure-bearers would not pass that way, having gone to Punchpuhar, on hearing which we immediately set out for there, but could not find our quarry. In the morning we sent six active Thugs in different directions to trace them, two to Asseer, two to Boregow, and two to Sherpore, while the main body halted at Punchpuhar. (Note the similarity to hounds quartering the ground for the scent of a lost fox!)

“About a watch before sunset, the two from Sherpore came back and said that the treasure-bearers had lodged there the preceding night and had set out for Indore that morning and intended to put up at a village whose name I forget. On learning this, although we were all much tired, we immediately set out, arriving there at midnight and encamping outside. The next morning, when the treasure-bearers set out, we followed, but were detained by the officials of the customs, and during our detention the treasure-bearers went on out of sight. We paid the customs officials one rupee and went on; but during this interval they had crossed the Nerbudda and gone on to



Burwaha and put up in a shop. We followed, and next morning the village customs detained the treasure-bearers in order to make them pay duty on their treasure. We were also detained, but decided not to pay our dues till the treasure-bearers had settled, with the view of following them. The treasure-bearers had great altercation with the officials, who demanded a high rate of duty, and finally Maharaj Patuck (a leading Thug) went to the chief official and admonished him, asking why he did not let the treasure-bearers go, and pointing out that in the event of any accident happening to their treasure if they moved at a late hour, the customs would be responsible for it. (Clever and consummate cheek, so characteristic of the Thug!) On this the customs official became alarmed and took from them what they had intended to pay, but it was now late and the treasure-bearers would not move that night. (This process of attempted extortion had apparently lasted almost all day. Indians to-day, who complain of taxation under British rule, should note the system which prevailed in bygone days, when every village had the power to tax the unfortunate traveller.)

“The next morning, while preparing to move, we saw the camels of the treasure-bearers coming on and immediately set out for a nullah in an extensive bamboo jungle. Here, after cutting some large bamboo sticks, we sat down, thinking it a suitable place for murder. (The Thug spoke of this as one would of a pleasant place for a picnic). Presently the treasure-bearers arrived and sat down to rest. We surrounded them from every side, and seized and strangled the matchlock men and horsemen and lastly pulled down those on the camels with the bamboo sticks we had cut and dealt with them. We buried the bodies in the nullah, first sending on the treasure camels by a bye-road through the jungle. Later we took the loads off, put them on the horses and turned the camels



loose in the jungle. We now left the Indore road and in three days reached Sundulpore, where we cut the treasure bags open with *tulwars* and knives, finding 15,000 tippoo sahee rupees (Spanish dollars), 100 rupees weight of silver bullion, and a small brass box sealed. When broken open, we found this contained four diamond rings set with other jewels, also eight pearls, and a pair of gold bangles. From this booty Zalim took out a handful of money as an offering to our goddess, Bhowani, which he was to give to the priests of Bindachul where her temple stands. Afterwards we divided the booty and got about 150 rupees each, the pearls and jewels being dealt with according to their value. Next day we returned to our homes by regular stages." (The treasure proved so great and the danger of detection so possible that the expedition broke up at once.)

This murder occurred on 29th January, 1829, and was discovered the following month, when the bodies of the murdered travellers and also the deserted camels were found. They were traced by the village customs officials mentioned by this Thug approver, and one can but speculate as to the reason of their interest in the whereabouts of the treasure-carriers whom they had tried to exploit. Knowing the state of India at that time, it is more than probable that their intentions were evil, and that they had sought for them in order to rob them, only to find they had disappeared off the face of the earth. There is no indignation greater than that of one thief forestalled by another, and suspicion once aroused, thorough search was made and the murder discovered. It was ascertained also that the Thugs concerned had come from Gwalior, and four of them were actually seized with 1,400 rupees upon them. But Indian justice was pathetically futile at this period, and native authority as usual jammed its scales, so that, although thousands of rupees were spent in en-



deavouring to bring these Thugs to trial, they were subsequently allowed their freedom, for the Thug understood the art of bribery better even than a Chicago gangster. It is satisfactory to record, however, that at a later date most of the Thugs concerned in this expedition met with their deserts through the instrumentality of Sleeman and his assistants, and Roshun Jemadar was hung at Saugor with ten others of his Thugs, Khuleel and Jhureeda met the same fate with seven companions each, Zolmukar Jemadar and Golab Khan with ten each, and Sheikh Madaree with thirteen. Another died in Saugor gaol, while eight exchanged hanging for imprisonment for life by turning approvers. A total of sixty-nine Thugs out of this particular gang of one hundred and twelve met their deserved fate, while the remaining members were all subsequently accounted for by British justice, and India saved from the depredations of such ravening human wolves.

The initiation of a young Thug has already been described, and the following conversation between Sleeman and a Thug throws more light upon this subject.

*Sleeman*: "And your children, too, reverence their Thug fathers, even after they have been acquainted with their trade?"

*Sahib Khan* (a Thug Jemadar): "The same. We love them and they love us just the same."

*Sleeman*: "At what age do you initiate them?"

*Sahib Khan*: "I was initiated by my father when I was only thirteen years of age. A father is sometimes avaricious and takes his son out very young, merely to get his share of the booty, for the youngest boy gets as much in his share as the oldest man. But generally a father is anxious to have his son in the rank of the stranglers as soon as possible; he does not like to have him considered of lesser rank after he has attained the age of puberty."



*Sleeman* : "How soon do you let them see your Thuggee operations?"

*Sahib Khan* : "The first expedition they neither see nor hear anything of murder. They know not our trade: they get presents purchased out of their share, and become fond of the wandering life, as they are always mounted upon ponies. Before the end of the journey they know that we rob. The next expedition they suspect that we commit murder, and some of them even know it; and in the third expedition they see all."

*Sleeman* : "Do they not become frightened?"

*Sahib Khan* : "Not after the second or third expedition."

*Feringeea* (most famous of all Thugs, breaking into the conversation): "About twelve years ago my cousin, Aman Subahdar, took out with us my cousin Kurhora, a lad of fourteen, for the first time. He was mounted upon a pretty pony, and Hursooka, an adopted son of Aman's, was appointed to take charge of the boy. We fell in with five Sikhs, and when we set out before daylight in the morning, Hursooka, who had already been on three expeditions, was advised to take the bridle and keep the boy in the rear out of sight and hearing. The boy became alarmed and impatient, got away from Hursooka, and galloped up at the instant the *jhirnee* was given for murder. He was seized with a trembling and fell from his pony; he became immediately delirious, and was dreadfully alarmed at the sight of the turbans of the murdered men and, when any one touched or spoke to him, talked about the murders and screamed exactly like a boy talks in his sleep, trembling violently. We could not get him on and, after burying the bodies, Aman and I and a few others sat by him, while the gang went on. We were very fond of him and tried all we could do to tranquillise him, but he never recovered his senses and before evening he died. I have seen many instances of feelings greatly shocked at the



sight of the first murder, but never one so strong as this. Kurhora was a very fine boy and Husooka took his death much to heart and turned religious. He is now at some temple on the banks of the Nerbudda river."

From this account it will be seen that the initiation of a boy into the mysteries of Thuggee was not unmixed with danger: indeed, it is an extraordinary thing that the majority of budding Thugs should become so callous that they revelled in committing murder themselves. But, just as to-day the youthful offender is often tempted to a life of crime by coming in contact with hardened criminals, so the young Thug was initiated into a profession of murder by being taught to regard it as a form of religion combined with sport offering rich prizes to those who pursued it.

The confession of Sheikh Inaent, a celebrated Thug Jemadar, given before Captain W. H. Sleeman on 11th April, 1833, illustrates a less successful expedition.

"About fifteen years ago, when Mr. Jenkins, the Resident, went from Nagpore to Banda, I was with a gang of 125 Thugs who heard of his approach from Jubbulpore and waited at Sehora for his party. (It was usual in the days when Indian roads were infested with robbers, for travellers to attach themselves to an English official's *entourage*, and it was for these travellers that the Thugs were waiting on this occasion.) When they came up we made acquaintance with them, some of us pretending to be sepoy on their way home from military service, others to belong to the Resident's camp. We continued with them to Belhree, where we persuaded twenty-seven of the party to join us, including five women and two boys about three years of age each. We succeeded in this by representing that they suffered loss and inconvenience by travelling with a large camp, where food was much dearer and water always scarce and muddy, and that we should escape these



inconveniences by leaving Mr. Jenkin's protection. To this they agreed and next morning we left his camp and, reaching Shikarpore, encamped in a grove and sent Kurhaes and Mutholes to select a place for the murder. They chose a place on the river where the jungle was thick and extensive, and about midnight we set out with the travellers. As soon as we reached the appointed place we advised them to sit down and rest themselves, as a good deal of the night still remained. About half sat down and the other half remained standing (probably, poor fellows, their suspicions were at last aroused). The signal for murder was now given and twenty-five of the party were strangled, including the five women. Jowahir took one boy and Kehree the other, and the bodies were thrown into a dry pit in the nullah and some stones and branches cast upon them for concealment. The boy whom Jowahir had taken, cried loudly, for his mother was among the victims, and Jowahir dashed him against a stone and killed him.

“We concealed the bodies of all but that of this boy, which we forgot to throw in upon the rest and it lay by the stone exposed, while we went on to Powae and purchased five rupees' worth of *gur*. In the morning a man going to the river to fish, saw the body of the boy and gave information to the landowner of Powae, who went to the place with his people, opened the pit, took out the bodies, and proceeded in search of the murderers. (A rare occurrence!) He searched all day and the following night in vain, but next day came up with us when we were washing our hands and faces after having eaten our *gur* in celebration of the murder. He had two matchlock men and, suspecting his designs, we formed into a close body and proceeded on our road. They ran upon us, but we kept waiting with our matchlocks ready and pointed towards them, but they had some horsemen and charged



us, wounding Hyput with a spear in the breast, and Bhugwan on the face with a sword, and finding it vain to attempt resistance any longer, we dispersed and fled. They each seized his man and, after possessing themselves of whatever property they found upon them, let them all go except four whom they sent to Bandah, where they were kept in confinement four years and then released. The boy who was saved was Gunesh and he was brought up as a Thug by Kehree and died about three years ago."

Here was a case where the Thugs failed to take their usual precautions in burying their victims. Both this and the pursuit were out of the ordinary, and it is rare in Thuggee history to find such instant retribution. Even so, only four out of a hundred and twenty-five Thugs were captured, which makes one strongly suspect that the energetic and almost unique action of the landowner was induced not so much by a sense of justice as a desire for loot, and is a typical illustration of the motive behind punishment, on the rare occasions of its being inflicted in India in days gone by.

Confession of Ram Buksh, Thug, before Captain W. H. Sleeman, 20th February, 1833.

"Three years and a half ago I went with Mahrban and Dibba, Jemadars, and a gang of twenty-five Thugs, which halted on the road to Myhur and there dined, when six travellers came up on their way to Benares. The Jemadars won their confidence and we went on with them to Omurpaten, where we rested in the shops of the bazaar. After dark we determined to kill these men and set out with them for that purpose after the third watch. About an hour before daylight we sat down on pretence of performing our ablutions, when Esuree gave the signal and Heera, my nephew, Sumphoo, Esuree, Mehrban, Dibba and Persaud strangled these six men, while others held them down. Their bodies were disposed of in some rising



ground close to the place. Some gentleman's (an Englishman) things were coming from Rewah, and a white pony belonging to Esuree got loose and the new arrivals asked whose it was. Upon that we left the bodies exposed and fled. We got from them two ponies, with some packages upon them, which we opened and found 150 rupees in money, some gold beads and a hundred rupees' worth of silver, also eight scarves, two with gold lace and six plain. We divided the plunder and each man got about twenty rupees. When we were about to take up the bodies to bury them, one got up and attempted to run off, but he was pursued and seized after he had gone a hundred paces, and Dibba strangled him. He could not make a noise as his throat had been hurt in the attempt to strangle him before. As soon as we had placed his body with the other five, we saw the party of the gentleman approach and made off." Had this unfortunate man waited another three minutes before making his dash for life, he would have been saved. It is rare to find a case of a Thug failing to kill, but it is still more rare to find one where the victim escaped.

Confession of Rustum Khan to Captain W. H. Sleeman on 15th January, 1834.

"Six years ago I was with a gang of forty Thugs under Nuthee Khan when we reached Mularna Dongerka in Jypore. A little before dark, the son of the headman of Sooper came up with four companions and lodged in the same *sarai*. Nuthee Khan went to the young man, who was about fifteen years of age, and so won his confidence that he agreed to travel with us. Two days later we reached Rangūr and lodged in some shops and sent on Bhikka, Jemadar, to select a place for the murder, but he could not find one and returned in despair.

"The next day we went on to Dowsa and lodged the boy and his companions in a shop while we went to the



*sarai*. The shop-keepers in whose shops they lodged were Nanuk, Sewlall and another whose name I forget, who were all well known to us and had shared liberally in our booty in the past. (With India honeycombed with confederates of this kind, small was a traveller's chance of escape once marked down by Thugs.) From here we again dispatched Bhikka to look for a murder place, and he chose one not far distant and at night reported his success. Nuthee Khan, Bhikka, Kureema, Incha, Bamla and another were chosen as stranglers, and others appointed to assist them, and a watch and a half before daylight we set out, and on reaching the place chosen in the dry bed of a river, we persuaded the travellers to sit down. A carpet was spread and the boy sat upon it with one companion, and the other three sat at a little distance. The holders of hands sat near and the stranglers stood behind them. I was appointed to give the signal and did so by saying, 'If the lads are all come, give them tobacco,' and instantly the *ruhmals* were thrown over their necks and they were strangled. Their bodies were buried in two graves in the bed of the river. We got from them a mare, a pair of ear-rings with two large pearls in each, and other things worth 250 rupees. Our share of the booty was five rupees each, and Nuthee Khan took the mare at a valuation of forty rupees, and sold her to the headman at Punchpuhar for sixty rupees. Three days after the murder the bodies were dug up by the animals of the jungle, as we learnt from the shopkeepers who requested us to keep away from Dowsa in consequence. The headman wrote to his home to announce the departure of his son and, as he did not reach there, his uncle came in search and traced him to the shop where he had lodged at Dowsa. We returned there twenty days later and found the uncle sitting in front of the shop, weeping and saying that he could trace his nephew that far and no further. We concealed the



property we got after hearing this, but we have none of it now."

It will have been noticed that the characteristic feature of all these confessions is the total omission of anything approaching remorse or any feeling of sympathy for those who suffered at the hands of the Thugs. This callous disregard for the most elementary principles of civilisation would have been remarkable in savages: in intelligent and often educated Indians it defies explanation.



## CHAPTER V

### A DESCRIPTION OF THUGGEE BY A THUG

THE confession of Khaimraj, Thug, to Captain W. H. Sleeman, at Saugor, 1831.

“I was seized by a party of horsemen at Dekhola, along with the gang of Thugs now in confinement. The horsemen said they had information that we had opium and that we must therefore return with them to Bheelwarah to be searched. Deceived by this subterfuge, we readily accompanied them without apprehension of any mischance befalling us. We were soon undeceived; for on arrival they accused us of being Thugs, saying that Captain Borthwick had received positive information to that effect, and that they must take us into custody. The people of the place having also co-operated to prevent our escape, we had nothing for it but to submit to our fate. Some of the gang, taking alarm on the first appearance of the horsemen, had escaped, but with that exception, and a party of thirty who had left before to take home the plunder we had acquired, the whole of the Thugs who have formed this gang for the last few months are now here in confinement. From Bheelwarah we were brought to Jowrah, the people of the towns and villages on the way helping the horsemen to guard us, by which means we have been brought here in safe custody. It is not usual for persons of our character, when apprehended, to make disclosures from intimidation, or the application of severities, and I should never have made confession had such a course



been resorted to with me. Indeed, I was firmly resolved to keep silent but, finding two or three of my companions had already told all and pointed out the spots which led to the discovery of those murdered during the last few days previous to our being seized, I considered it would be very foolish to abide by such a resolution. Particularly was this the case when I found I might save my life by a full and true confession, while remaining silent would not avail me or my companions anything. I, therefore, now come forward to disclose all that I know regarding the Thugs, and what has been done by them since the time that I have belonged to them, as far as my knowledge and recollection of deeds and incidents will serve me.

“The gang of Thugs now in custody is composed of men from the Bundlecund quarter. Makhun Jemadar (prisoner) and his party are inhabitants of Sillanee Punharee. Oomrao Sing, Jemadar (prisoner) and his Thugs come from Mullaitra and other villages. Mundun Jemadar (prisoner) and his party, all Mussulmans, come from Motee and thereabouts in the Jhansi purgunnah. My immediate superior, Brikbhan Duffadar, comes from Motee. I am an inhabitant of Mullaitra and for four years have been on an intimate footing with Oomrao Sing and his gang of Thugs, but it was not until last year that I actually joined them and accompanied them until the present expedition. Previous to setting out upon it, the several gangs assembled at the Oomrao Sing's residence at Mullaitra. From here Dirkpai and Mundun Jemadar, with their Brahman and Mussulman gangs, preceded Oomrao Sing's and Makhun's by twenty days.

• “Of their acts and proceedings since I have been associated with them, I speak from personal knowledge. Six stages brought us to Seronge, where we murdered a traveller, and next morning continued our journey without doing anything. The stage following we came to a river where



we found four sepoy cooking, whom we murdered. This occupied some time and was not effected without difficulty, for they seem to have entertained suspicion and, having in a hurried manner got through their meal, they quickly recommenced their journey. They stopped at a village where our spies saw them fairly lodged; we halted a short distance away, and at night sent a select party of Thugs to effect our object. The sepoy commenced their journey next morning, followed by our party, who, watching their opportunity and when remote from any village, fell upon them and murdered them as they walked along the road. One of the sepoy must have perceived the design of the party and made such extraordinary efforts to save his life that he got away a few paces and raised his spear in defence, but was instantly overpowered and murdered; 2,000 rupees was the amount of plunder obtained on this occasion. As we were resting close to where the sepoy had just met their fate, four strolling players joined us. We spoke kindly to them, promising to hear their *ras*, at our next halting place, and to give them a rupee for their performance; they were persuaded to accompany us and take up their quarters with us at a well-known shrine near Bhopal, where we murdered them that night and plundered them of all they had, something about fifty rupees.

“We divided the plunder and, after settling each Thug’s share, sent four of our comrades back to our own country with what remained surplus to our immediate necessities, with orders to rejoin us near Indore. The next morning we met another gang of Thugs returning home from an expedition which had lasted three months. They were twenty-five in number, chiefly Mussulmans, and were busy following two water-carriers with a bullock whom they had formed designs upon. For the sake of friendship and to admit us to share in the booty that might be acquired, they invited some of us to join them. (Just in the same



courteous way that sportsmen to-day ask others to hunt with their packs or to shoot their preserves!) Accordingly Oomrao Sing sent four Thugs who rejoined us four days afterwards, bringing with them our share of the plunder, a brass bowl, a sash, and a bullock. When preparing to leave the village in which we were halted, two Brahmans arrived, and finding by our spies that they had property, we prevailed upon them to join our company. That same evening we murdered them and took their property, the amount of which I cannot exactly remember, but some gold and bills of exchange were found upon them. The next day we came to Rugoghur, where we camped and our spies formed an acquaintance with a subahdar of 'John Company's' army and two sepoys, who were lodged in the bazaar. Our spies so imposed upon them that they were eventually prevailed upon to quit their safe security and encamp with us outside, and in the early evening we murdered them. I cannot speak to the amount of money and property found upon them, but I saw two red jackets and two sepoys caps which belonged to them, besides a bay pony—now amongst those others seized with us, and three bullocks. The caps and the jackets were burned, and the bullocks disposed of some days afterwards at Dhar. A bowl which belonged to the subahdar is amongst the articles found upon us when apprehended. On the same night a man from Mhow took up his quarters with us and was murdered; four rupees and a brass bowl were found upon him. The place where all this done being too near the village, we carried the bodies some distance away for burial.

• "From then until we reached Dhar we did nothing, but there a Mussulman was persuaded to encamp with us, and shortly after nightfall met his fate, and was buried where murdered. We then left for Baroda, proceeding by short stages until the four Thugs sent home with the





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A KUTCHERRY, OR COURT HOUSE, DURING THE TRIAL OF A THUG

From a sketch made at Jubbulpore by Mrs. Fanny Parks, in 1830, the year that the operations for the suppression of Thuggee actually commenced; which accounts for the somewhat startled expression of the Magistrate.



plunder rejoined us, after an absence of twenty-five days, after which we quickened our pace. Next we met a banker escorted by four sepoy, with a pony and a bullock, on his way to Baroda. Our Jemadars, by the most pointed attentions and civility, cultivated their acquaintance with a view to the success of our designs upon them; but we had to proceed four stages in their company before these could be carried into execution. At length an opportunity offering, all were murdered and their property plundered. We set the bullocks loose in the jungle, but retained the pony until we were arrested, when we poisoned it through fear that it might lead to our detection. After this murder we travelled to Oodeypore, where we found an English gentleman on his way from Bombay and, not relishing to be seen by him, studiously kept out of his way.

“The next morning the English gentleman proceeded on his way to Mhow accompanied, unfortunately, by a number of travellers who had sought his protection, and we took the road to Baroda, meeting Dirkpāl's Thug gang returning from there. They passed the night with us, and next morning continued their journey homewards, and we proceeded on our way. At Makney we camped near the town, and five ‘John Company's’ sepoy having arrived from Bombay, our spies succeeded, after much deceitful entreaty and false pretences, in inducing them to join us. In the evening we murdered them and took their property finding several small bars of gold and some rupees upon them. Altogether it was considered a good productive job for, besides these, two bills of exchange were also found. At Dubhoy we met a Mussulman and Brahman travelling together and our usual artifices were practised with success, and in the evening both were murdered. They had a pony laden with opium, which we disposed of at Baroda for one hundred rupees, out of which we had to give the headman twenty-five rupees on the sale (commission of



25 per cent to escape awkward questions!) We here found eighteen Thugs of Mandun Jemadar's gang who joined us, and afterwards proceeded on the Baroach road. For five days nothing fell to our hands and we were close to Baroach when the *Hooly* festival arrived, which we celebrated with due festivity, making a halt for that purpose. At this camp two Mussulmans and a gipsy were seduced into our power and murdered.

“From thence we proceeded to Piblownd, where spies returned with accounts of four travellers proceeding to Baroda with considerable property. As it was calculated that they would reach there the same night and so gain safety, twenty-five Thugs, the most active and experienced of our gang, were sent after them. After a long and fatiguing march, they overtook the objects of their pursuit, close to a cantonment of the English, and, after accompanying them a little way, murdered them as they were walking along the road. To the great disappointment and chagrin of us all, no property was found upon them, for they turned out to be common stone-cutters, and their tools tied in bundles which they carried over their shoulders, had deceived our spies into the supposition that they were carrying treasure. Soon afterwards sixteen horse-dealers and their attendants arrived with their horses and took up their quarters with us. At night we held a consultation as to the possibility of murdering them, which we were only deterred from doing by the difficulty of disposing of the bodies of so many men in the open and frequented country we were in. In devising plans to overcome this difficulty, so much of the night had passed that we considered it advisable to forego our designs upon this party. The same night thieves came among us and carried off clothes and other things from Makhun Jemadar. From this we proceeded to Baroda and after remaining there a day or two set out on our return to Hindostan, soon after



which three travellers fell into our hands and were murdered.

“Our next stage was to Dubhoy, where four pedlars with three ponies, whom we had overtaken on the road, were prevailed upon to take up their quarters with us and were murdered. Their wares consisted of various articles of trifling value, amongst which were a quantity of cornelian stones cut into different forms, betel-nut cutters, and scissors. Twenty rupees were also found upon them. Our spies also brought three men to our resting place, who were likewise murdered and buried.

“The next day we met six palankeen bearers, with two women and two children, whom we persuaded to join us. That night they took up their quarters in an old temple in a village, by which circumstance we were prevented from effecting our purpose upon them; but on the way through the jungle next morning it was accomplished, the whole party were murdered and their bodies, after being stripped of everything, were buried. On this occasion more previous arrangement was thought necessary than was usual where the victims were fewer in number, and, as it was resolved to dispatch them while they were walking along, some of the most expert hands at the business were selected to dispatch them, while a skilled party was sent on beforehand to prepare the graves at a convenient spot. Two ponies fell into our hands, also some ornaments of base metal were taken off the legs of the women, with neck and other silver ornaments of small value.

“At Futtehpoore four Mussulman travellers from Bombay halted near our camp; overtures were opened with them and an acquaintance formed, which terminated in their being murdered in the evening and their property plundered. They had five *minahs*, or singing birds, in a cage and four ponies which, with their clothes and other things,



we took possession of. Our march was then to Oodeypore, where we met a number of carts laden with opium and escorted by 'Company's' sepoy, one of whom remarked that persons of the same description in appearance as ourselves had been arrested at their cantonment. This threw us into some apprehension, and that day we took up our halting ground at a retired spot in the jungle. A party of horsemen with some sepoy arrived from Baroda soon afterwards and took up their quarters in the bazaar, where the prisoner, Makhun Jemadar, was sitting at the time (acting as a spy). One of the horsemen observing him attentively, remarked to a companion that 'The necklace upon that man appears exactly like the one belonging to my brother.' As this actually was so, Makhun was so disconcerted that, though the horseman did not follow up his remark with any question, he immediately slipped off and told us what had occurred. We were all thrown into such alarm that we started off and proceeded many miles before we thought it safe to halt.

"We afterwards continued our progress and arrived at Pitlawud, near which we found a merchant with four attendants preparing their meal. From his respectable appearance, his dress, and the ornaments he wore, he became the object of our attention and design, but, having hastily finished their meal, his party set out towards Rutlan and we saw nothing more of them; but we afterwards found that they had fallen into the hands of Oomrao and Rutyram. At Rutlam we met the Thugs who told us that they dispatched the merchant and his attendants and that they had proved a rich prize; to which Makhun replied, in a dissatisfied tone, that good luck seemed to attend where the Mussulmans were (professional pique!) On our way we were searched twice for opium, but none being found upon us we were allowed to proceed without further molestation.

"The next day we passed Mundesur, where a traveller



fell into our hands and was murdered during the night, being buried in the banks of a *nalah*. From here we sent Ruttayram with twenty-five Thugs to our country with the plunder acquired. Later we took the Neemuch road and that day four travellers were enticed to rest themselves where we were; when an opportunity offering, they were murdered. A stage beyond this another traveller fell into our hands and was murdered, and near Sangan our four shopkeepers were also murdered. Nothing further occurred until we arrived at Dekhola, where we were arrested."

This calm deliberate statement of fact, made without either exaggeration or modesty, gives a remarkably clear idea of the cold-blooded manner in which the Thugs regarded their murders, considering them either as sport or as business transactions.

Confession of Feringeea (a most infamous Thug), before Captain W. H. Sleeman, on 17th February, 1832.

"About ten years ago, in January, I was with a gang of nearly one hundred Thugs at Lakheree, lodged in some deserted houses outside the town, when Akbur Khan Subahdar came up with eight companions, six being bearers, one a sepoy and one a servant. He was very ill and was carried in a doolhie, and took up his quarters nearby, intending to leave on the same day, after resting a little. He said he was going to his home in Furruckabad in consequence of a protracted pain in his head. After he had gone on, Khuluk, Bichoo, Aman and Chotee went after him with forty Thugs and reached Indergur. I with sixty Thugs under Dhunnooa and Nunha, Jemadars, remained with five travellers on their way to Cawnpore, whom we killed that evening, proceeding to Indergur with the booty after midnight.

"Here we lodged at the *tukeea* (shrine) of a fakir, with those who had gone on before, and in the morning left and two days later reached Sherepore with the Subahdar



and his party. Having determined to kill them, we sent on Khomna and Junguleea to choose a *bele*, and they chose one on the road to Herowtee on a hill. In the morning we set out before daylight, and on reaching the spot, they were all killed; the stranglers were Man Khan and Bhowanee, who have been seized. Gunesh Soorjun, Peera, and Mandhata are still at large; Bhowanee, now in gaol; and Lal Khan, approver, who lately died in goal.

“Three months after, while we were encamped at Madhorajpore, two relations of the Subahdar came up and asked us whether we had heard anything of him, and told us all they knew about him. We had with us an iron-grey pony that we got in this booty, and we threw a cloth over him lest they should recognise it.”

Confession of Zalfukar, Thug Jemadar, to Captain W. H. Sleeman at Saugor on 27th December, 1834.

“About twenty-one years ago at the time of Mohurram, I, with the following leaders and their gangs, in all about three hundred Thugs, assembled at Choree with the intention of proceeding on a Thug expedition.” (Then follow the names, together with Captain Sleeman’s statement of their ultimate fate). Bodhoo Jemadar (afterwards trodden to death under the feet of an elephant at Jhalone—a favourite ancient Indian punishment), Hingah Jemadar (who died on a Thug expedition twelve years ago), Khan Sahib (hung at Jubbulpore, 1835), Khuleel, Kurreem and Dhurum Khan (all hung at Saugor), Mohun Brahman and Purasur (dead), Sheikh Nuggoo (hung at Saugor, 1835), Mahasookh (approver), Muchul (dead), Rajah Khan (hung at Jawra), Sheikh Inaent (approver), Hur Sing (dead), Hur Singh Rae Patuck, Tuhungooreea and Bhudae (still at large), Puhar (arrested), Laljoo Sookul and Sumadha (dead) Adhar Jemadar (hung at Saugor, 1833). These notes show the extreme care taken to account for every Thug named.



“After performing the concluding ceremonies of the Mohurram, twenty-seven travellers came up (they were dacoits or highway robbers) and lodged in the bazaar; Dhurum Khan brought this intelligence and said that they had four ponies laden with cash, besides much other rich property. The next morning the travellers set out for Lucknadow where we followed, and Bodhoo Jemadar went to where they were lodged and opened conversation with them, winning their confidence by saying that the road was very dangerous and that we had all better travel together until we had passed through the jungles. They agreed to this, and next morning 125 Thugs followed them and they were all murdered. We obtained from them gold worth 3,000 rupees, cloths worth 1,500 rupees, and ready cash to a total of 9,000 rupees, the whole booty amounting to 13,500 rupees. On division we received forty rupees each, sending one hundred Thugs with money for our families, whilst seven took the road to Jubbulpore, and eighty other Thugs went home.

“The intelligence of the murder reached Jubbulpore previous to the arrival of these Thugs, and the police confined them on suspicion. Khuleel Jemadar had a young lad adopted by him and the chief constable asked the boy who we really were, and on his denial of information ordered him to be tied up and flogged. Upon this Khuleel Jemadar said that there was no use in his punishing the boy, and that he had better send for some swords and have us all cut down and confessed our crimes. Bodhoo Jemada offered 10,000 rupees as a bribe if he would release them, which the chief constable accepted, but as they were unable to procure the money, he kept the following Thugs in confinement for six months inside the fort: Bodhoo Jemadar, approver (his nose and hands were cut off by Indian justice three years later at Seronge), Hinga Jemadar, Subhan, approver, Murdan (died after



his nose and hands had been cut off by Indian justice at Seronge), Kurrondée (hung at Saugor). These Thugs were kept in confinement in the Fort at Jubbulpore and six months later attempted escape by jumping the fort wall. Hingah had his back broken, Murdan was severely hurt in his legs, but the other five got off. The sepoy of the guard took both the wounded men and confined them again in the fort.

“After this Noor Khan Jemadar obtained some instruments and cut the irons of the imprisoned Thugs and broke open a window, and while it was raining they effected their escape. When the whole party had escaped, the Raja of Nagpoor released the other Thugs who had been sent to him.”

Sheikh Inaent, a most celebrated Thug leader, gave a very detailed account of a Thuggee expedition when he made the following confession to Captain W. H. Sleeman in 1835.

“Thirty-six years ago, in January, I was with a gang of ninety Thugs under Khuleel Khan and seven other Jemadars in the Deccan; it was my first expedition in which I accompanied my father, and I was then sixteen years of age. We came to Elichpore, where our Jemadars fell in with the grooms of Nawab “Subjee” Khan, who had been with his son in the service of the Nizam of Hyderabad, with two hundred horse, and having quarrelled with his son, was on his way back to Bhopal. The Jemadars reported this and other Thugs were sent to the Nawab and told him that they had been to the Deccan with horses and, having sold them, were on their return home through Bhopal. They visited him the next day and having won his confidence, he set out with us the day following. He had two grooms, two troopers, and a slave girl with him, and two horses, and a mare with a wound in the neck, and a pony laden with property. He told us that he had



got the name of "Subjee" Khan from the quantity of *subjee* (similar to *bhang*, or a drug made from hemp) that he used, and that he was known by no other. He also said that while in service at Hyderabad, a horse had covered the mare he had with him, at which his son became so enraged that he drew his sword and inflicted the wound we saw on her neck. This had made the Nawab so angry that he had left his son with all the horses and property save what he had with him, and was going home.

"He came on with us three stages, during which no opportunity could be found to kill him; the third day we encamped at Dhoba and, leaving that place, came to an extensive jungle, on reaching a *nalah* in which Khuleel said, 'Khan Sahib, we had better rest and take some refreshment here.' He said, 'Very well, I will take my *subjee* here,' and dismounted, and having put aside his sword and shield, he spread his carpet and sat down. The slave girl was preparing his *subjee* when Dulele Khan and Khuleel went and sat down by his side as if to partake; for it had been determined to kill the chief first, for else it was feared that he would cut down some of the gang and get off. Accordingly Laljoo went also and sat down by the Nawab and Gomanee stood near and pretended to be interested in the conversation. When they found him excited by this and off his guard, they fell upon him and strangled him; as soon as the others saw that the Nawab Sahib was down and overpowered, they fell upon his attendants and strangled them. We got from them two horses, a mare and a pony, a gold bracelet, twenty-five gold coins and fifty rupees and some clothes, and a very handsome bird cage; Khuleel Khan got one of the horses, Dulele and Gungoo got the mare, my father got a horse and Gomanee and Laljoo the pony. Dulele sold the mare at Omrowtree and my father his horse at Borhanpore. Gomanee got also a valuable shield which he sold at



Elichpore for eight rupees, and the people said that it was sold too cheaply to have been honestly obtained. Hearing this, he made off without taking the money and came to us; the people pursued him, but we concealed him. Afterwards, on coming to Elichpore, we heard that great search was being made for the Nawab Subjee Khan, and left that part of the country."

Deposition of Sheikh Inaent before Captain W. H. Sleeman at Saugor.

"During 1829 several gangs of Thugs united from different points between Jubbulpore and Banda, forty from Futtehgur and Cawnpore under Rambuksh, Mirhban and others, twelve under Bhola from Jhalone, and twenty-five under myself from Jhansi. We intended to operate that season upon the great road from Mirzapore and strike off to that between Saugor and Calpee when necessary. We came on to Shahnagar, and there, leaving the main body, I went with seventeen other Thugs to Pureyna in search of prey. Here we met two shopkeepers, two blacksmiths, and a Mussulman trooper, on their way from the Deccan to the Dooab; and, having won their confidence in the usual manner, we sent them to our friends with four of our party, and a message to say that they would find them worth taking; at night we rejoined the main body and found Dibba Jemadar entertaining these travellers. We set out next morning intending to put them to death on the road, but found so many gipsies encamped and moving that we could not manage it. The day following we went on with them from Biseynee, and in a *nullah* in the jungle we killed them. The bodies were buried under some stones where your people afterwards found them. From thence we came in upon the great road to Mirzapore at the village of Sewagunge.

"In the evening four travellers came up and were persuaded to pass the night with us. We were preparing to



go on with them after the third watch, with the intention of killing them, when we heard the *duheea* (the cry of the hare), a dreadful omen, and let them go unmolested. Soon after four sepoy's of the 73rd Regiment came up and sat down at the fire to warm themselves, their regiment being on its march from Jubbulpore to Banda and they a little in advance of it. After some conversation they went on and we threw into the fire some clothes and a badge of office belonging to the trooper we had murdered. While we were preparing to leave, the two men whom you (Captain Sleeman) had sent on with the regiment, Dhun Sing and Doulut (Thug approvers) came and sat down by our fire as if to warm themselves. We overheard Doulut say to Dhun Sing, 'This stick and these clothes must have belonged to the murdered men, and these must be some of our old friends, and a large party of them,' and both seemed alarmed at their situation, as they were alone. I made a point of being the last off, and my brother, Sheikh Chund, who was lately hung, had already mounted his horse, and I had my foot on the stirrup, when these approvers saw the advance guard of the regiment approaching and immediately made a rush at our bridles. We drew our swords, but it was too late. Sheikh Chund jumped off his horse and made off, and both approvers fell upon me and I was secured. Had they called out Thugs the sepoy's might have secured a great part of our gang, but they appeared panic-stricken and unable to speak. Finding some of the remains of the trooper's clothes on the fire, the English officers found it difficult to prevent the sepoy's from bayoneting me on the spot. [One of the officers was James Sleeman, nephew of 'Thuggee' Sleeman, later to succeed him.] I put on a bold face and told them that they ought to be ashamed of themselves to allow a native gentleman to be thus insulted and maltreated on the high road, and that nothing but the dread



of the same ruffianly treatment had made my friends run off and leave me. I had three brothers in that gang; they were all afterwards taken; two have been hung and the third is here."

So ends Sheikh Inaent's statement, which affords clear indication of the nervousness of the Thug when on his expeditions, relying, as he did, entirely upon cunning, intrigue, and treachery. When threatened by suspicion or faced by anything approaching equal numbers, he dropped his plunder and bolted like a rat. Intrepidity is, indeed, never a characteristic of the assassin, and a superiority of physical force—three or four to one usually being thought necessary—was regarded by the Thug as an indispensable preliminary to a successful murder. The majority of Thugs were firm adherents of the maxim that "Discretion forms the better part of valour," although some did pride themselves upon their ability to strangle a man single handed. This, however, was so rare that it was esteemed the most honourable distinction to ascribe to a Thug, who was then considered to have conferred a dignity upon his family which ennobled him in the eyes of his fellows for many generations. A Thug did not need much inducement to commit murder, and although a gang sometimes hesitated because of the prospect of small profit, in most cases they murdered for the sheer love of killing. As Shumsheras, a Thug approver, stated to Sleeman, "Eight *annas* (a shilling) is a very good remuneration for murdering a man. We often strangle a victim who is suspected of having two *pice* (a farthing!)." Surely murder on a wholesale scale can never have been committed for smaller profit?



## CHAPTER VI

### METHODS OF THUGGEE

RELATED by Poorun, a Thug sixty years of age, of Baraicha, before Captain W. H. Sleeman.

Few tales of Thuggee are as interesting as the following, for it is one of the very few actual descriptions of its mysteries given by a Thug.

“My father was a cultivator in Baraicha, which occupation I also followed; but joined the Thugs when I was thirty years of age, and have since continued to be connected with them. I have not, however, accompanied them on every excursion they have made, but, on the contrary, for intervals of two, three, and even six years remained at home and earned a subsistence by cultivation. In short, I have been upon six predatory excursions altogether, four under Oodey Singh, since dead, and two with Makhun Jemadar (now a prisoner) to whose gang I belong. During the last interval that I remained at home, I was apprehended on information of being a Thug and was kept some time in confinement, but the proofs which I brought forward of having for so many years been seen employed in cultivation were the means of my regaining my liberty. (Respectable employment, when not actually engaged upon Thuggee, was the great stand-by of the Thug!) This event, however, threw me into financial embarrassment and to get rid of it I went to Salany to borrow money from Makhun, a Thug Jemadar. He would only agree to relieve my necessities on condition that I brought my family to Salany



and became one of his Thugs, to which, from the destitute state my family was in, I was forced to agree. I accordingly joined his gang and accompanied them on the present and preceding excursions.

“Oodey Singh, my former leader, was beyond the prime of life when I joined him. He was, however, an active and enterprising man, but becoming less fit for exertion such as his situation required (as a leader of Thugs!), and his son Koman having been seized by other Thugs and thrown into confinement at Jubbulpore, affected him so much that he renounced Thuggee and shortly after died. It was before the establishment of tranquillity over the country (Extremists will note with regret that by this is meant the establishment of British rule!) that I served under Oodey Singh, at which time our excursions were neither carried to so great a distance as they have since been, nor were so lucrative or certain, for in those days travellers—particularly those with much property—seldom ventured to go from one place to another without being well escorted or in large parties, and we feared the soldiery and other mounted plunderers as much as other classes not connected with them.

“It was after this that I joined Makhun, and set out with him on an excursion to the Deccan. His gang, on this occasion, consisted of forty men and we set out in March, 1826, crossing the Nerbudda at Cheepanair Ghaut and joining up with Chotee Jemadar and his gang, which was the same strength as our own. At Nassuck we met a Thug of Oomrao and Rutyram’s gang, who told us that their gangs were close at hand in pursuit of some treasure-bearers, and proposed to Makhun that he should send a party to join them in order to be entitled to a share in the spoil. At first he thought of going himself, but recollecting that Oomrao and he were not on good terms, he sent twenty-five men with Chotee Jemadar instead. The next day we



received a message saying that they had successfully effected the business (the murder!) and that they were going on to Bhoranpore, where they requested we would meet them. We accordingly proceeded and learnt that the treasure-bearers were attacked and murdered near Jhokur, and that no less a sum than 22,000 rupees was found upon their persons in gold and bullion, the share of our two gangs being 6,000 rupees. This sum was immediately disposed of—Makhun received 2,000 for himself and his gang, and a similar sum was given to Chotee Jemadar's gang, and these sums were dispatched to our homes. That sent by Chotee reached home in safety but one of Makhun's men, who went in charge of our share, having got drunk at Jhansi, blabbed out the secret that they were Thugs returning with a large amount of plunder, upon which the authorities seized them and took the money. The remainder of the prize, namely 2,000 rupees, was retained for the expenses of our gangs. After this we proceeded to Aurungabad, but meeting with little success, we returned to our different homes before the rains set in.

“Such acts as these are of too common an occurrence with people of our habits to make much impression upon me, or any of my associates who had long been familiar with them, or to excite curiosity as to particular circumstances attending the acquisition of plunder by parties detached from the main body. Therefore it cannot be a matter of surprise if some of the murders and robberies committed have escaped my recollection, but I have without reserve stated all that my memory serves me to mention with every circumstance attending them. *I have never, since I have belonged to the Thugs, known one single instance of robbery committed by them without the previous destruction of life, almost invariably by strangulation.* This is effected either by means of a *ruhmal*, or strip of cloth, well twisted and wetted, or merely by the hands, though the latter is rarely practised



and only had recourse to from accidental failure in the former, and usual, mode. On a preconcerted signal being given, the victim or victims are instantly overpowered and the perpetration of the murder is the business of a moment.

“It is an invariable point with the Thugs to avoid spilling the blood of their victims, but if possible to take their lives by suffocation. This point is attended to with a view to leave no traces by which suspicion of the deed might be excited in the minds of people passing the spot, and detection ensue. In the hurry, however, in which it is necessary sometimes to dispose of the bodies, the graves are frequently not dug to such dimensions as to contain them in a whole state, particularly when there is a good number to be disposed of; they are, in such cases, cut into pieces and closely packed in them. After this they are filled with earth, and fires are burnt over them to remove all appearance of the earth being newly turned. Our murders are, with equal facility and certainty, as frequently perpetrated while the victims are walking along the road, as when enticed to our encampment and, all unconscious of what is to befall them, are sitting amongst us with everything carefully and leisurely arranged for their destruction. They are frequently perpetrated contiguous to villages, and take place generally before the twilight is completely over and night has set in, and always—while the business is going on—the hand-drum is beaten and singing commenced, to drown any noise that might be made by the victims.

“The Thugs actually engaged commence their operations simultaneously, and by a preconcerted signal, which is generally some expression not likely to strike the attention of the victims, such as *Tabac la ow* (bring tobacco). A *ruhmal* is the only implement which is used for strangling. I have never seen the *phansy*, or noose made of cord, used, though I am aware of the general supposition that it is by such an implement people are strangled by us. If it



has ever been in use, of which I have great doubt, it has long since been laid aside, for the obvious reason that, on any incidental occasion of being seized, it would inevitably lead to detection. (For travellers in India, guilty or innocent, were always liable to be seized for some semi-legal or illogical purpose before the full establishment of British rule.) Oomrao, Makhun, and other Thug Jemadars keep up a direct understanding with the local authorities in Bundelcund, where they and their followers reside, and invariably on return from a Thuggee excursion conciliate their forbearance and favour by suitable *nuzzeranas*, or presents. Assistance and support from the English authorities being likewise indispensable, these are through artifice also obtained.

“The Thug Jemadars have no direct intercourse themselves in this instance, but act through the medium of emissaries, who, by misrepresentation and falsehood, frequently contrive to extricate them from the difficulties which persons of our habits are constantly liable to be involved in. A relation of Oomrao’s, named Motee, and a person named Lala, a barber, of Cawnpore, render important service in this way. Motee, who was formerly a practising Thug, has discontinued for some years going on predatory excursions. He first brought himself into notice with the gentlemen (Englishmen) by informing against a Thug gang which, in consequence, was seized and confined at Jubbulpore. This action advanced him in favour, for the gentlemen thought that he acted as a check upon the Thugs. At least, this is what he makes it appear to be, and in consequence exercises great influence over us, making us pay well for his connivance and the good offices he performs on our behalf. Lala, a barber, is the patron of Makhun, and by representations to acquaintances in the service of a government official at Cawnpore, he renders great assistance in matters of difficulty.



“After the mishap that befell the share of plunder sent from Bhoranpore, Makhun had as usual recourse to Lala, who lost no time in waiting upon his friend Mahdee, a chief clerk to the government official at Cawnpore. To him he represented matters in such a light and with such success that Mahdee managed to get an injunction written by his superiors and sent to the Jhansi Rajah, saying that: ‘It having been made known that he (the Rajah) had seized four travellers passing through his boundaries, and plundered them of their property, the persons so treated being of respectable and inoffensive character, he was directed to set them at liberty and restore to them the property he had taken from them.’ (This letter had, of course, been sent out unknown to the British authorities.) A day or two before the receipt of this, the Rajah had released the Thugs, after having first obtained an acquittance for money he had taken from them. On receipt of Mahdee’s letter—thinking that, as the matter had come to the knowledge of the English, he would get a bad name with them and also lose the money, unless he could prove that the men were Thugs—he sent after them and had them again apprehended.

“Besides Lala, the barber, who manages matters in his favour through his acquaintances at the courts and court-houses at Cawnpore, Etawah and Humeerpore, Makhun has a great friend and supporter in the *Jhansi* (native attorney) at Humeepoorah, named Gunesh Lall. Makay sahib (quite evidently a Scotsman!) at Kytah is a great friend of Motee’s, and it was from him that he obtained the English pass which Oomrao showed to the horsemen when we were apprehended at Dekhola. (This is adequate proof of the clever manner in which the Thug actually succeeded in getting into direct touch with even English officials, and bluffing them by his guile and seemingly respectable employment.) When on a Thuggee expedition, so great a number of men together is calculated to excite



suspicion, but we are always prepared with some explanation to ward it off. Few of us carry arms, perhaps among twenty Thugs three swords may be found, but no more. When Thugs meet, though strangers, there is something in their manner which soon discovers itself to each other, and to assure the surmise thus excited, one exclaims 'Alee Khan!' which, on being repeated by the other party, a recognition of each other's habits takes place, but this is never followed by a disclosure of past acts. We use certain terms to distinguish particular circumstances and events connected with our proceedings which are known to ourselves alone. These terms are known to all persons of similar habits to ourselves, as well as to the Thugs of the Deccan, Malwa, Kaunthul, Bagor, Bundelcund and Gwalior, and I believe there are few parts of Hindustan that do not produce Thugs.

"In the division of plunder the Jemadars receive seven-and-a-half per cent besides sharing equally with the rest of the gang, but before any division whatever is made, the principal Jemadar alienates a certain part which is devoted to Bhowani, our tutelary deity. This almost entirely refers to money in gold or silver, for when it consists of diamonds or pearls, the leader draws blood from his hands, and having sprinkled a little of it over them, the sanction of the deity to a division is thereby considered to be obtained without any other alienation. But the omission of this ceremony, or neglecting when success attends us to propitiate a continuance of Bhowani's favour, by laying aside a part of our acquisitions to be appropriated to her service would, we firmly believe, bring heavy misfortunes upon us. The office of strangler is never allowed to be self-assumed, but is conferred with due ceremony after the fitness of the candidate in point of firmness, bodily strength and activity has been ascertained, and a sufficient degree of expertness in the use of the *ruhmal* has been acquired by long sham practice. When thus qualified, the person on whom the



office is to be conferred proceeds to a field conducted by his *gooroo* (instructor), who carries with him the *ruhmal*. Arrived there, he anxiously looks out for some favourable omen, such as the chirping of birds, or their flight past the right hand, and knots the *ruhmal* at each end the moment that either occurs, and delivers it to the candidate, imploring success upon him. After this they return and the ceremony is closed by a feast or distribution of sweetmeats. It is the seniors only who confer this office, generally old Thugs held in some estimation, but who—from infirmity of age—have ceased to accompany the gangs on their expeditions, and who receive their chief support from the voluntary contributions of those on whom they have conferred the privilege of using the *ruhmal*.”

So end this account of Thuggee from the lips of a Thug.

Mention has been made of Thugs killing Dacoits in the course of this expedition, and it will be of interest to give a description of these gang-robbers.

In India, under its native rulers, murder and robbery were hereditary professions and hereditary robbers, known as Dacoits, infested the highways and ever found a ready harbour of refuge in every independent native state. They usually lived in colonies in the midst of wild jungles difficult of access, and with incredible rapidity would sweep down on some distant town or village, plunder some houses, torture the inhabitants, and be off before pursuit could be organised. They stopped short at nothing, murder meaning very little to them when in search of plunder.

Sleeman's charge included the suppression of Dacoits as well as Thugs, and a case is quoted in his reports where some Dacoits, having been plundered by the treachery of their associates, applied for redress to Rajah Gung Sing in the Kingdom of Oudh, appointing him arbitrator. The Rajah determined to decide the question by an appeal to Heaven, and to this the Dacoit leader, Mungul Sing, and



his party consented. A blacksmith was ordered to make some cannon balls red hot, which were then lifted with tongs and placed on the palms of the suspected persons, protected only by a thin leaf. The ordeal was to carry these balls a certain distance without being burnt, but, after taking a few paces, all the suspects gave in under this awful test and were consequently pronounced guilty, sentenced to refund the money they had purloined, and ordered to pay a fine of five hundred rupees to the Rajah. (There was always a "rake-off" for the big man in those far off days!) Sleeman states that in 1849, nineteen years afterwards, "The hands of Boohooa, a Dacoit leader, still bear the marks of the burnings he got; and in showing them to me one day, he confessed that the decision of the deity, in that case, was a just one—that he really had assisted Mungul Sing in robbing Ghureeda on that occasion of 10,000 rupees."

The Dacoits were by no means an inconsiderable body, for in 1839 it was estimated that there were seventy-two Dacoit leaders south of the Jumna, who could gather together 1,625 followers, and to the north forty-six leaders controlling 1,445 of these ruffians. Sleeman compared them to a ball of quicksilver, which, if pressed by the finger, divided into many small globules, all certain to come together again and cohere as firmly as before. And yet, in spite of this difficulty and the fact that they were protected and warned of approaching danger by friendly, profit-sharing Rajahs and landowners, British rule in India ultimately succeeded in effectually suppressing Dacoity on an organised scale, in the same way as it had dealt with Thuggee.

A good description of Dacoity is given in Sleeman's "Report on Bagree Dacoits and other Gang-robbers by Hereditary Profession," published in 1849. One extract is as follows:

"In 1822, while I had charge of the civil district of Nursingpore in the Nerbudda Valley, a party of about



thirty natives in the dusk of the evening with nothing, seemingly, but walking-sticks in their hands, passed the piquet of sepoy's under a native commissioned officer, which stood on the banks of a rivulet, separating the cantonment from the town. On being challenged by the sentries, they said they were cowherds who had been out with their cattle which were following close behind. They walked up the street and, coming opposite the houses of the most wealthy merchants, they set their curtains ablaze with a box containing combustibles, stabbed everybody who ventured to move or made the slightest noise, plundered the houses, and, in ten minutes, were away with their booty, leaving about twelve persons dead and wounded on the ground. I was close at hand and had large parties of mounted and foot police sent out in all directions, but could never seize or trace one of the gang. There was a large police guard within twenty paces of the Dacoits on one side and this piquet of sepoy's within a hundred paces on the other. Both saw the blaze and heard the noise, but took them to be from a marriage procession; and the first intimation of the real character of the party was given by a little boy who crept along a bridge, unobserved by the Dacoits, and, half-dead with fright, whispered to the officer commanding that they were robbers and had killed his father. Before the officer could get his men ready, all were gone and nothing more was ever heard of them till I got behind the scenes twenty years afterwards and became acquainted with the whole *dramatis personæ* of these fearful expeditions."

In a book dealing almost entirely with tragedy, with little to relieve the monotonous tale of murder and treachery, it is a pleasant change to be able to record how some Dacoits, at least, obtained their deserts at the hands of the Thugs, and it is sincerely to be hoped that many Thugs, in turn, fell victims to Dacoits.



## CHAPTER VII

### THE SIXTY SOUL AFFAIR

KNOWN to the Thugs as "The Sixty Soul Affair" and confessed by Dorgha, a prominent Thug approver, before Captain W. H. Sleeman at Saugor.

"After the capture of Gwalior by General Wellesley (afterwards Duke of Wellington) in 1801, it was restored to the Nagpore Rajah, who appointed Ghureeb Sing to the command of the Fortress. Anxious to get some good soldiers to garrison it, he sent his younger brother, Ghyan Sing, with a number of followers and a large sum of money to raise them in Oudh and the districts between the Ganges and Jumna rivers.

"They came to Jubbulpore in June, where we Thugs were concentrated from the different parts into which we had extended our expeditions that season. Ghyan Sing's party consisted of fifty-two men, seven women and a boy four years of age. Some of our gangs lodged in the town, some in the cantonments among the troops, and others were encamped at the Tank of Adhar, three miles out. As soon as we heard of the arrival of this party, every Thug gang deputed some of its most respectable members to win their confidence. At first we tried to separate them into different parties and to induce them to proceed by different roads, but it was found impossible to separate them from Ghyan Sing; and, seeing this, we agreed to unite our gangs and to lead the party by the most unfrequented roads till we might find a place convenient for the murder of the whole at once.



“On reaching Sehora we persuaded them to quit the high road and take that which leads through extensive tracts of jungle and uninhabited country, without finding a fitting time and place, and reached Rewah, winning more and more upon their confidence every day. Eventually, at Simareea, we sent on Thugs as usual to select a place for the murder and they found one not far distant in a jungle, without a human habitation for many miles on either side. We persuaded the party to set out soon after midnight; and, as we went along, we managed to take our appointed places, two Thugs by every traveller, and the rest in parties in reserve at intervals along the line, every two managing to keep the person they were appointed to kill in conversation. On reaching the murder place, the signal was given at several different places, beginning with the rear party and passing on to that in front, and all were seized and strangled except the boy. It was now near morning and too late to admit of the bodies being securely buried; we made a temporary grave for them in the bed of the river, covered them over with sand, and went on with the boy and the booty to Chitterkote, intending to send back a large party the next night and have the bodies securely buried. The rains now began to set in and, after the murders, it rained very heavily all day. The party, however, went back but found that the river had risen and washed away all the bodies except two or three, which they pushed into the stream to follow the rest.”

*Sleeman* : “What became of the boy?”

*Dorgha* : “He was brought up by Mungul, and having taken to the trade of Thuggee, he was last year sent across the black water (i.e., transported) from Saugor.”

To appreciate this confession one must realise the immense difficulty of first overcoming the suspicions of sixty people, the majority soldiers trained to arms, and



next the extremely formidable task of strangling the whole without a single mistake. That the art of killing was carefully studied by the Thugs is shown in this affair, where the first to be murdered were those in the rear, and next those on their immediate front and so on until the head of the column was reached: all done so quietly and skilfully that none of the victims was able to make a sound, and the last of the sixty killed was utterly unconscious of the fate of the first. Treacherous and despicable as the Thugs were, one must give them full credit for the excellence of their organisation.

Dorgha made a second confession before Captain W. H. Sleeman on 13th February, 1834.

“In 1809 we were 200 Thugs at Suhajie in Nagpore, when we met forty travellers with whom we travelled seven stages. In the jungle near Choree we killed them all and buried their bodies under stones in the bed of the river. One was a Subahdar, with two daughters he was taking home to get married, who were murdered with their father and mother. There was another Brahman with an old woman, his wife, and a young daughter. The old woman was killed, but the daughter was preserved and married to Hunee Rao, a Thug; she had three children by him, but all are dead. In dealing with the forty travellers, on nearing the appointed place, the stranglers and hand-holders were all on some pretext or other close to those whom they were detailed to strangle, and reaching the spot, the signal was given and thirty-eight out of the forty were seized and strangled. The daughter of one of these travellers, Gunda Tewaree, was a very handsome young woman and Punchum Jemadar wished to preserve her as a wife for his son. When she saw her mother and father strangled, she screamed and hit her head against the stony ground and tried to kill herself. Punchum tried in vain to quiet her, and promised to take great care of



her and marry her to his own son, who would be a great chief, but all was in vain. She continued to scream until at last Punchum had to put the *ruhmal* round her neck and strangle her. We buried all the bodies in a *nullah* and got property to the value of 17,000 rupees which we divided. After this affair we returned home through Chitterkote, the place where we had murdered sixty people at one time two years before."

It is satisfactory to be able to record that the principal actors in this dark and bloody scene suffered for their crimes. Even when its full tale is told, only a very small percentage of the crimes committed by Thuggee were dragged into the light, few indeed outside the recollections of Thugs captured by Sleeman and his assistants—men who confessed to being the seventh or eighth generation of Thugs whose records of murder will never see the light of day.

On a previous expedition, in October, 1806, this same gang of Thugs passed through Mirzapore and, after making their offerings at the temple of Bhowani at Bindachun, collected at Ruttunpore with other Thug gangs, making the enormous total of six hundred. This gives an idea of the immensity of the Thuggee organisation at a period when its existence was almost unknown to Indian and English authorities alike. To continue in the Thug's own words:

"From there we went to Tukutpore, where we murdered a good many travellers who came near our place of encampment. We pretended to be sepoy's returning from furlough to different armies in the Deccan. On the third day a lady of rank arrived, whose husband, an officer in the Nagpore service, had recently died. She was on her way home accompanied by her uncle and had with her a slave girl and twelve armed men as guard. When she left next morning her party was followed by a detachment from every one of our gangs, making a gang of 160 Thugs under



some of our best leaders. For several days they followed without finding a convenient opportunity of disposing of them, until they reached Choorá, after which the road passes through extensive jungle without a village for many miles. Leaving this place in the morning we put the whole party to death and buried their bodies in a *nullah*."

Just a bare recital of crime which, but for its hideousness, might be an account of a Sunday School treat. In fact what makes it difficult to describe Thuggee is that approver after approver confessed his crimes with such cold-blooded callousness that revolting murder appeared almost like ordinary business. "Met two travellers—murdered them; found on them five rupees. Met six others, two stages later, engaged them in conversation, and, after lulling their suspicions, put them to death. Three hours later met a blind man and killed him, but found little upon him." Just a dry, matter of fact account of each terrible incident: the honeyed words by which victims were lured to their doom; the unquestionable charm of the Thug's conversation; the inspiring deportment which gave such confidence; the ingratiating manners of these blood-thirsty scoundrels—all this is left to the imagination. History only records that by the skilful use of the *ruhmal* the Thug annually brought to their doom thousands of well-armed travellers, alive to the dangers of the road.

It is usual to introduce amusing anecdotes into a book of this kind to lighten the tale of horror, but it is almost impossible to discover anything in Thuggee lending itself to comic relief, or upon which one can dwell with any approach to levity, for the whole business was grim. There is such similarity in the methods of the Thugs that it would be wearisome to travel through the five hundred odd pages of Sleeman's report, closely packed as they are with gruesome murder, but the following extracts are of interest as disclosing experiences outside the ordinary run.



During 1829 a gang of thirty-one Thugs at Daita met five sepoy3 with whom they became friendly and finally travelled on together. The next day when on the march they persuaded their victims to sit down and rest, preparatory to murdering them. One of the sepoy3 went into the jungle for a purpose, and by curious chance his absence was not noticed when the signal for murder was given, so that only four were accounted for. It was discovered later that the Thugs detailed to kill the fifth sepoy thought it wiser to hold their tongues and not to inform the gang that their prey had vanished. The fortunate man who had quite accidentally escaped death was returning to his comrades when the murder took place and actually witnessed the fate of his companions, after which, still concealed by the undergrowth, he crept stealthily away, being one of the very few ever to witness such a deed and live to tell the tale. When the bodies were being taken away for burial, the Thugs realised they were one victim short and, becoming alarmed, they threw two down a well and mutilated the third, which still showed signs of life, with a sword, afterwards resuming their journey somewhat hastily with 400 rupees worth of plunder. In the meantime the sepoy who had escaped proceeded to the nearest village, stated what he had witnessed, a search was made—the villagers proving less apathetic than usual—and the bodies of the murdered men were recovered. Six years later this murder was confessed to by the Thugs and enquiries were set on foot for the sepoy who had escaped. He was discovered to be still serving as a *havildar* in a regiment at Lucknow, and corroborated the statements made, recognising articles 'belonging formerly to his unfortunate comrades.

In December, 1829, a gang of Thugs on their way to Mirzapore met four travellers, whom they were planning to kill when some soldiers passed by. This sorely alarmed







the Thugs, who were naturally anxious to avoid the military for fear of arousing suspicion, but their chief Jemadar, Sheikh Inaent, was quickly arrested by the soldiers, who were under the command of Lieutenant James Sleeman (later Colonel James Sleeman, C.B.). Every Thug in the vicinity immediately sought safety in flight, but even so they were not too panic-stricken to cease from murder, one gang killing six travellers *en route*. While carrying the bodies of these unfortunate victims to their graves, one of the men, having been but lightly strangled, came unexpectedly to life again and ran away crying out loudly for assistance. Two Thugs pursued him, but some approaching travellers, concealed by the jungle, heard his screams of terror and shouted out that they were coming to his help. The Thugs on this occasion showed unusual nerve, keeping up the chase until they had caught the poor wretch and strangling him before rescue could be effected. Unquestionably the fact that, had he escaped, he would have been a witness against them, was a determining factor in this unusual exhibition of courage. When one reads of such an attempt to escape on the part of a half-strangled victim—who returned to life within the few minutes which elapsed between strangulation and burial—one can but think of the numbers who must have been buried, or thrown down wells, while still alive.

On another occasion some Thugs met two travellers on their way to Muttra—poor religious mendicants, with nothing about them to tempt cupidity. Their death, however, was determined upon and they were invited to dinner, the unfortunates, who had visited all parts of India, enlivening the evening by relating their adventures. Entertaining and delightful as they had proved, nothing could soften a Thug's heart and next morning they were strangled. While the murderers were engaged in digging their graves, the neighing of horses was heard and up rode a body of



mounted men. To conceal themselves was the work of an instant, but it meant leaving the bodies exposed in full view upon the ground. However, to their surprise and relief the horsemen rode straight on, but when the Thugs emerged to resume their ghoulish work, they found to their great astonishment that the bodies had disappeared! The approvers who described this incident many years later, swore to this disappearance and could only account for it by assuming that Bhowani, their goddess, seeing that the murdered were holy men, had removed the bodies in order to avoid suspicion falling upon her Thugs. History will never reveal the true explanation of this incident, but it is probable that the men were lightly strangled and feigned death, crept into the surrounding jungle and so escaped. Although it was against Thuggee law to kill holy men, when this did happen the Thugs argued that such pious victims had, through their offices, obtained so speedy a passage to Paradise that no sin could possibly attach to the murderers.

During the long existence of Thuggee in India professional money-carriers and treasure-bearers were entrusted with the conveyance over long distances of enormous sums in specie and precious jewels. These men, often of low caste, usually travelled without protection and even without arms, their fidelity, sagacity and beggarly appearance being relied upon as sufficient security. It bears testimony to their reputation for honesty when Sleeman states that, after investigating the details of murders of hundreds of these unfortunate men, he had never heard of one who had betrayed his trust. It was generally by such carriers that merchants in big cities sent their remittances to distant parts, and some indication of the value of property carried by these seemingly poor men is afforded by the following details: in 1826 the murder of fourteen treasure-bearers yielded 25,000 rupees worth of plunder; in 1827, seven



murdered, 22,000 rupees; in 1828 nine murdered, 40,000 rupees; in 1829 six murdered, 82,000 rupees. However questionable the wisdom of conveying treasure in this manner may now be considered, it must be borne in mind that the roads of India before the advent of British rule were so generally unsafe that it is doubtful whether strong escorts of well-armed guards would have provided much protection. For, apart from Thugs, the roads were rendered dangerous by unscrupulous native chiefs and land-owners, many little better than robber-barons, who had formidable and well-armed retainers always eager for plunder, as well as dacoits, or professional armed robbers, to all of whom a treasure-party advertised by its escort, offered an irresistibly tempting prize. The poorly-dressed money-carriers were experienced men trained to betray no sign whatever of the wealth they carried and, therefore, comparatively safe from robbers, but not from Thugs, to whom plunder came second to murder.

In 1831 some Thugs were sitting by a well when three treasure-bearers from Bareilly arrived and began to bathe. Under such circumstances the fact that they were conveyors of specie could not be concealed from such lynx-eyed assassins who afterwards addressed them with great respect and eventually persuaded them to accompany the gang. The usual programme followed, and with insinuating discourse and devilish treachery they ingratiated themselves with the travellers, until the opportunity came to strangle them. The dead bodies were thrown down wells—often a favourite device of the Thug for hasty burial: indeed, there were few wells in India at that time which did not periodically give up human victims, for men with no regard for life could hardly be expected to show much consideration for hygiene. Thinking all evidence of their crime so satisfactorily concealed for so little effort, the Thugs pursued their way happy in the knowledge that they had obtained



a considerable amount of treasure. How different their feelings would have been had they known that one of their victims had not been quite dead when thrown down the well, and that the shock of immersion in cold water had so revived him that, with immense effort, he had succeeded in climbing out of his clammy tomb and, running to a village, had given the alarm. Righteous indignation at the murder probably carried less weight with the villagers than anxiety to share in the plunder, and they pursued the Thugs and captured eleven. The Thugs had 600 rupees of the murdered men in their possession, but managed to throw them away before being seized, with the result that, on being searched, no money was found on them. Years later it transpired that—fortunately for them—this money had been found by a dishonest cultivator, who retained it without telling the police! It is typical of native justice of that time that these Thugs, caught red-handed in murder and with a living witness to accuse them, were kept in confinement for six months only and then liberated.

On the last expedition of the infamous Sheikh Inaent in 1830, his gang of twenty-five Thugs opened its expedition at Buseela. Soon afterwards they fell in with a tambourine player and his wife, who had an infant daughter at her breast, and a little later were joined by a Mussulman and his wife and child, a lad of five—all of whom they induced to join up with their party. Their luck was in, for presently they were overtaken by five other travellers. Their organisation, however, generally so good, was not functioning well on this occasion for, although they succeeded in murdering the tambourine player and his wife and child, they lost the rest owing to the gang being divided into three for the convenience of putting all the travellers to death. Those who escaped had been sent on ahead to be dealt with later and, without the slightest suspicion of the danger they were in, escaped death for the simple reason



that they took the wrong road, thus passing out of the Thugs' power, to remain for the rest of their lives unconscious of their good fortune. Next day the Thugs met two sepoy returning home on furlough and induced them to join their party, but three days passed before they could prevail upon them to set out before daybreak, for the sepoy had heard of numerous murders on the road and were suspicious and on their guard. Early morning starts, long before other travellers were astir, formed an important part of the Thuggee programme, facilitating as this did both murder and burial.

Proof of the cunning and cleverness of the Thug can now be illustrated, for when these particular specimens were arrested by native police on suspicion of being Thugs, they told such plausible stories, looked so respectable, and were so injured at the reflection cast upon their characters, that the police officer actually released them with apologies. He even went further to show his faith in their integrity, for he gave them a letter to the chief of police in Calpee, whom they had pretended to know intimately. How they must have laughed at the success of their invention! This incident was unfortunately to prove the downfall of the sepoy, who were still in their company and had witnessed all this, for they were so impressed by the police apology as a proof of their companions' respectability, that they now fell in with the Thugs' plan and were prevailed upon next morning to start at a very early hour, being strangled in a water-course soon afterwards.

Passing through Chattapore that day the gang met three carriers of holy Ganges water, whom they succeeded in persuading that they also were holy men employed in such religious duties—what histrionic talent these Thugs possessed!—suggesting that they should take advantage of the occasion and participate in a feast. The poor men accepted this invitation and camped with the Thugs that



night, to be strangled and buried next morning. Later that day came three other travellers, who proved most entertaining, sitting and smoking with their pleasant chance acquaintances and relating for their interest and amusement long and detailed stories of Thugs they had assisted in arresting and seen hung at Joura, until the Thugs eventually tired of talking "shop" and, probably to their great surprise, strangled these garrulous club bores. The fact that they were engaged for some time in such conversation with men familiar with the appearance of Thugs, shows how singularly clever they were in disguising their trade.

Another gang of Thugs met a native teacher from Ajmere, with two attendants and a groom, and after the usual artifices, all put up for the night at a *fakir's* shrine. In the evening the Thugs induced the *fakir* to go to the bazaar to make some purchases, and during his absence murdered the travellers within the sacred precincts of the shrine itself, covering up the dead bodies with their blankets so that the *fakir*, on his return, might think them asleep. When he came back and lay down, surrounded by murderers and the dead, and all unconscious of the peril he was in, the corpses were carried away and buried. Nothing could daunt the Thug when out for murder.

Next comes a Thug expedition by Ramzam and Hyder in 1831, peculiar in that it is one of the few on record in which two Thugs only took the road. It is related by Ramzam:

"We set out for the purpose of strangling travellers (How simply expressed!) in the beginning of the rains, and proceeded to Bauderlow upwards of a hundred miles, from whence we returned by another route." Their luck was apparently not in, for the record goes on to say, "Still no travellers, till we reached Bowanegh, where we fell in with a boatman. We enveigled him and strangled him as he stood, for he refused to sit. (Poor soul, doubtless he



realised, too late, the hands he was in!) We then made a long journey, about 130 miles, to Bheelhaehat, where English troops were, and fell in with another traveller. Next morning, having won his confidence, we endeavoured to induce him to sit down. This he would not do, having become, I think, aware of us, and I therefore endeavoured to strangle him as he walked along, but did not succeed. Both of us then fell upon him, and although he made a great outcry, shouting "They are murdering me!", we eventually strangled him and flung his body down a well. After this we returned home, having been out for a month and travelled 260 miles. My companion Hyder was a staunch Thug, fearing nothing, but he was not a good enveigler. To enveigle a man is no easy matter, to answer all his questions and act upon them." So ended a pleasant little walking tour, as it were, its tedium relieved by murder, and only marred by Ramzam's bungling and Hyder's lack of polish.

Another Thug now relates his experience with an old man of Senapore:

"We won his confidence in this manner. He carried a load which was too heavy for his age, and I said to him after other conversation, 'You are an old man, I will aid you in carrying your load, as you are from my part of the country.' He said, 'Very well, take me with you.' So we took him with us to where we slept at night. We woke him next morning long before dawn and set out, and after three miles we got him to sit down to rest while it was still very dark. Madura was ready behind him and strangled him. He was seventy years of age. We flung his remains into a well, having first searched his corpse."

For the most part Thugs were arrant cowards, but the following confession illustrates what could almost be called bravery on a Thuggee expedition.

"In the rainy season I enveigled a traveller. He was a soldier and I woke him at night and made an excuse for



starting. We were midway between two villages when I endeavoured to persuade him to sit down, as the place was convenient for murder, but he would not sit and took his sword in his hand, so I strangled him as we walked along. He instantly fell and was quickly a dead man. Budloo and Madaree aided me by pulling his legs when I seized his neck in the noose." This is a rare instance of a Thug showing anything approaching bravery when up against an armed and suspicious man, and shows the dexterity with which the Thug was able to kill his man by team-work, every operation being most carefully rehearsed during the off-season, just as to-day the sportsman gets into practice on clay pigeons before trying his luck on the moor.

When the victim refused to sit, the method adopted by the Thug was to throw the *ruhmal* round his neck, holding on to one end, the other being seized by an accomplice on the other side, it was then instantly crossed behind the neck and drawn tight, the head being pressed forward. Simultaneously the holder of hands seized his legs and threw him face downwards on the ground, and an assistant pinioned him to earth by pressing upon his buttocks. In this situation the wretched victim could make no resistance, particularly as all this while he was being savagely kicked in the most sensitive parts of the body.

A native commissioned officer told Sleeman that, while guarding some Thug prisoners at Lucknow, one of them related with great pleasure the following experience which had befallen him on a Thuggee expedition.

On this occasion his gang had encountered a Mogul officer of noble bearing and handsome countenance, mounted on a fine horse and attended by numerous servants. A man of high courage and well armed, he considered he had nothing to fear from this small party of seemingly respectable and modest-looking Hindus going the same road. But, although they approached



him in a respectful manner and attempted to enter into conversation, the Mogul had heard of Thugs, and thinking it best for this reason to have nothing to do with strangers, ordered them away. The Thugs did all in their power to overcome his suspicions, but finding their efforts unavailing and recognising the futility of persistence, took their leave and dropped behind. The next morning the Mogul and his retainers overtook other travellers—Mohammedans this time, like himself (by arrangement!)—who accosted him in a most respectful manner, dwelling upon the dangers of the road, the necessity for travellers keeping together for mutual security, and expressing the hope that they would be permitted to take advantage of the protection of such a well-armed party, which happened to be going the same way. The Mogul, however, was determined to have no strange companions on the road, and made this perfectly plain, even threatening them with his sword. As he had a bow and quiver full of arrows over his shoulder, a brace of loaded pistols in his waistbelt, and a sword by his side—in every way a formidable cavalier—the Thugs thought discretion the better part of valour and departed.

But nothing diverted these human beasts of prey, and that same evening another party of Thugs lodged in the same *sarai*, or native inn, as the Mogul, and succeeded in ingratiating themselves with his butler and groom. His march was resumed the following morning, and presently the party of Thugs who had shared the *sarai* and, with masterly cunning, had left it before the others—were overtaken by the Mogul and, salaaming respectfully, began to talk with his servants. The Mogul took exception to this and ordered them away, but his servants interceded for them, stating that the travellers were men of respectability whom they had made friends with overnight and that they needed company. Their pleas proved fruitless,



however, and the Thugs were compelled to leave and admit defeat for the third time.

But they were not easily daunted, and had not only prepared for this contingency but had by this time actually completed their arrangements for the murder, even to the preparation of the graves. Next day, when in the middle of an extensive and uninhabited plain, the Mogul's party came upon six poor Mussulman sepoy, sitting weeping by the side of a dead companion—actually five disguised Thugs with a victim they had killed—who stated that they were soldiers on their way to Lucknow, and that their companion had died from exhaustion. His grave was ready, but they were poor unlettered men, unable to repeat the funeral service from the holy *Koran*, and they requested that "His Highness" would perform this last office for them, and by so doing find his reward both in this world and the next. Such an appeal from co-religionists could not be refused without dishonour and the Mogul officer, dismounting, had a carpet spread, the body placed in its proper position—the head towards Mecca—and all made ready for the burial. As, however, it was improper to perform the funeral service while armed, he removed his array of weapons (how the Thugs must have chuckled inwardly at this, after all their failures!) and, calling for water, washed his feet, hands and face that he might not pronounce the holy words in an unclean state. This done, he knelt and began to repeat the funeral service in a clear, loud voice, with a Thug on either side of him, and the others a few paces behind with the servants, ostensibly to see that they did not interrupt the good Samaritan at his devotions. All being ready, the leading Thug gave the *jhirnee*, or signal, the *ruhmal*s were thrown round the necks of the victims, and a few moments later the Mogul and his servants were dead and lying in the previously prepared grave in the usual manner, the head of one at the feet of the one below.



This true account affords a characteristic instance of the manner in which the Thugs overcame the scruples and suspicions of those they hunted; and if a highly intelligent man such as this super-suspicious Mogul officer could be so victimised, what chance had more simple folk?

On and on go these endless stories in the pages of Sleeman's Thuggee records of cruel deception, treachery, and murder, which sullied Indian history for hundreds of years: stories which are of interest in that they are the actual confessions of Thugs, and were the means by which their atrocious system of murder was finally suppressed. Enough has been said to show that no human being aroused any feeling of pity or remorse in the Thug, and it is therefore a pleasure to recount the way in which Thuggee was suppressed, for no sane body of men since this world began have been greater human vermin.

A study of the history of India before the days of British rule brings out one fact pre-eminently: that upon its unprotected roads unarmed travellers had small chance of safety, for few native chiefs had any sympathy even for the inhabitants of their own territory, and it was rare to find anybody with a desire to protect the stranger from robber or assassin; on the contrary, many waxed fat upon ill-gotten "squeezes" from Thugs and Dacoits.

Sleeman, writing of this time a hundred years ago, says; "No instance can be found of a chief extending his sympathy or his charities to the people of any other territory. They all possess a feeling of strong pride in claiming for their own territory the privilege of a sanctuary for robbers and assassins of all other territories, while the public officers of every description, and land-holders of every degree, converted this privilege when conceding to their chiefs into a source of revenue for themselves. This meant that the traveller encountered by Thugs had small chance of saving his life, for, even if alarmed and frightened



it was useless to appeal for protection from the property-owners or villagers of the strange country through which he passed."

And so the wretched, unprotected traveller was forced to seek protection by joining other travellers, who so often proved to be Thugs. It is only when the state of India under native government is examined that one is able to appreciate the great benefit of British rule which has brought justice and order to a people who were previously most hideously oppressed. To one unfamiliar with the East it must seem extraordinary that the continued disappearance of large numbers of Indians should have excited so little interest and enquiry, and did not lead to an earlier discovery of Thuggee. This perplexity is due to the fact that, in well regulated countries, the absence for any appreciable length of time of even a single person creates alarm, and usually results in the missing person being traced. But even in England, in Europe and the United States, many people do disappear from their ordinary occupations or homes without producing either surprise or alarm, and in the India of the past the probability of such disappearance was far greater and, unless the person was of importance, became known to few beyond the absentee's family or village.

The majority of those who fell victim to Thuggee were from far distant parts: many had no settled abodes, such as *fakirs*, or religious mendicants, strolling musicians, pedlars and tramps, while the Thugs were careful to refrain from murdering those who might be known in towns and villages near which they were operating. These precautions not only prevented suspicion attaching to them, or to any local authority protecting them and sharing the booty, but—a masterpiece of cunning—threw suspicion upon unfortunate residents near the scene of the strangulation in the unlikely event of a murdered traveller being traced



to where he was last seen alive. Those setting out on a long journey even to-day are often unable to fix the exact date of their return: in India a hundred years ago one had to allow a margin of months, so that if travellers did not return at the expected time, the delay excited small alarm among relatives and friends until it was too late to institute enquiries with any hope of success.

In the improbable event of a suspicion arising that they had been murdered, this was attributed to highway robbers, and it was seldom that the expense of a lengthy search could be borne by the bereaved relatives, for, even when it was possible, it was extremely difficult to trace the progress of the missing travellers to any particular place. In the few instances where this was accomplished, suspicion was apt to fall upon others than the respectable, well-mannered and inoffensive travellers such as the Thug always appeared, journeying by road for business purposes, or to visit relations or attend a marriage. The Thugs, indeed, were so inconspicuous, owing to the care with which they divided their gangs and the cunning way they played their different parts, that they were rarely suspected of murder, and even if suspicion did fall upon them, by that time those concerned had long since scattered and returned to their respectable employments and were once again posing as public-spirited citizens and model parents.

Thus the difficulty of suppressing an age-old secret organisation of murder, itself existing in a country renowned for secrecy and mystery, will be appreciated. For Thuggee was a mysterious religion of murder, protected not only by a secret language, but also by native chiefs, officials, land-holders and other important people who, whilst themselves ignorant of its secrets, knew enough to be convinced that to support its continuance and protect its followers was to their own pecuniary advantage.



## CHAPTER VIII

### THE BEGINNING OF THE THUGGEE SUPPRESSION

NEVER yet has England failed to find the man to fit the emergency, and Thuggee was not to prove the exception when British Government learnt of its existence. In this particular case its discoverer was to be given charge of its suppression—a somewhat unique fact—and this gigantic task was entrusted to a young officer, Captain W. H. Sleeman, whose exhaustive researches into the mysteries of Thuggee had not ceased from the time when he had first been brought into contact with Thugs in 1823 until he had succeeded in laying bare its grim secrets in 1829.

Those were the days when British rule in the East was synonymous with courage, strength and justice, when those vested with authority did not hesitate to employ instruments which, in their wisdom and experience, they felt to be the best to deal with a situation. As a consequence the Indian had faith in British government and learned to respect it, with the result that Thuggee, which had existed for over three hundred years with comparative freedom from molestation under native government, was suppressed within a dozen years by a handful of Englishmen, actually never more than a dozen in total number throughout the Thuggee operations. It is of interest to speculate as to what the procedure would be to-day were such an organisation of murder to be discovered in India, and imagination runs riot at the long vista of Royal Commissions, Blue, Red and White Books, Geneva Conferences and political capital



which would be made out of it, the procrastination and delay, the tying of the hands of those on the spot, and the world propoganda which would ensue. But a hundred years ago British might was founded on two things, strength and justice, both well understood and appreciated in the East, and dexterous as the political juggler with words might be, acts counted for more, and Thuggee could not shelter behind disunited party government.

Let us now glance at the qualifications of Major-General Sir William Sleeman, K.C.B.—as he was later to become—for this important duty. A member of an ancient Cornish family, of Pool Park, St. Tudy, and descended from a long line of sailor and soldier ancestors, he had arrived in India as an Ensign in 1809 and had served throughout the war with Nepal of 1814-16, being one of the two officers in his regiment to survive the campaign and being specially commended. After the war he served at Allahabad and Partabgarh, where he laid the foundation of an intimate understanding of Oudh affairs, until 1820 when his unique knowledge of Indian affairs and his great gift for languages led to his selection for political employment, and he was appointed assistant to the Agent of the Governor-General administering the Sagar and Nerbudda territories. In such a recently conquered country, where the sale of widows by auction for the benefit of the treasury, and other strange customs, still prevailed, his abilities had ample scope, and two years later he was given the independent charge of the districts of Narsinghpur in the Nerbudda valley, gaining great experience in preventing and remedying the grave disorders of this district. With such experience behind him, there were few in India better fitted for the great task with which he was now entrusted.

In 1824 he was promoted Captain and in March, 1828, assumed civil charge of the Jubbulpore district, where he married, on 21st June, 1829, Amelie Josephine, the



daughter of Count Blauden de Fontenne de Chalain, a scion of a noble house of France, who had succeeded in escaping from France during the Revolution, when most of his family were put to the guillotine. It is interesting to recall a story connected with her uncle, Charles Louis Blauden de Chalain, a young brother of the Count's. At the time of the Revolution he was a very young boy in charge of a tutor who proved an unmitigated blackguard, and seizing his opportunity with France in such a turmoil, sent his young charge to a peasant family and usurped the estates of Chalain. So for some years this boy grew up among the peasant class and remained in ignorance of the possessions he was heir to, for his elder brother was then dead. In the reign of Louis XV restitution was made as far as possible to those of the aristocracy who had survived, and the tutor was immediately dispossessed of the estates, while the rightful heir was found in his peasant's home and restored to his possessions. After his flight from France the Count de Fontenne de Chalain escaped to the Mauritius where his daughter, later to become Lady Sleeman, was born. She was a splendid helpmate to Sir William and survived until 1883. The author has just a dim recollection of her imposing presence when she paid periodical visits to his home, in days when a carriage and pair meant an impressive majesty which no longer exists. She must, indeed, have been a remarkably brave woman, for she stood by her husband throughout his difficult and dangerous task, and remained by his side in India for twenty-seven years without a break. Considering those were the days when means of alleviating the heat and solitude of India were few, this was a noble effort, and without her support it is doubtful whether Sir William could have survived his strenuous labour. For this reason it is felt that she deserves mention in this book.

An amusing story hinges upon this union. Sleeman had



been married for over four years without having any children, and during a tour through his district was received by the headman of a certain village with the salutation that he might be blessed with many sons, for the native of India regards the possession of children as a great blessing. Half jokingly Sleeman replied that, were he blessed with a son, he would present the village with a sum of money. Within the year his only son, Henry Arthur, was born, and remembering his promise, his gift was dispatched. Coming from such a quarter and being a substantial sum, the patriarchs of the village determined to build a shrine, inside which a light was kept perpetually burning in memory of the donor. Since that time, now a hundred years ago, this shrine has been visited out of curiosity by many of Sleeman's female descendants, with the invariable result that a son has been born within the same year, although the visits were paid without the least intention or desire to test the efficacy of the shrine's superstitious power.

Poor little Henry Arthur Sleeman was not destined to be with his father for long, for at the age of seven he was sent to England and never saw his father again. Even at that early age he was something of a diplomatist as is shown by the following extract from Sir William's book, "Rambles and Recollections of an Indian Official":— "Poor old Salamat Ali wept bitterly at the last meeting in my tent, and his two nice boys, without exactly knowing why, began to do the same; my little son Henry caught the infection and wept louder than any of them. I was obliged to hurry over the interview lest I should feel disposed to do the same." In 1840 Henry Arthur sailed for England round the Cape with seventeen large trunks filled with sufficient clothing for at least twenty boys. Not the least of the price paid by those who served the Empire in India then was the long separation from their children, and it was always a matter of deep regret to Sir William that his



only son ultimately elected to enter the 16th Queen's Lancers in preference to returning to India.

This brief sketch of Sleeman's career shows very clearly that there was nothing fortuitous about his discovery of Thuggee, for had blind stumbling been able to achieve this, it could not have lain hidden for three centuries. Twenty years of uninterrupted work in India, including two years of warfare with native troops, and thirteen years of valuable experience in settling newly-conquered districts, had fashioned the key which was now to unlock the secret mysteries of ages.

Minor arrests of Thugs, chiefly of an accidental character, had been made from time to time up to 1829, but never of such a type as to threaten the very existence of Thuggee, nor had any organised attempt been sustained to encompass its destruction until Sleeman discovered its secrets and horrors. As a reward he was given the truly terrific task—one which would have appalled most men—of battling against this repulsive religion until it was finally suppressed.

To appreciate to the full the difficulties which lay before Sleeman it must be remembered that there was no really serious desire to suppress Thuggee on the part of a large percentage of leading Indians themselves, whilst actual hostility was shown by a minority, who visualised in its rooting-out a certain and regrettable loss of income. Furthermore, the period 1830-45, when the main work of the suppression of Thuggee was undertaken, was one during which most Englishmen in India, comparatively few in number, were engaged in restoring or creating, to use a better term, law and order in other directions, or in "shaking the pagoda tree" to their own financial advantage. The result was that those entrusted with this suppression received little help from outside, and may be likened to men isolated in the midst of a dangerous, trackless and gloomy jungle, without map or compass.



Up to this time Thuggee had been regarded by those in authority, on the occasions when it came to light, as something in the nature of Dacoity, or a haphazard assembly of criminals for the purpose of murder and robbery. When thought about at all, which was seldom, the Thug was looked upon as a man rendered desperate by privation, who took to the road much as the garrotter of old in England who strangled people to escape detection. They were, in other words, regarded as outlaws who infested the roads of India all the year round, with every man's hand against them.

Instead of this Sleeman's revelations proved them to be for the most part men holding responsible and respectable positions, model citizens, husbands and parents, who spent their holidays in murdering everyone they met regardless of motive. It was found that they divided up their area of operations in much the same manner as a pack of hounds hunts a particular bit of country, only overlapping in exceptional circumstances, which ensured that each Thuggee gang could work its area without disturbance, and enabled its members so to familiarise themselves with every feature of it that murder could be accomplished with the minimum of inconvenience and the greatest safety.

Thuggee was a hereditary profession, the sons of Thugs being taught their craft by skilled leaders who led them by easy stages to the point of murder, so that they came to look on Thuggee not only as a legitimate means of profit but also as a pleasant pastime. On reaching manhood, therefore, they were not only versed in all the arts and crafts essential to inveigling their victims, but the treacherous murders they had seen committed by their seniors whom they respected had produced a callousness of mind which made them for all time devoid of feelings of pity and remorse for their victims. The absence of motive for their murders: the fact that they never murdered near



their own homes: the splitting up of the gangs and the return to respectability after a comparatively short period of absence: their secret language and signs: the support and patronage they obtained from those who benefited by the murders they committed—who asked no questions, providing their palms were well oiled: their respectable appearance and pleasing manners: the reputable, if fictitious reasons given for their absence, had all combined to keep Thuggee secret for centuries and now made its suppression one of the most difficult tasks which an Englishman has been called on to undertake. It was, naturally, no safe one either, for the names of Sleeman and his few assistants charged with this most dangerous duty soon became known to every Thug in this wide-spread organisation of skilled murderers, to whom assassination meant nothing since it was an everyday occurrence. Their opportunities for effecting reprisals were only equalled by the ease with which they could gain access to the Englishmen concerned, for as the work of suppression proceeded, many Thugs were discovered to be in semi-official and even official positions, which brought them into direct contact with those in authority. No Europeans fighting against such odds ever had so little protection, and had the courage of the Thugs equalled their cold-blooded cruelty, neither Sleeman nor his assistants could have survived a week, nor Thuggee been suppressed. On the other hand, had this small handful of British officials, scattered like poppies in a corn-field, shown the slightest timidity in grappling with this gigantic task, they would surely have fallen victims to the Thugs at the onset, in which case millions of Indians alive to-day would never have been born, including possibly those who now agitate for a restoration of the conditions under which Thuggee thrived and battered.

The fear of reprisals was undoubtedly one of the main reasons why an attempt to suppress the Thugs had never



been made before, for periodically through Indian history one finds instances of Thugs caught in the act of murder and imprisoned by some Rajah or native chief, only to be liberated after a short time. In an Eastern court of those days bribery almost always took the place of justice, and this, combined with fear, was responsible in most cases for the extreme leniency shown. The attributes which led to the selection of Sleeman for this job were his intrepid courage, his extensive knowledge of the criminal tribes, and a nobility of purpose which placed duty before everything else. Fortunately also he possessed that all-important gift so vital in any great leader, the ability to select the right men to help him, and soon he had chosen and was controlling a group of some thirty assistants: a small and heroic band of brothers engaged in a great enterprise.

Centuries of experience had enabled the Thugs to build up an organisation so secret in character that, in their estimation, it was impregnable. And when they first heard of the suppressive measures which were to be taken, they were amused, for, as they said, attempts to suppress them had been made before and had not succeeded, and this attempt was also doomed to failure. Such was their philosophy, so quickly to be shattered, and they were soon to realise a truth which many criminals have learned before and since, that British justice can neither be bribed nor frightened.

Even to Sleeman, accustomed as he was to crime in many forms, Thuggee came as an astonishing revelation, as is shown by the following extract from his book, "Ramaseena," published in 1836:—

"When Feringeea—a Thug leader of some note, for whose arrest Government paid five hundred rupees—was brought in to me at Saugor in December, 1830, he told me that, if his life were spared, he could secure the arrest of several large gangs who were in February to rendezvous at Jypore



and proceed into Guzerat and Candeish. Seeing me disposed to doubt his authority upon a point of so much importance, he requested me to put him to the proof—to take him through the village of Selohda, which lay two stages from Saugor on the road to Seronge, and through which I was about to pass on my tour of the district, and he would show me his ability and inclination to give me correct information. I did so and my tents were pitched where tents usually are in the small mango grove. I reached them in the evening, and when I got up in the morning he pointed out three places in which he and his gang had deposited, at different intervals, the bodies of travellers. A Pundit and six attendants murdered in 1818, lay among the ropes of my sleeping tent, a havildar and four sepoy's murdered in 1824, lay under my horses, and four Brahman carriers of Ganges water and a woman murdered soon after the Pundit, lay within my sleeping tent. The sward had grown over the whole, and not the slightest sign of its ever having been broken was to be seen. The thing seemed to me incredible; but after examining attentively a small brick terrace close by, and the different trees around, he declared himself prepared to stake his life upon the accuracy of his information. My wife was still sleeping over the grave of the water-carriers, unconscious of what was doing or to be done. She has often since declared that she never had a night of such horrid dreams, and that while asleep her soul must consequently have become conscious of the dreadful crimes that had been perpetrated.

“I assembled the people of the surrounding villages, and the Thanadar and his police, who resided in the village of Korae close by, and put the people to work over the grave of the havildar. They dug down five feet without perceiving the slightest sign of the bodies or a grave. All the people assembled seemed delighted to think that I



was become weary like themselves, and satisfied that the man was deranged; but there was a calm and quiet confidence about him that made me insist upon their going on, and at last we came upon the bodies of the whole five, laid out precisely as he had described. My wife, still unconscious of our object in digging, had repaired to the breakfast tent, which was pitched at some distance from the grave; and I now had the ropes of her tent removed, and the bodies of the Pundit and his six companions, in a much greater state of decay, exhumed from about the same depth, and from the exact spot pointed out. The water-carriers were afterwards disinterred, and he offered to point out others in the neighbouring groves, but I was sick of the horrid work and satisfied with what he had already done. The gangs which were concentrating upon Jypore were pursued and the greater part of them taken; and Feringeea's life was spared for his services. It was afterwards found that the proprietor of the village of Selohda nearby connived at all these murders, and received the horse of the Pundit in a present. Several of the Thug gang resided in this village, and the rest used to encamp in his grove every year in passing, and remain there for many days at a time feasting, carousing and murdering. Yet the people of the village and of the surrounding country knew nothing of these transactions, which shows how cleverly the secrets of Thuggee were kept.

“While I was in charge of the district of Nursingpore in the years 1822, 1823 and 1824, no ordinary robbery or theft could be committed without my becoming acquainted with it; nor was there a robber or thief of the ordinary kind in the district with whose character I had not become acquainted in the discharge of my duty as Magistrate; and if any man had then told me that a gang of assassins by profession resided in the village of Kundelee—not



four hundred yards from my court—and that the extensive groves of the village of Mundesur—only one stage from me—was one of the greatest *beles* or places of murder in all India, and that large gangs from Hindustan and the Deccan used to rendezvous in these groves, remain in them for many days together every year, and carry on their dreadful trade along all the lines of road that pass by and branch off from them, with the knowledge and connivance of the two land-holders by whose ancestors these groves had been planted, I should have thought him a fool or a madman; and yet nothing could have been more true. The bodies of a hundred travellers lie buried in and around the groves of Mundesur, and a gang of assassins lived in and about the village of Kundelee while I was Magistrate of the district, and extended their depredations to the cities of Poona and Hyderabad.”

Fortunately Sleeman was a *shikari*, or hunter of big game, and while the Thug looked upon the killing of his fellow man as sport, so he regarded the extermination of the Thug as hunting of the finest type.

Colonel Meadows Taylor, C.S.I., whose delightful novel, “Confessions of a Thug,” brought Sleeman’s discovery of Thuggee and successful work into great prominence, says in his “The Story of My Life,” “Returning after an absence of a month through my district, I was met by some very startling revelations. The police, and chiefly my faithful Balram Singh, had reported some very unusual occurrences. Dead bodies, evidently strangled, and in no instance recognised, were found by the roadside, and no clue could be discovered as to the perpetrators of their death. In two places jackals or hyenas had rooted up newly-made graves, in one of which were found four bodies and in another two, much eaten and disfigured. The whole country was in alarm, and the villagers had constantly patrolled their roads, but as yet in vain. All we could learn was, that





*(By courtesy of C. J. Irwin, Esq., and D. Savidge, Esq., I.C.S.)*

#### A FAVOURITE THUGGEE BELE OR MURDER PLACE

The grove of Mundesur famous in Thuggee days for the number of murders committed within its shelter and mentioned by Sir William Sleeman as follows; "One of the greatest Beles, or places of murder in all India. Large gangs from Hindustan and the Deccan used to rendezvous in these groves, remain in them for many days together, every year, and carry on their dreadful trade along all the lines of road that pass by, with the knowledge and connivance of the two land holders by whose ancestors these groves had been planted.



some time before, two bodies of men had passed through the district, purporting to be merchants from the north going southwards, but that they appeared quiet and respectable, above suspicion. During these enquiries it transpired that numbers of persons of that part of my district were absent every year from their homes at stated periods. These were for the most part Mussulmans, who carried on a trade with Belgaum, Dharwar, and Mysore, bringing back wearing apparel, copper and brass vessels, and the like. Who could these be? Day after day I tried to sift the mystery, but could not. I registered their names, and enjoined Balram Singh to have the parties watched on their return home. But as the monsoon opened that year with much violence, I was obliged, most reluctantly, to go back to my bungalow at Sadaseopet."

Under the year 1833 Colonel Meadows Taylor's account continues:—

"Now I became very busy. Those famous discoveries in regard to the practice of Thuggee had recently been made at Jubbulpore and Saugor by (then) Captain Sleeman, which made a sensation in India never to be forgotten. By the confessions of one gang who were apprehended, many Thugs in Central India were brought to justice; and at last the Thugs of the Deccan were denounced by these approvers, and as many lived near Hingoli, they were at once arrested. I volunteered my services in the labour of collecting evidence, and they were accepted. Day after day I recorded tales of murder, which, though horribly monotonous, possessed an intense interest; and as fast as new approvers came in, new mysteries were unravelled and new crimes confessed. Names of Thugs all over the Deccan were registered, and I found one list containing the names of nearly all those whom I had suspected in my old district. The reader will remember my intense anxiety on this subject in 1829, and my conviction that



deadly crime existed and was only awaiting discovery; now it is all cleared, but I felt sore that it had not fallen to my lot to win the fame of the affair."

Meadows Taylor's "soreness" was perhaps justified, since, with the optimism of youth, he assumed that, had he been able to pursue his investigations, he would, as a natural sequence, have been the first to discover Thuggee. Alas, many before him, both Indian and European, had also scratched the soil beneath which lay the mysteries, the master-key to its discovery, which needed someone with exceptional qualifications and far greater experience of Indian character and languages. That Meadows Taylor even got a suspicion of the existence of Thuggee was remarkable testimony of his alertness, for in 1829 he had been but five years in India and was only twenty-one. Sleeman, on the other hand, was thirty-nine when he discovered Thuggee and had completed twenty years of continuous service in India, years employed in work which had brought him into the closest touch with native life and character, both in peace and war. In addition, he spoke seven native languages and had specialised for many years upon work relating to the suppression of crime. And yet, as he himself confesses, with all his special gifts and unique experience, Thuggee flourished for years unsuspected under his very eyes, before he happened upon its secrets and dragged its foul cruelties into the light of day. It was indeed like ill-gotten treasure, buried deep on an uncharted island, for which many searched haphazardly without success, until the day came when an expert got to work and disclosed its position by scientific deduction.

Although Sleeman's first official connection with the extermination of Thuggee began in 1829, his experience of Thugs began far earlier. In 1820 he had seen arrests of Thugs caught in the act of murder, and his researches into its secrets had been going on since 1823, when he



had been responsible for the custody of a gang of 115 Thugs arrested in the Nerbudda valley, committing them for trial with such success that all were convicted. These arrests took place a year before Meadows Taylor's first arrival in India as a boy of sixteen.

Although it is sometimes erroneously thought that Meadows Taylor played a major part in the suppression of Thuggee, this was not actually the case; for, at the time of its discovery, he was but a young subaltern of the Nizam of Hyderabad's State army, and therefore restricted to a very limited area, as compared to that dealt with by the officers of the Thuggee Department, whose charge extended over the whole of India; in fact his charge was limited to one small district. In addition, he was much absent on sick leave during 1834 to 1837; and from January, 1838, to 1840—the most vital period of the Thuggee Suppression—he was absent from India altogether, travelling in Egypt, England and Ireland. His connection with Thuggee was therefore of but short duration, indeed his name does not appear in the principal reports of the Thuggee Department. But no one did more to make it known by his novels and it is for this reason that his name will ever be remembered in connection with Thuggee.



## CHAPTER IX

### THOSE WHO SUPPRESSED THUGGEE

GREAT actors never steal other players' thunder, and full credit was given by Sleeman to those able and courageous men who assisted him in the suppression of Thuggee, without whose loyal aid the task could never have been completed. The actual Thuggee Department, during its earliest years and when the most difficult work was done consisted of:—Captain W. H. Sleeman, Captain Reynolds, Mr. Wilson, Mr. McLeod, Lieutenant Briggs, Lieutenant Etwall, Captain Paton and a Native Officer, Rustum Khan, each of them being given a small cavalry and infantry escort. Subordinates do not always receive due credit for duty carried out successfully, but in this instance their leader never forgot, either in personal regard or official records, those who constituted his microscopical army in this war against Thuggee, this Eastern combat of St. George and the Dragon, and in his book, "Rambles and Recollections of an Indian Official," still regarded as a classic of Indian literature by Englishmen and Indians alike, there is the following reference to those who helped him in those perilous and arduous years:—

"I may here mention the names of a few diplomatic officers of distinction who have aided in the good cause:—Of the Civil Service, Mr. F. C. Smith, Mr. Martin, Mr. George Stockwell, Mr. Charles Fraser, the Hon. Mr. Wellesley, the Hon. Mr. Shore, the Hon. Mr. Cavendish, Mr. George Clerk, Mr. L. Wilkinson, and Mr. Bax; Major-Generals Cubbon



and Fraser; Colonels Low, Stewart, Alves, Spiers, Caulfield, Sutherland and Wade; Major Wilkinson, and, amongst the foremost, Major Borthwick and Captain Paton." (Note:—Several of these were but the Magistrates who tried the Thugs when arrested; but it was owing to their recognition of the serious nature of the crime and their strength of character that Sleeman was enabled—once he had caught the Thugs concerned—to know that they would be justly dealt with and not liberated if guilty.)

To this page is added a footnote by the editor of the new edition of this book published in 1915, Vincent Arthur Smith, I.C.S., as follows:—

"The author's (Major-General Sir William Sleeman, K.C.B.) characteristic modesty has prevented him from dwelling upon his own services, which were greater than those of any other officer. The Thug organisation dated from ancient times, but attracted little notice from the East India Company's Government until the author—then Captain Sleeman—submitted his reports on the subject while employed in the Saugor and Nerbudda territories, where he had been posted in 1820.

"He proved that the Thug crimes were committed by a numerous and highly-organised fraternity operating in all parts of India. Later he was relieved from District work, and appointed General Superintendent of the operations for the suppression of the Thug gangs. Between 1826 and 1835, 1,562 prisoners were tried for the crime of Thuggee, of whom 1,404 were either hanged or transported for life. The Thug approvers, whose lives were spared, were detained in a special prison at Jubbulpore, where the remnants of them, with their families, were kept under surveillance."

In addition to those whose names have already been given as assisting Sleeman in his operations the following are mentioned in this official records of the Thuggee



Department as having done good work in a more minor capacity:—Dr. Sherwood, Lieutenant C. Brown, Mr. Baber, Mr. Boyd, Mr. Birch, Mr. Graham, Mr. Hollings, Mr. Hodges, Mr. Ludlow, Captain Lowis, Lieutenant Mills, Mr. Malcolm, Mr. Miles, Mr. Morrison, Mr. Molony, Mr. Marsh, Lieutenant W. M. Ramsey, Mr. Riddell, Mr. Whiteford, Mr. Wardlow, Captain Weston. Apart from “Thuggee” Sleeman, as he came to be called, there was yet another Sleeman connected with the suppression of Thuggee, Lieutenant James Sleeman (afterwards Colonel James Sleeman, C.B.), a nephew of Sir Williams’, who arrived in India in 1827 and, after serving in the 73rd Regiment of the Bengal Army, joined his uncle in his great work for humanity. Also Major Whitfield.

It will be of interest to give the testimony of another who was familiar with the circumstances of this period, John William Kaye, who published in 1853 his “History of the Administration of the East India Company,” in which he says:—

“Thuggee did not stand, it fell! The great work of rooting out these monstrous depredational deeds was accomplished in a few years by the energy of a few European officers. Up to the year 1829 but little had been done to suppress the abomination. Occasional evidences of the crime had presented themselves some years before, and a few gangs of professional murderers had been arrested. About the same time some of the more active of our Magistrates in Upper India had succeeded in securing the persons of a number of these murderers, but although several of them confessed and the property of the murdered men was found in their houses, the higher judicial authorities did not consider that the evidence was sufficient to convict them. Mr. Wright apprehended seventy-six, of whom seventeen made confessions which strongly incriminated the remaining fifty-nine, who denied. Those who denied, and



those who confessed, were alike released by one sweeping order from the Nizamut Adawlut, without security or anything else, and sent back to carry on their old trade, emboldened by impunity and success.

“These were but fitful efforts resulting in nothing. The subject excited little general interest, and no organised efforts, on an effective scale, were made to root out the enormous evil. Indeed, its extent was imperfectly known even to the best-informed of our officers until about the time which I have indicated, when, under the government of Lord William Bentinck, operations were formally commenced, and a regular department for the suppression of Thuggee instituted by that enlightened nobleman. And so vigorously was this great work prosecuted, with such remarkable intelligence and such admirable perseverance were all our measures shaped and all our projects executed, that, ten years afterwards, Colonel Sleeman, to whose benevolent energies we are, under Providence, mainly indebted for the success of the undertaking, was enabled to write:

“ ‘In 1830, Mr. George Swinton, who was then Chief Secretary to the Supreme Government of India, and our best support in the cause which Mr. F. C. Smith and I had undertaken, wrote to him to say that he feared success must be considered as altogether unobtainable, for he had been given to understand by those who appeared to be well-informed on the subject, that the evil had taken deep root in all parts of India, and extended itself to almost every village community. There were certainly at that time very few districts in India without these resident gangs of Thugs; and, in some, almost every village community was more or less tainted with the system, while there was not one district free from their depredations. No man aware of the fearful extent of the evil could ever have expected to see so much progress made in its suppression within so short a time; because no man could have



calculated on these many extraordinary combinations of circumstances upon which our success had chiefly depended—combinations which it behoves us gratefully to acknowledge as Providential interpositions for the benefit of the people entrusted to our rule—interpositions which these people themselves firmly believe will never be wanting to rulers whose measures are honestly intended, and wisely designed for the good of their subjects.'

"How this great work was accomplished is soon told. These vast criminal leagues have hitherto thriven on the ignorance of the British authorities. We could do nothing to suppress them, for, indeed, we knew little or nothing about them. They were mighty secrets—hidden mysteries—dimly guessed at, not at all understood. But now Sleeman and his associates, resolved that this trade of Thuggee should no longer be any more a mystery than tailoring or carpentering, began to initiate themselves into all the secrets of the craft, and were soon, in their knowledge of the theory of the profession, little behind the professors themselves. It need not be said that all this information was derived from frequent intercourse with the Thugs themselves. Our officers, having apprehended some of these professional stranglers, selected the likeliest of the party, and by holding out to them promises not only of pardon, but of employment, soon wormed their secrets out of them.

"In a little while Sleeman and his associates had learnt from these 'Approvers' all that was to be learnt from them—all the mysteries of their craft, the whole art of Thuggee, how the murder-gangs set out on their journey, how they propitiated the goddess, how they consulted the omens, how the victim was first beguiled, how the noose was thrown, how the body was buried, how they brought up their children to the trade, how generation after generation of Thugs lived prosperously and securely, and how it happened that



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

One or two extracts from Colonel Sleeman’s report will be sufficient to convey an idea of the extent of these captures and their results:—

“When they arrived at Dekhola, Captain Borthwick, having heard of their proceedings, despatched a party of horsemen to apprehend them. The horsemen came upon the gangs unawares, while encamped outside a village, and accused them of stealing opium; they were glad to have an opportunity of clearing themselves of this unfounded accusation, so accompanied the horsemen to the village for the purpose of being examined; immediately on their arrival they were secured and taken to Captain Borthwick, of whom seventy-nine were made prisoners, viz:—five made approvers, 74 tried by Colonel Stewart, the Resident of Hyderabad, 39 condemned to death, 21 to imprisonment for life, 11 to limited imprisonment and 3 acquitted.”



“These captures struck terror into the hearts of the whole fraternity of Thugs. And far more terrible than English officers, environed with the prestige of that irresistible *Ikkal* of the Company, which was acknowledged to be too powerful for *Davee* to combat, and his well-armed, well-mounted followers, was the knowledge that their own brethren were turning against them, and that ever at the stirrup of the Thug-hunting Englishman, went one or more apostate members of their own murderous Guild. It was plain to them, now that all their secrets were revealed, that there was no safety any longer to be derived from the ignorance of dominant power—that, let them go where they might in the Company’s territories, the Thug-led Thug-hunters would be upon their track. Some, endeavouring to find in the neighbouring native states a fair field for their operations, or to obtain service under the native chiefs, fled hastily across the boundary line; but there, too, the Philistines were upon them. English humanity was not brought to a stand at the confines of the country subject to our regulations, and guarded by our own police. From Northern Oudh to Southern Hyderabad our influence at the native courts, and the labours of our political officers, produced the same results as in our own provinces; and even there some, hopeless of eventual escape, and weary of a life of unceasing anxiety, rushed into the presence of the English officer, flung themselves at his feet, and implored him to receive them as approvers. But great as was the personal energy and ability brought to bear upon the suppression of the crime of Thuggee, it was hardly probable that our officers should have achieved complete success unless armed with peculiar powers—unless a certain relaxation of the law, warranted by the extraordinary character and the extreme enormity of the crime, had been legalised by the Supreme Government.

“For some years we had been trying men accused of



Thuggee, but they had almost invariably escaped. It had been difficult, to a degree perhaps not readily appreciable by English lawyers, or any other residents in this little island of Great Britain, to convict men upon clear judicial evidence of specific acts of Thuggee.

“The migratory character of the murder-gangs—the vast extent of country which they traversed, the number of local screens and fences—the difficulty of personal identification—the craft and subtlety of the offenders themselves, the unlimited amount of false swearing and of false impersonation which, at any time, they could bring into our criminal courts, were obstructions to the course of justice, under a strict interpretation of the existing law, which were seldom or never overcome. A timid or even a cautious—perhaps I ought to write a ‘conscientious’—judge would be sure to acquit even a notorious Thug for want of satisfactory evidence of the commission of a specific offence. Some of the causes which I have recited contributed largely, also, to the embarrassment of the question of jurisdiction. A murder was committed in one part of the country, and the murderers were apprehended in another, perhaps some hundreds of miles distant from the scene of the atrocity. To limit the jurisdiction in such a case to the particular district in which the crime was committed, was to throw up all sorts of difficulties and delays, and almost to ensure the prisoner’s escape. These impediments to the strict and prompt administration of justice were wonderfully protective of Thuggee. The more complicated the machinery, and the more formal the procedure of our courts, the better for these professional stranglers. They throve upon the legal niceties and the judicial reserve of the English tribunals, and laughed our regulations to scorn.

“It was wisely determined, therefore, after due consideration by the supreme Government of India, to make the case of Thuggee an exceptional one, and to sanction a relaxed



application of existing laws and regulations to members of the great fraternity of Thugs. Accordingly an Act was passed in 1836, by which a man convicted of belonging, or having belonged, to a gang of Thugs was rendered amenable to imprisonment for life, whilst at the same time, prisoners accused of Thuggee were made liable to the jurisdiction of any of the Company's courts, without reference to the locality of the alleged offence, and the formality of the Mohammedan judge was dispensed with as a preliminary to the trial of this class of prescribed offenders. The good effect of these enactments was soon felt. They were all that the Thuggee officers needed to enable them to carry out the great work which was placed in their hands. The strong defences of the Thug gangs were now struck down. They had no longer our ignorance on the one side, and our judicial over-scrupulousness on the other, to protect them. So the work of suppression went on bravely. The gangs were hunted down; our gaols were filled with Thugs; conviction and condemnation were no longer unattainable ends; and a great institution which had existed for centuries was broken up in a few years."

"I do not say that there is no such thing as Thuggee at the present time (1853) in any part of the Company's dominions. It is probable still that an occasional traveller may, from time to time, be strangled by the wayside. But the cases are few in number, and comparatively insignificant in character. The system is destroyed; the profession is ruined; the Guild is scattered, never again to be associated into a great corporate body. The craft and the mystery of Thuggee will no longer be handed down from father to son. A few English officers, acting under the orders of the supreme administrative authorities, have purged India of this great pollution. If we have done nothing else for the country, we have done this one good thing. It was a great achievement—a great victory. And it is one to be com-



templated without any abatement of satisfaction, or any reservation of praise."

As was only to be expected, and as he had anticipated, when the Thugs learned that Sleeman had been selected to exterminate them, he was by no means popular, either with the clan or their supporters, who stood to suffer serious financial loss were he successful: and there are many more enviable positions than be the open enemy of thousands of skilled assassins. Isolated, insufficiently protected, and hated by the Thugs, small wonder that three separate attempts were made upon his life before his work was completed, none of which had the slightest effect upon his morale, or stopped for a single hour the great work for India to which he had dedicated his life. On the first occasion, a sentry posted at the foot of a stairway leading to Sleeman's bedroom was drugged one night, and two natives rushed upstairs and slashed at his bed with sharp swords. Though he had slept in this room for some years, he had by an extraordinary coincidence changed his bedroom that very day, and thus escaped injury. The second time Sleeman was looking at his horses in company with his nephew, James, and a native officer, when a native fired at him at close range from behind a wall, missing him but killing the native officer at his side. The assassin immediately made off, pursued by James Sleeman, until, finding that he was being followed by an unarmed man only, he turned about and drew his sword. His pursuer was in a dangerous position, but at that moment his foot struck against something which gave a metallic ring, and looking down he saw an axe, which he picked up and flung at the armed man before him. The action achieved its object and the man was arrested, later being sentenced to death by Sleeman and hanged.

On the third occasion his daughter, Elizabeth, witnessed the attempt and told the author about it. Sleeman was then Resident at Lucknow and, as a little girl, she was in his



study one day when her father suddenly had a premonition of evil, drew aside a curtain concealing an alcove, and disclosed an Indian standing there armed with a dagger. Unarmed as he was and not expecting such an attack, Sleeman had spent too much of his life in the midst of danger to be perturbed by anything like this, and, pointing a finger at the man, he said, "You are a Thug." The man promptly dropped the dagger and said, salaaming profoundly, "Yes, sahib." The power of the human eye is said to be great, and many Thugs testify that Sleeman's had such a compelling force that they were obliged to tell the truth when under his cross-examination, and the Thug Ameer Ali, when taken before him for trial at Saugor, thus described him: "A tall, noble-looking person he was, and from the severe glance he cast on me, I thought my hour had come and that before night I should cease to exist." Whatever the source of Sleeman's power, his personality alone saved his life on this occasion, for the Thug confessed that he had planned for a considerable time to assassinate him in the hope of saving Thuggee. One cannot, however, exterminate a wasps' nest without expecting to be stung, and Sleeman and his assistants were prepared for inadequate protection from the very start of their operations, for with such a skilled, intelligent and elusive quarry, an army corps could not have ensured the safety of this scattered little team, who carried their lives in their hands most cheerfully. Curiously enough some of the greatest difficulties which confronted them were not due to the Thugs themselves, but to those who had actually suffered from their crimes, as is seen in a report by Captain Whiteford at Barhampore in 1838:

"I am preparing for another Session and have twenty-one cases completed with the exception of a few witnesses to the defence. In one case the proprietors of the money taken from the murdered treasure-bearers, who are respectable



bankers, have been found, but they are now so much in the habit of denying that they have ever sustained any loss that, even in this case, we may have to commit the prisoners upon the general charges under Act XXX of 1836."

In his "Report upon Thuggee" Sleeman mentions one "among a hundred similar instances recorded in my office" of the difficulties encountered in getting men to disclose what they knew regarding Thuggee murder. In 1835 he proceeded to the village of Soojuna to investigate a case which had occurred there in 1814, when a gang of forty Thugs had murdered seven well-armed treasure-bearers. When making off with the treasure, valued at 4,500 rupees, they were disturbed by a tanner, and on the principle that dead men tell no tales, had killed him also. The bodies were left unburied and were found by some women from the village, when the body of the tanner was burnt by his friends in the presence of all the inhabitants, men, women, and children; while the rest, being strangers,—such was the charity of India at that time—were left to be eaten by jackals, dogs and vultures. Approvers had given Sleeman full details of this murder, and as some of the Thugs concerned in this affair still remained untried prisoners in Jubbulpore gaol, it was thought desirable to bring the case to trial, if this evidence could be confirmed by that of the villagers. This would seem a simple task, since all the approvers who had described this murder had been engaged in it, their statements agreeing in all material points, except the number of victims, some affirming that eight had been put to death, while others avowed there were only seven. Of these approvers Feringeea was, as usual, one of the foremost, and he accompanied Sleeman and pointed out the exact spot where the bodies had been left exposed. All the men of the village were then assembled, but, to the surprise of everyone concerned, including the



Thugs, they all said that it must be a mistake, that the murder of so many persons could never have taken place without their knowledge, and that they had never seen the bodies or heard anything about them. Lieutenant Brown, who was present, fortunately possessed information which showed that they were lying, pretending ignorance merely from the dread that they might be summoned to give evidence in some far distant court. To overcome this difficulty a promise had to be given to all the old men of the village that, if they would tell the whole truth, they would never be summoned to any other court to give evidence. This was sufficient, and the same men who had denied all knowledge of the murder then took those concerned in the investigations to the spot, pointed out the places where the bodies had been found, and mentioned the circumstances of the tanner having been killed with the treasure-bearers and afterwards burnt by his friends. This accounted for the difference in the depositions of the approvers, for in the confusion of killing the treasure-bearers and seizing upon their treasure, some had never even seen the poor tanner or heard of his death. He had been strangled by the Thugs left behind to prevent the main actors in the scene from being interrupted, his death being regarded as such a trivial incident that they had not even reported it to the gang. All attempts to discover the banker to whom the treasure belonged, or the friends and relations of the murdered men, had proved equally vain, until it was made widely known that they would not be summoned to give evidence at the trial—a pledge made possible by the fact that the Thugs concerned had by this time confessed their crime, and had, indeed, been convicted and sentenced for other murders. This promise proved, as usual, the open sesame, and the banker, Motee Kocheea of Jubbulpore, now came forward with his books, which gave the date of the murder, the amount of the treasure lost, and the names



of the seven bearers whose friends and relations also came to light and gave similar evidence.

At an early stage of the operations Sleeman had maps prepared of every district in India where Thuggee existed, and, when completed, the approvers were called upon to point out upon them where the principal *beles*, or places of murder, were situated: no mean task, as is shown by one of these maps, where every black spot is a *bele*, in which for many generations Thug victims had been put to death. Each approver was questioned separately, and none were shown the places designated by those who had been interrogated earlier. This system of evidence proved so staggering that it was almost unbelievable, but approver after approver, all chosen for their terrible records, selected exactly the same spots, for the most part groves of trees or watercourses, and this evidence was later verified by many skeletons, ancient and modern, dug up from each one of them.

From the manner in which arrested Thugs turned approvers, it would seem that they had little to learn from Judas, and the following accounts are typical of most.

Rumzam, a revenue collector of the Raja Surat of Dunowlee, was on a Thuggee expedition when he was arrested:

“I was asked if I could point out Buhras Jemadar, a notorious leader of Thugs (almost as much so as Feringeea), for whose seizure a reward of 100 rupees had been offered by the British Government. I said ‘Yes,’ and that very night led forth an English guard of eight sepoy to the village of Sohane. I went to the house where Buhras Jemadar slept. Often has he led our gangs! (Note the pride of recollection mingled with treachery!) I awoke him—he knew me well, and came outside to me. It was a cold night so, under the pretence of warming myself, but in reality to have light for his seizure by the guard, I lighted



some straw and made a blaze. As Buhras and I were warming ourselves, the guard drew around us. I said to them, 'This is Buhras,' and he was seized just as a cat seizes a mouse. Buhras immediately confessed that he was a Thug, saying, 'I am a Thug, my father and grandfather were Thugs, and I have thugged with many. Let the government employ me and I will do its work.' (He afterwards became one of the best approvers.)

Bhoosee, captured after a Thuggee expedition during which forty-one men had been murdered, ends his narrative in the following manner:—

"This was my last murder. After a life of assassination for thirty years I now fled from fear of the close pursuit of the British guard until, at the expiration of my flight, as a bird flies off, and after about three months I surrendered myself to my pursuers, confessing myself a Thug, and was sent into Lucknow, where I immediately became an approver and was sent out by you (Sleeman) in pursuit of my Thug associates."

Futty Khan, Jemadar, also adds his contribution, having just completed, with his gang, the murder of three entire families:—

"After this I heard that my wife and three children had been seized by the guards of the British government, so I returned home and in about a month after this, my last murder, I delivered myself up, confessing my crime. I at once turned King's evidence, and within three days pointed out to the guard the following Thugs, who were seized, namely Maigal and Ameer, now in gaol here. When I went to catch Maigal he was at his own house and readily came at my call; but when he saw irons on my legs, great was his consternation! He knew that I had come as an approver to seize him! The lamentation which he and his wife made soon filled the whole village with the news of his capture. He is a well-known Thug! He confessed on





CLAY MODELS OF THUGS DEMONSTRATING THEIR METHODS OF STRANGULATION

Photograph of a painted, clay, group of Thugs, exhibiting their methods of strangulation at Lucknow and showing a traveller being murdered. Taken by the courtesy of A. D. Campbell, Esq. of the India Museum, S. Kensington.



reaching Lucknow. Besides him I had led to the capture of the following nine Thugs by tracing them to their haunts."

Treacherous as the Thugs were in their murderous careers, they maintained this characteristic when under arrest, and it is interesting, though perhaps surprising, to be able to record the following admissions made by notorious Thug approvers to Sleeman a few short years afterwards:

*Morlee*: "There is no fear now. They are everywhere seized and punished with impunity; there is no resisting their *ikbal* (good fortune)."

*Dorgha*: "The Company's *ikbal* is such that, before the sound of your drums, sorcerers, witches and demons take flight; and how can Thuggee stand?"

*Davey Deen*: "Thuggee! Why, it is gone. There are not fifty *seel* Thugs (i.e. Thugs of good birth) left between the Ganges and the Jumna."

*Dureean*: "Oh, my friends, you had better cut and run as fast as you can. Hundreds of us Thugs are being hung about Saugor, still more are being sent across the black water (transported for life), which is worse; and those that escape are cut off for life. As for the poor approvers, Sleeman Sahib is getting a large mill made up at the Mint to grind them all to powder." (Satirical imagination!)

Truly the mighty power of Thuggee had fallen, when its former leaders could make admissions such as these!

In connection with the extinction of Thuggee, the following extract from *The Bengal Chronicle*, 17th July, 1832, is of value: "Some Account of the Gang-Murderers of Central India, called Thugs."

"However humbling it is to the pride of man to find that any of his fellow-creatures can be found to evince a fondness for such horrible crimes, yet certain it is that these men do acquire such an attachment for his mode of life that they can rarely afterwards give it up. An instance of this



occurred of the leader Motee, who was executed with twenty-eight others at Saugor last week. This man was returning with a large gang of Thugs from the Deccan in 1822 towards Bundalkund and, having a brother then in gaol at Jubbulpore, he called to see him and informed him of the proceedings. On this information the brother, Kaleean Singh, went to the political officer and had them all seized. (Somewhat rough on the visitors who had called upon him to cheer him up!) Of two of the party one was a government messenger and the other a police inspector, who, with his official warrant—although a notorious vagabond—the Thugs used as a foil. Against such seemingly respectable men, the charge was held to be improbable and they were let go. After they had left, Kaleean Singh went again to Captain Sleeman and represented that, if this gang of 150 Thugs were again brought back, his brother Motee would point out the places where the bodies of their victims were buried. On this, a strong body of horse and foot was despatched, and the whole party secured near Saugor, with the exception of twelve who had, in the meantime, gone off to Bundalkund with their valuable plunder. The graves were accordingly pointed out, the bodies found, and the gang distributed over different gaols. As a reward Motee was allowed to remain at large on security. This occurred in 1822. After remaining quiet at Jubbulpore for four years, he made off and, not making his appearance again, his bail was forfeited. Meanwhile, he had obtained respectable employment elsewhere, from which he subsequently obtained leave of absence for a few months, during which he headed a gang of over a hundred Thugs, and committed a series of most horrible murders on the Baroda road; among others, Lall Singh Subahdar, his wife, female servant, and seven companions and attendants at Akola. It was for this he so justly paid the forfeit of his life.



“Of these numerous gangs of murderers about eight hundred have been seized. At Jubbulpore in 1830 twenty-five were executed; in 1831, fourteen; while at Saugor in 1832, seventy-seven were executed and the warrants are daily expected up to thirty-four more. The remainder are either to be transported or imprisoned for life. The indifference these men show on mounting the gallows is truly astonishing. With their own hand they adjust the halter, pressing the knot close up behind the ear so that it shall not slip, and talking to their companions while doing so with the greatest coolness. Ere the fatal beam can be withdrawn, they jump off and launch themselves into eternity! After hanging for a sufficient time, their bodies are taken down. The Mussulman bodies are buried and the Hindoos are burnt. Among the last party of Thugs that were executed, there were seventeen Mussulmans, who hung themselves in their shrouds. From the great number of Thugs that have been seized it was found necessary to erect two new prison houses at Saugor in addition to the gaol. There are now five hundred Thugs in confinement, exclusive of those executed, and some sixty who died in gaol, and others are daily pouring in. It is but justice to Captain Sleeman, Political Assistant, to add, that it is through his indefatigable zeal and perseverance, aided by the hearty co-operation of Mr. Smith, Political Agent, that such wonderful seizures have been made; overcoming every obstacle; breaking through every opposition, they have gone on and rescued from posterity this most cold-blooded system of iniquity that ever disgraced the history of the world.”

The writer of this article remains anonymous and unknown, but his opinions voiced those of all Europeans in India at that period, particularly of those who, after long years of service spent in total ignorance of the Thuggee organisation, now awoke to its full horrors.



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

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

The Act quoted in this extract which so helped towards the suppression of Thuggee is as follows:—

“Act XXX 1836, (1) ‘It is hereby enacted, that whosoever shall be proved to have belonged either before or after the passing of this Act, to any gang of Thugs, either within or without the territories of the East India Company, shall be punished with imprisonment for life with hard labour.

(2) ‘And it is hereby enacted, that every person accused of the offence made punishable by this Act, may be tried by any court which would have been competent to try him, as if his offence had been committed within the *zillah* (district) where that court sits, anything to the contrary in any regulation contained notwithstanding.

(3) ‘And it is hereby enacted, that no court shall, on a trial of any person accused of the offence made punishable by this Act, require any *futwah* (order) from any Law officer.’”



This provided the necessary legal machinery for those engaged in the task of ridding India of its monstrous burden of Thuggee, and it is doubtful if any Act of such brevity and less bound with red-tape ever produced more beneficial results.

Not the least of the difficulties which Sleeman had to overcome were the misrepresentations of native police officers in cases of murder which would otherwise have led to discoveries of importance. The corpses of travellers strangled by Thugs were, in numerous instances, either concealed or represented by the police as having been killed by wild animals or died of disease, and were burnt without further enquiry, when an inquest attended by impartial witnesses would have brought to light the marks of strangulation round their necks. Rajahs, native chiefs, and land-owners of all descriptions would, in the same manner, endeavour to conceal murders perpetrated by Thugs in their anxiety to prove that Thuggee did not exist within their dominions or estates. This was largely due to the fact that heavy penalties were injudiciously imposed by the native authorities in some parts of India upon those within whose estates or jurisdiction the bodies of murdered men were found, unless they could produce the perpetrators. In consequence the Thugs were protected practically wherever they went, with the result that they were almost certain to be found on the properties of the principal land-holders.

In his "Suppression of Thuggee in India," published in 1836, Sleeman writes:

"The first party of men I sent into the Deccan to aid Captain Reynolds recognised in the person of one of the most respectable linen drapers of the cantonments of Hingolee, Hurree Singh, the adopted son of Jowahir Sookul, a Subahdar of Thugs, who had twenty years before been executed with twenty-one of his followers for the murder of



two women and eight men. On hearing that the Hurree Singh on the list sent to him of noted Thugs at large was the Hurree Singh of the Sudder Bazar, Captain Reynolds was quite astounded, for so correct had been his deportment and all his dealings, that he had won the esteem of all the gentlemen (Englishmen) of the station, who used to assist him in securing passports for his goods on their way from Bombay. Yet he had, as he has since himself shown, been carrying on his trade of murder up to the very day of his arrest on all the roads around, and leading out his gangs of assassins while he pretended to be on his way to Bombay for a supply of fresh linens and broad cloth. Captain Reynolds, for several years up to this time, had the civil charge of the district of Hingolee without having had the slightest suspicion of the numerous murders that he has now discovered to have been every year perpetrated within his jurisdiction. Hurree Singh's own confession after his capture is as follows:

“ ‘A year and a half before I was arrested at Hingolee, in June, 1832, I became intimately acquainted with Maha Singh Subahdar and told him that I should like to set up a shop in his bazaar, and he advised me to do so. I set up a linen-draper's shop, and went several times with other shop-keepers to Bombay to purchase a stock of broad-cloths and other articles. I used to go out occasionally on Thuggee after I settled at Hingolee. Ismael, Thug, now an approver, used to reside in the bazaar of the 5th Regiment and served Captain Scott as coachman. Bahleen, Thug, also used to live and work in the bazaar, and all three used to go on the road, as many travellers used to pass and no one sought after Thugs. Any skilful party might have three or four *affairs* (murders) every night, without anyone being the wiser for it. People knew not what Thuggee was, nor what kind of people Thugs were. Travellers were frequently reported murdered by robbers,



but people thought these must be in the jungle, and never dreamed they were murdered by men they saw every day about them. I was much respected by the people of the town and cantonment and never suspected until arrested.'

"Here is an instance of a Thug being actually in English employment and of others resident within a British cantonment and unsuspected as Thugs. This is sufficient to show how secretly Thuggee was carried out under the very eyes of able and conscientious Englishmen, versed in dealing with the ordinary offences of the Indian States.

"It is a maxim with these assassins that 'Dead men tell no tales,' and upon this maxim they invariably act. They permit no living witness to their crimes to escape, and therefore, never attempt the murder of any party until they can feel secure of being able to murder the whole. They will travel with a party of unsuspecting travellers for days, and even weeks together, eat with them, sleep with them, attend divine worship with them at the holy shrines on the road, and live with them on the closest terms of intimacy, until they find time and place suitable for the murder of the whole. Having in the course of ages matured a system by which the attainment of any other direct evidence of their guilt is rendered almost impossible, they bind each other to secrecy by the most sacred oaths that their superstition can afford; and such associations never desire from any government a clearer licence to their merciless depredations than a copy of the rule, 'That the testimony of any number of confessing prisoners shall not be considered a sufficient ground to authorise the detention of their associates.'"

This extract from Sleeman's report gives a very vivid idea of the many and varied difficulties with which those engaged in the suppression of Thuggee had to contend.



## CHAPTER X

### THE RIVER THUGS AND FERINGEEA

IN addition to those Thugs who operated on the roads in India, there was another caste who confined their attentions to its rivers. Bengal especially suffered from this form of Thuggee, doubtless owing to the fact that Thugs captured over a century earlier by an Indian Emperor, had been transported to Bengal and foolishly set at liberty. Their proceedings were no secret to the river police, whose silence was secured by rich presents, but their very existence was hidden from the European magistrates until Sleeman began his operations. So rapidly did he and his associates work that little more than twelve months elapsed before 161 of these miscreants had been arrested and the names obtained of 38 others. The boats used by the river Thugs usually held fourteen men each, and eighteen boats were regularly employed upon one river alone in this dreadful business, which gives some idea of the magnitude of these operations.

The following cross-examination of a Thug is, therefore, of interest:—

*Sleeman*: “How are the river Thugs not suspected by the people who live on the banks of the river?”

*Shumshera*: “They are very well known by the policemen and some others in the villages along the banks of the Ganges, for they sometimes keep their boats near these for days together. These Thugs never keep any part of the booty but the money, lest it should bring them into



trouble, the clothes of men murdered being thrown into the river. The principal men of the gang, or the shrewdest, go slowly along the roads, each having a servant carrying his bundle, and proceeding towards the landing place where his boat is to be found. When a traveller overtakes him, he learns whither he is going and pretends to be going to the same place, but to be entirely unacquainted with the road and anxious to have somebody to instruct him. Once in company, the Thug soon pretends to be tired, and wishes that he were near a boat. The traveller expresses the same desire, and they agree to diverge from the road to the river. Coming to the landing place, the Thug pretends that he is a good hand at a bargain and is allowed to agree for a passage for both. (Then follows a clever bit of acting.) He beats down the master of his own boat (whom he pretends never to have seen before!) and, after a good deal of disputing, manages to obtain a passage for half-price, at which the traveller is generally much pleased and expresses his gratitude. They then embark and the traveller is killed as soon as they get away from other boats. If, on the other hand, the traveller suspects or dislikes the first Thug he meets, he is passed on to the inveigler of another boat, who learns this by secret signs, and who pretends to enter into the traveller's fears and feelings until he is enticed to his boat and killed.

*The river Thugs are much more numerous than we are."*

*Sleeman*: "You are said to have occasionally gone with the river Thugs?"

*Bakhtawut* (another Thug): "About fourteen years ago I had been on an expedition with seventy-two Thugs. Two had often served with the River Thugs, and used to interest us by talking about their modes of proceeding. Near Majrahal we fell in with two of them who pretended to be going on a pilgrimage and were accompanied by five travellers, whom they had picked up on the road. Our



two Thugs recognised them immediately as old acquaintances, and started a conversation, and it was agreed that I should go with them and see how they did their work, while the rest of my gang went on (professional interest, or a bus-man's holiday!). We embarked at Rakmahul and the travellers sat on one side of the boat and the Thugs on the other, whilst we were placed in the stern. Some of the Thugs, dressed as boatmen, were above deck, and others walking along the banks of the river, towed the boat by a rope. All, I observed, were very much on the look-out. Presently we came up with an Englishman's pinnace and two baggage boats and were obliged to stop to let them pass. The travellers now became anxious and were quieted by being told that the men at the rope were tired and must take some refreshment. They pulled out something, too, and began to eat; but when the pinnace had gone on a good way, our boat proceeded. It was now afternoon, and when a signal was given from above that all was clear, the five Thugs who sat opposite the travellers, sprang upon them and with the aid of the others, strangled them. They put the handkerchief round the neck from the front, while we land Thugs put it round from behind. They then pushed them backwards, and having completed the business, broke their spinal bones and stabbed the bodies to prevent them rising to the surface, throwing them into the river through a hole made at the side. All this while the boat was being pulled along by the men on the bank. The booty amounted to about two hundred rupees. We claimed and got a share for all our party; and Sewbuns declared that our gang was 29, while we were really only 25 in strength, and got a share for that number; he cheated them out of the share of four men." There is never any honour among criminals the world over!

It was the considered opinion of Thugs who operated upon land that far more murders were committed by river



Thugs than by those of their own kind, for the opportunities for inveigling travellers upon these boats were great, and the facility with which the dead bodies could be disposed of made Thuggee infinitely easier than on the highways of India.

Bholai Chung, a river Thug, made the following confession in 1831:—

“Early in April last Nubeendee called upon me to arrange to trade in rice; thence he took me to a boat in which five other men were sitting—none of whom I knew. Later it stopped and Suroop went ashore and brought two weavers with several loin cloths, and he said to Nubeendee, ‘Oh, relative, you wanted to buy cloths.’ Soobuldam and another man threw the *ruhmal* round the necks of the two men and threw them on the floor, dipped them under water and held them awhile, and then let the bodies go. We set out after this and pulled fifteen days, until we found a boat laden with tobacco and hemp. Our boats set out together next day and we all dined upon a sandbank, after which Nubeendee said, ‘I have made a vow to the God Hurry Sote, let me here fulfil it. Call the captain and his boatmen that they may assist.’ When the captain and the four sailors of the tobacco boat came, Soobuldam said, ‘Do you, I pray, sing the song of Hurry Sote.’ They had sung one verse and were beginning another when Nubeendee shouted, ‘Now, Hurry, give us your plunder!’ on which five Thugs leapt on the throats of the five men with twisted *ruhmal*s and threw them flat on the sand; others seized them at the same time, after which they punched them to death with fists and elbows and sank the bodies in the water.”

It is only when one reads confessions such as this that one appreciates the state of India before Thuggee was suppressed. With its roads and rivers, the only avenues of communications, infested by unscrupulous murderers,



it is marvellous indeed that any travellers succeeded in escaping during the months favoured by the Thugs for their expeditions. No other system of murder can surely ever have existed which can compare to Thuggee in size or organisation: murder on a wholesale scale, planned with the delicacy of skilled craftsmen and carried into effect with the crudeness of butchers. And never once, in all these cross-examinations, is there any sign of remorse; on the contrary, most Thugs displayed the greatest pride in relating their horrible achievements, smiling with derision when the interrogator expressed his horror at some particularly unpleasant revelation of cold-blooded crime.

It is of real interest to be able to read the exact thoughts and beliefs of Thugs, taken down word for word just as they were related, which it is possible to do since Sleeman's high sense of justice and extreme accuracy demanded that every cross-examination should be recorded, in order to give a fair trial to every suspect, to extract information regarding other Thugs still at large, and to be able to compare such statements with those of other approvers. This procedure ensured that the guilty were punished and the innocent escaped: a somewhat novel experience for those accustomed only to native courts of justice as they then existed, the chief features of which were persecution and bribery. Under Sleeman's system each captured Thug incriminated others, and what often appears as almost idle chatter was actually helping to bring to a close an ancient campaign of hideous murder. For not only did the Thugs give away themselves and their fellows, but they also familiarised those concerned with their suppression with every minute detail of their murderous craft, the system and particulars of their expeditions, and the names of chiefs, land-owners and police who had protected or countenanced their dreadful work. These records, indeed, constitute the swan song of Thuggee!



Of those who appear in these pages and relate their crimes of a hundred years ago—strange visions from the past—there is one most sinister actor who stalks across the stage, Feringeea, who plays a major part. Although his record of murder may not have been as great as some, Sleeman's good fortune in arresting him early in his operations brought this formidable Thug into great prominence. A man of attractive personality and high intelligence, with a soft voice and handsome countenance, Feringeea possessed all the attributes of a successful Thug chief. He was indeed a keystone which, once removed, caused the arch of Thuggee to totter until, stone by stone it fell and the hideous faith it spanned ceased to exist. For, once he found himself a prisoner and realised that his life depended upon his exposing the secrets of Thuggee and giving away his comrades in crime, he threw himself into this task with all the energy which had previously characterised his pursuit of travellers in order to murder them. Though he was such an unscrupulous scoundrel, there was much that would have been attractive in Feringeea's character, and one must remember that, from infancy, he had been educated to believe that Thuggee was a pious duty. Certainly his entry into the ranks of the Thug-hunters caused the tiny trickle of evidence gradually to swell in volume until it finally burst asunder the dam which had so long protected the vile secrets of Thuggee and its repellent disciples.

Feringeea received his name in a peculiar manner, for his mother, when expecting to be confined, was staying with her brother, Rae Sing, an impecunious land-owner, who owed 18,000 rupees in taxation—which has a curious reminiscent ring in these days. The tax-collectors, however unpleasant and unwelcome to-day, were even worse in India a hundred years ago, and to compel payment a native regiment, officered by Europeans, was sent to seize him. Evidently no long drawn out process of appeal



existed in those days, or, if it did, Rae Sing had no use for it, for he resisted with such vigour that his fortified village was assaulted and burnt, and the expectant mother gave birth prematurely to a son, who was called Feringeea in memory of the *Feringees* or Europeans.

Coming from a family of property and established position, Feringeea was a kind of Beau Nash of Thuggee and forms the principal Thug subject in Eugene Sue's "Wandering Jew," which brought him into great prominence. From the Thuggee point of view he was a great success, as is shown by an expedition conducted by him in 1828, when his twenty-five Thugs arrived at Mogul Ka Serai, where two travellers were killed. Later other Thugs joined him, until he had a gang of fifty-one, and soon after six travellers, including a bird-catcher and a shop-keeper, were unfortunate enough to meet them and were killed that night. The gang now divided, and Feringeea, with thirty companions, crossed the Nerbudda river and fell in with three sepoy, killing them in the jungle, and also two travellers, and a Sikh who was absconding with 1,100 rupees. This unlucky man had suspicions about the Thugs, for he had hidden himself among some graves when Feringeea found him. It was a battle between criminal wits, and the superior cunning of the Thug prevailed, and needless to say his absence from the cemetery was not unduly delayed.

The gang then proceeded to Nandair, where they met five travellers whom they murdered in their encampment that night. Next day nine travellers were killed before daylight, and later, at Hyderabad, they met a Brahman and two Rajpoots, whom they killed at their lodging, followed by the killing of three travellers at Gungakhera. After this brisk bit of wholesale murder, Feringeea's gang went on to Purureea, where a Subahdar, five sepoy and one woman fell into their hands and were murdered.



For the reader this expedition, however successful from the Thug point of view, proves almost dreary—a monotonous series of murders—but now comes a more interesting passage, for at Doregow they met three native gentlemen and a *fakir*, the latter riding upon a pony which was plastered over with sugar, both steed and rider in consequence being covered with flies. This religious mendicant was subjecting himself to such intense discomfort as a penance, the heat of India and its wealth of insect life combining to make his sufferings almost unendurable.

The Thugs had apparently some scruples regarding this *fakir*—a quality rare in Thuggee annals—for they persuaded him to go on ahead, and killed the other three travellers after he was out of sight. As it is difficult to credit the Thug with such nicety of thought, it seems obvious that the *fakir* was allowed to escape because he was too repellent for even the hardened Thug to deal with. However, he proved a persistent fellow, poor soul, and later rejoined the Thugs, insisting upon travelling in their company to Raojana, where six travellers were encountered. The inconvenient and insanitary *fakir* again interfered with the killing, and this time had to be driven off with stones before he could be got rid of and the pious duty performed. Ultimately, however, with the assistance of some hefty blows, it dawned upon him that he was unpopular and away he went, the six travellers being killed and buried that night. The joy of the Thugs' success was considerably dimmed next day when the rhinoceros-hided *fakir* again appeared—evidently an irrepressible gate-crasher—and, in spite of every remonstrance, insisted on going with them to Mana, where two travellers and a sepoy fell in with them. The patience of the Thugs on this occasion was as exceptional as it was remarkable, for they once again spared the *fakir's* life—how really very unpleasant he must have been—this time leaving him behind asleep in a village.



More travellers were met with, and just as the Thugs were approaching the place chosen for their murder, with no thought in their minds but pleasant anticipations, to their considerable embarrassment and anger up came the fly-decorated and sugar-encrusted *fakir*, merry and bright, and obviously contemplating a long journey in their company. Misguided soul, this time he was to get a far longer one than he anticipated, for the Thugs' patience was now exhausted and one, Mithoo, was given five rupees to strangle him and to take the sin of killing a religious man on his conscience. And so our pious, if malodorous friend joined the other travellers in their doom. When searching the bodies after death, great was the astonishment of the Thugs to find that the *fakir*, who had apparently forsworn the things of this world, had, secreted in his ragged garments, three hundred and sixty-five strings of pearls and a gilded necklace!

Although it is not unknown for pious men the world over to combine religion with the amassing of wealth, the probability is that this *fakir* had either acquired his wealth improperly—for some are mighty blackguards—or else was a disguised treasure-carrier. Which ever he was, there is one thing quite certain, that he had mistaken the gang of Thugs for honest travellers and had sought their company for protection, thinking himself sufficiently disguised and, certainly unpleasant enough to escape the interest of criminals.

Pleased with their rich booty so unexpectedly acquired, the gang next killed two men at Nadsow, treasure-bearers with 4,000 rupees worth of silver. On their way to Omrowtee next day they met five men, with two bullocks laden with copper coin, whom they killed and buried. Then on to Indore, where they joined sixty-two other Thugs, and filled with that degree of courage engendered by superiority of numbers, these ninety-three that same day



encompassed the murder of seven travellers, and of another four on the following night. Feringeea then led his gang to Chutterpore, where he heard that he was being pursued, and so started for home through Saugor, finding time *en route* to put two travellers to death. At Raghoogur they joined Sheikh Inaent and forty others, who had been "hunting" that neighbourhood for some time, but "sport" was poor, only one official messenger falling to their bag, whose breastplate of office was buried with him. Another gang of twenty Thugs was met next day, for it was the swarming-season for Thuggee, and a sepoy and a traveller were killed at Thappa. At Bheelpore two travellers were killed, and at Oodeepore three sepoy and a traveller, the latter having been put into their charge for safety by the misplaced confidence of the inhabitants of the town, impressed by their respectable appearance. Near Dhar they met an elephant mahout of the Oodeepore Rajah and murdered him the same night, although to kill a man of this caste was against the laws of Thuggee.

At Raghoogur three travellers fell victims, and at Asha a havildar, a sepoy and a traveller were unfortunate enough to join their company and were killed next morning. Feringeea now heard that the police were hard on his trail, which so alarmed some of his Thugs that they returned home with all speed, leaving him with only twenty-one men. These, however, were stalwart fellows who were not to be put off from their enterprise, and at Peepala killed two sepoy, a woman and a traveller, and at Jhundawala, a day later, a sepoy with two women. The next halt was Khenjarra, where two sepoy were put to death that night and at Manoru, two days later, two more sepoy were killed close to the village and two others strangled in camp at Korsalee. This was the final murder on this Thuggee expedition, and Feringeea's gang dispersed and returned to their homes.



From their point of view it had proved a pleasant and successful expedition, for they had killed a hundred men and five women during their travels. And so, contented in mind, rich in rupees, and with memories well stored with delightful reminiscences of the craft and subtlety by means of which they had made such a successful "bag," they returned to their wives and children, to pose again for the rest of the year as respectable and prosperous citizens.

Even when recounting these hideous deeds years later, no expression of regret or shame was made by Feringeea. Rather did he relate them with obvious pleasure, dwelling upon his villainy with nauseating wealth of detail, and glorying in the deceit and treachery which had lured these unfortunate men and women to their death.

This account of but one expedition out of hundreds effected that same year on the roads of India, affords ample proof of the enormous wastage of human life caused by the Thugs. Another expedition carried out about the same time resulted in three hundred and sixty-four men, twenty women and one girl being murdered, but it would be bore-some to describe this, for the confessions of the Thugs concerned contain little but bare details of the "game-book" variety.

With members of almost every profession and trade in their ranks, the Thugs found no difficulty in selecting for the duty of inveigling those best suited to excite the confidence or dull the fears of any kind of traveller. It was, indeed, the very terror of finding themselves alone on dangerous roads which induced travellers to join what appeared to be parties of respectable men, whose principal concern seemed to be the protection of those exposed to such risks. If one thing stands out more clearly than another in these gruesome records of Thuggee, it is that, just as a cat plays with a mouse before killing it, so the Thugs unquestionably extracted considerable satisfaction



in ingratiating themselves with their prospective victims, spending days in changing suspicion to confidence, before murdering them. Often and long did Feringeea and other captured Thugs laugh over tales of the innocence and faith of their victims which they had so cruelly shattered; and as one wades through these dry official records, one cannot fail to see in imagination these poor hapless travellers rejoicing at being in safe hands, while surrounded by Thugs licking their lips in anticipatory pleasure.

But for an accident Feringeea would have been taken prisoner earlier, for in 1829 he narrowly escaped, as is shown by the following account from his own lips:—

“We were bathing close to Bhilsa when I heard directly over my head the cry of the small owl, an omen which spelt disaster. I was much alarmed and Kurhora, who is an excellent augur, told me that I ought to take the gang back at once, but I determined upon coming to Saugor. Reaching there, I tied my horse to a tree and went into the village with the headman, leaving the gang behind. While talking with him I heard a great uproar and saw my horse running towards the village, and on going to catch him saw your police seizing and binding my men. There were forty Thugs, but they secured only twenty-eight. I made off as I was, half-dressed, and got home, and twelve of my gang escaped.”

Later, however, he was not so fortunate, for in 1830 he was captured, but owing to his cleverness and in default of incriminating evidence, was released. His nerve was good, for he at once rejoined his gang and continued his interrupted murder expedition, retaliating for his capture by killing a police servant. This was almost the last murder Feringeea was to commit, for a few weeks later he was captured by a guard sent out from Jubbulpore by Sleeman and was brought in to Saugor in December, 1830, a year after the commencement of operations. This capture was



of great importance and Sleeman's account of it is given in full:—

“Having ascertained precisely Feringeea's residence, I sent a guard to secure him. (How modestly he writes, not dwelling in the slightest on the immense difficulty he had experienced in getting this information.) It reached his house at midnight, but he heard their whispers and got out of the back door, leaving an English blunderbuss and pistol loaded on his bed, which the guard found when they entered. They brought these articles back to me at Jubbulpore, together with the brother, wife, child and mother of the fugitive. They arrived at Jubbulpore the day before Feringeea's foster-brother—Jhurher—was to be hung with ten others of his gang arrested at Bhrosa. Jhurher entreated to be allowed to see them; and in the morning, just before going to the scaffold, the interview took place before me. He fell at the old woman's feet and begged that she would relieve him of the obligation of the love with which she had nourished him, and the care with which she had cherished him from infancy, as he was about to die before he could fulfil any of them. She placed her hand on his head and his brow and said she forgave him all, and bid him die like a man.

“I knew Feringeea would not go far while those so dear to him were in my hands; and I sent out a second guard to Jhansi. It was found that he divided his time between five villages, in which resided friends and relations of prisoners in the Jubbulpore jail, who could manage occasionally to get him some information regarding his family. He never slept two successive nights in the same village; and having ascertained, by means of spies, the precise house in each village in which he slept, the guard determined to search the whole one night. They concealed themselves at Burwa Saugor, eight miles from the nearest of these villages, and soon after nightfall they set out, and not finding him in the



first, seized the proprietor of the house, bound and left him under two sentries, and went on two miles to the next. Not finding him there, they seized and bound the proprietor and left him under two sentries, and went to Jomun Sagura—the third village, eight miles distant. Not finding him there, they seized the proprietor of the house, Soghur, Thug—brother of Kuleean Singh, an approver in the Jubbulpore jail. Him they took with them six miles to the fourth village—Kisrae—which they reached as the day began to break. Five hundred rupees had been offered for his apprehension, and this village was their last hope, as the alarm would be given before they could reach the fifth. Leaving the remainder of the guard outside the village, Dhun Sing, a young approver, went to the house accompanied by only Soghur. Finding Feringeea was within, they rushed in upon him, and, supposing the house to be surrounded by soldiers, he suffered himself to be bound without resistance by these two boys, both of whom he was strong enough to have strangled. All who had been seized in the other villages were now released, and the guard brought the prisoner to me at Saugor in December, 1830.”

And that was the end of Feringeea the Thug, whose abilities were now to be utilised in another direction, for he had been the master-brain of Thuggee, holding the key to that secret lock which had for centuries baffled all who attempted to open it—a lock whose key Sleeman had found by dint of laborious investigation and personal danger and was now to be the first to turn.



## CHAPTER XI

### WOMEN AND THUGGEE

No movement is complete without the presence of women, and, a hundred years ago, Thuggee proved no exception to the rule. Female Thugs were not common, although the wives appear occasionally in the records as having taken a personal interest in the unrighteous faith of their husbands. But one instance, at least, occurred of active participation, for Sleeman writes:—

“I have heard of only one woman who had gone herself on Thuggee expeditions. That is the wife of Dukagheer Jemadar. She had often assisted her husband in strangling and, on one occasion, strangled a man who had overpowered her husband. Mothers have often made their sons go on Thuggee when they would not otherwise have gone, and wives on some occasions have told their husbands to undertake Thuggee expeditions. I have even heard of one woman in the Deccan, Moosmp, who kept a small gang of Thugs herself, but Dukagheer’s wife is, as far as I can learn, the only woman who has gone on Thuggee herself.”

Later, however, Sleeman was to find that others had actively participated, and we are fortunate to have his cross-examination of the woman Moosmp:—

*Sleeman* : “How long have you been confined to the Delhi gaol and for what crime?”

*Moosmp* : “About six years. I was arrested for the murder of three families near Delhi.”

*Sleeman* : “How came this murder to be brought to light?”



*Moosmp* : "The children of the murdered people were recognised by some of their relations through details of the particulars of the murder of their parents."

*Sleeman* : "How many of your sons were concerned in this murder?"

*Moosmp* : "Three, who were all hung, as well as two others of my relations."

*Sleeman* : "I understand you were formerly a Thug Jemadar leader. Is this correct?"

*Moosmp* : "Yes. My husband had a gang of forty or fifty men and women, whom I always accompanied on Thuggee."

*Sleeman* : "Did you ever perform the office of strangler?"

*Moosmp* : "No. The female Thugs are only employed in taking charge of the children of the murdered people."

One of the strictest laws of Thuggee was that women should not be killed, and it was to the breaking of this law of Bhowani that the majority of Thugs attributed their downfall. The following interrogation gives a clear indication of their feelings on this matter:—

*Sleeman* : "How is it that you Hindustan Thugs kill women with less scruple than the Deccan Thugs?"

*Feringeea* : "To that we owe much of our misfortune. It began with the murder of the Kalee Bebee."

*Dorgha* : "I was not present, but heard that she was on her way from Elichpore to Hyderabad with a gold sheet for the tomb of Dolla Khan Nawab, who had died just before. Shumshere Khan and Golab Khan strangled her, I believe."

*Sleeman* : "When was this?"

*Dorgha* : "It was, I believe, about four years before the affair in which we murdered sixty people at Chitterkote, among whom were some women."

*Sleeman* : "Did any calamity befall you after the murder of the Kalee Bebee?"



*Dorgha* : "I think not."

*Sleeman* : "And, therefore, you continued to kill them?"

*Feringeea* : "For five years no misfortune followed, and they continued to kill women; but then the misfortune of my family began."

*Sleeman* : "What relations had you there?"

*Feringeea* : "My father was one of the principal leaders, and the gold sheet they got was worth three thousand rupees. It was divided and my father brought home one fine strip. But the fifth year after this his misfortunes began; our family was never happy; not a year passed without his losing something, or being seized—he was seized every year somewhere or other. Ghasee Subahdar was another leader, and he suffered similar misfortunes, and his family became miserable. Look at our families; see how they are annihilated; all that survive of them are in prison."

*Sleeman* : "And still you went on killing women in spite of your conviction that your misfortunes arose from it?"

*Dorgha* : "Yes. It was our fate to do so."

Here is another cross-examination on the killing of women.

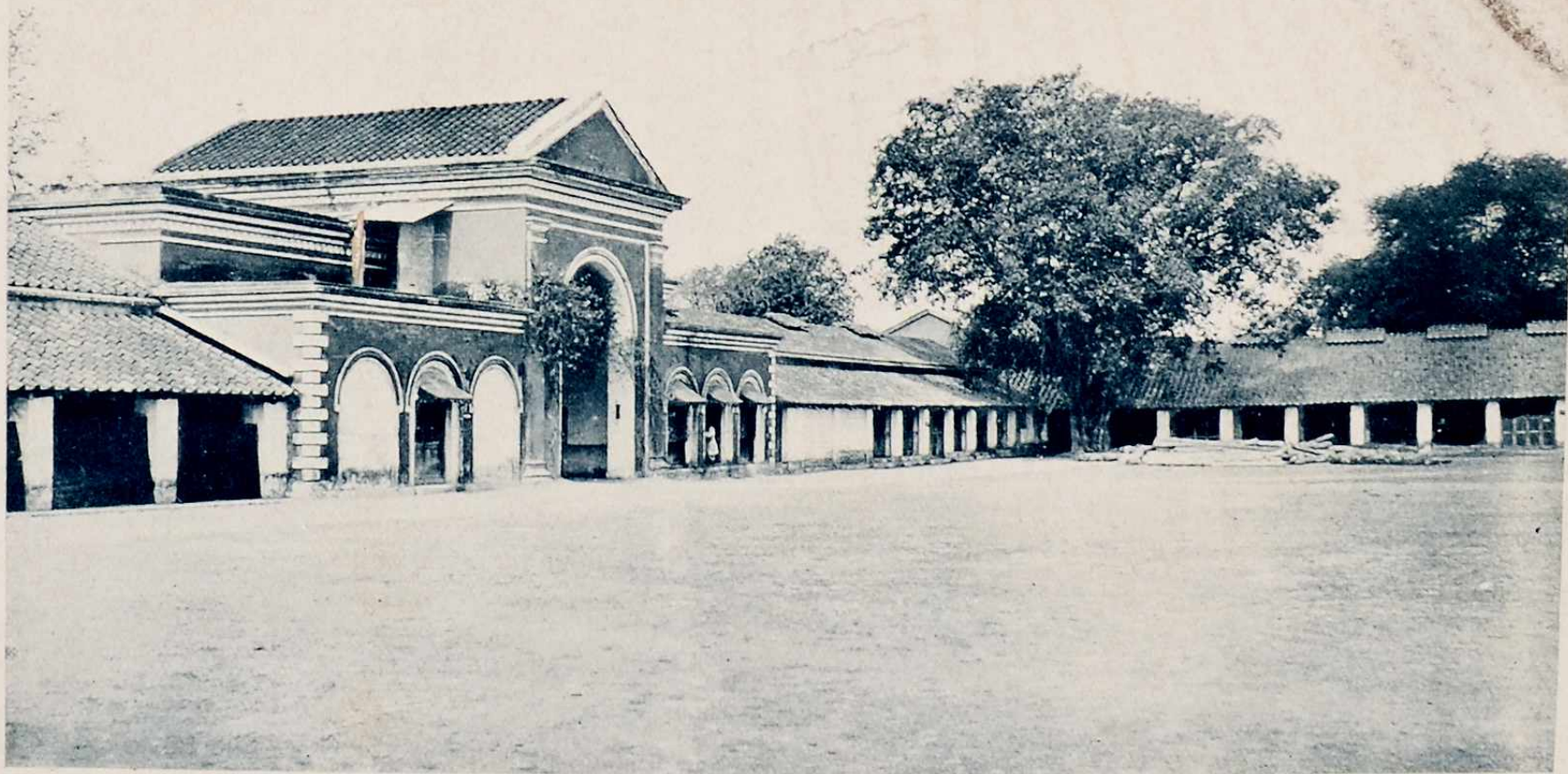
*Sleeman* : "But where did you fall in with Feringeea and the Moghulanee?"

*Dorgha* : "We fell in with them at Lalsont and came on with them to Somp."

*Sleeman* : "Who were with her?"

*Dorgha* : "She had an old female servant, mounted upon a pony, one armed man and six bearers for her palankeen. From Somp we sent on men to select a place for the murder, and set out with her before daylight, but the guide in the dark lost the road, and we were trying to find it when the young woman became alarmed and began to reproach us for taking her into the jungle in the dark. We told Feringeea to come up and quiet her, but dreading that some of her party might make off, the signal was given and they were all strangled."





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*(By the courtesy of Captain B. C. Trappes-Lomax, M.C., R.A.)*

THE OLD THUG PRISON, LATER A SCHOOL OF INDUSTRY, AT JUBBULPORE

Upon a tablet over its entrance is recorded the following; "The Jubbulpore School of Industry was founded in 1836, by the late Major-General Sir W. H. Sleeman, K.C.B., then General Superintendent of operations for the suppression of Thuggee and Dacoity."



*Sleeman* : "What did you get from them?"

*Dorgha* : "Six hundred rupees' worth of property."

*Sleeman* : "And was this enough to tempt a large gang to murder a beautiful young woman?" (A gang of 125 Thugs!)

*Dorgha* : "We were averse to it, and often said that we should not get two rupees apiece, and that she ought to be let go; but Feringeea insisted upon our killing her."

*Sleeman* : "How did you advise the murder of a young woman like this?"

*Feringeea* (interrupting): "It was her fate to die by our hands. I had several times tried to shake them off before we met the Mussulmans, and when we came to Lalsont, I told her that she must go on as I had joined some old friends, and should be delayed. She then told me that I must go to her home with her near Agra, or she would get me into trouble; and being a Brahman while she was a Mussulman, I was afraid that I should be accused of improper intercourse and be turned out of my caste."

*Sleeman* : "But you might have gone another road?"

*Dorgha* : "He could not, as he had before told her that he was going to her village near Agra; and, had he left her, she might have suspected us and got us all seized as bad characters."

*Buksh* : "She told Khoda that the young Subahdar, meaning Feringeea, should go to her home with her."

*Sleeman* : "Why did she call him Subahdar?"

*Dorgha* : "We all did so at that time, because he was a handsome young man and looked like a man of rank, which was useful to us."

*Sleeman* : "Who strangled her?"

*Dorgha* : "Medar Buksh, while Khoda Buksh held her down and Feringeea assisted in pulling her from her palankeen."

Confession of Dheera, son of Hurlall, aged twenty, a grass-cutter of Seekurgow, 14th February, 1838:—



“Khyda, Bhugta, Hunsooree, and myself set out with his party consisting of the two girls now here, their mother, father and aunt, and a young man. We went to Soneeput and from thence to the ghat on the Jumna to Kutona where we lodged at night in the bazar. A little before sunset the father and cousin of the two girls went with me, Rambuksh, Pema and Khyda in search of charity to the village and on the way we put the two men to death. I strangled the young man with a cord while Khyda held his hands. Rambuksh strangled the uncle while Pema held his hands. Having killed them, we threw their bodies into the river; it was about ten o'clock at night. We returned to the mother and aunt of the girls, and told them that the men would not leave the village and that they must go and join them. They got ready and set out, and when we got to the river we desired them to sit down; they did so and Rambuksh strangled one of the women while Bhugta held her hands, and I strangled the other while Khyda held her hands; whether the women assisted I do not know. Went to Rohtuk and sold the two girls to some gypsies for one hundred rupees, and out of this I got four rupees for the hire of my pony.”

Just another of those hundreds of confessions of cold-blooded murder, told with all the usual callousness of the Thug; but a most significant testimony of the depths of degradation to which this class of Thug descended, to whom women meant no more than men.

A somewhat comical reason was given to Sleeman for the omission on the part of a Thug father to initiate his son into the awful mysteries.

“His father,” said the witness, seeking to find something to palliate the offence, “used to drink very hard, and in his fits of intoxication used to neglect his prayers and his days of fast. All days were the same to him, while his son, Shumsheera, was always sober and religiously disposed and



lived with his uncle Dondee—a very worthy good man. He, too, was a Thug, but likewise refrained from removing the veil from the eyes of his nephew. Another relative, however, proved less considerate and flattered his cousin's vanity by telling him that he belonged to a very high family of Thugs."

A horrible instance of woman-slaughter is given in the tale of the Moonshee Bunda Ali, who with his wife, infant daughter and six servants, was taking another of his daughters to her bridegroom. *En route* he fell in with Thugs who succeeded in ingratiating themselves with his party and all travelled on together. One evening towards dusk, a few of the Thugs, sitting with the Moonshee outside his tent, began to sing and play on the *sitar*. His sword was lying on the ground, and presently a Thug took it up as if to examine it. The signal for murder was then given, the Moonshee springing to his feet, screaming aloud, and trying to rush into the tent, but being instantly seized and strangled. His wife, hearing the noise, came running out with the infant in her arms and shared his fate, while the bride was put to death in the tent. The servants were grooming the horses, and one of them crept under a horse's belly and lustily bawled out murder, but they were all quickly silenced by the fatal noose. Ghubbil Khan, who had murdered the mother, intended to adopt the infant, but was dissuaded by his comrades for fear it might lead to their discovery. He, therefore, threw the child alive into the grave of the others, the earth being hastily shovelled in upon the living and the dead. While this dreadful scene was being enacted, a number of native servants belonging to some English officers were actually within sight, pitching tents in readiness for troops shortly to arrive. To overcome this danger, the Thugs had started to sing loudly when the butchery began, and let loose two vicious horses, chasing them with much shouting in order to drown the cries of the victims.



Though a few women were murdered in the later days of Thuggee when discipline became more lax, sex-appeal still made some impression even on the Thugs, as is shown on one occasion at least, for Feringeea says:

“I and my cousin were with a gang of 150 Thugs on an expedition to Rajputana about thirteen years ago, when we met a handmaid of the Peshwa Bajee Row’s on her way from Poona to Cawnpore. We intended to kill her and her followers, but we found her very beautiful and, after having her and her party three days within our grasp, and knowing that they had a lac and a half (150,000 rupees) in jewels and other things, we let her and all her party go. We had talked to her and felt love towards her, for she was very beautiful.”

So beauty, which has ruined many women’s lives, was in this case to save one, for she must have been beautiful indeed to excite the compassion of such a Thug.

Seeing that from 1830 onwards Thug-hunting was in full cry and hundreds of Thugs suffered the last penalty for their offences, it might be thought that the cult of this particular form of murder would have become unpopular with those who possessed leanings towards crime. It is, therefore, almost incredible to find that at least two other distinct types of Thugs were discovered during the operations for the suppression of the ancient form of Thuggee. Yet such proved to be the case, and although these differed in some ways from the hereditary system, in that they professed neither its beliefs nor its laws, both dealt with the victims by the same system of strangulation by the *ruhmal*.

One of these sects was the Magpunnaistic Thugs, whose system was but sixteen years old when, in 1839, it was discovered by Sleeman, who had been promoted to Major in 1837. Yet within that short period of existence it was estimated that there were four hundred of these Thugs at large, over and above those he had already hanged or



imprisoned. In other words, it had proved a popular form of Thuggee, which, had it not been nipped in the bud, might have taken the place of the ancient system then nearing its end. Later, in 1848, the Tusma-Baz Thugs were also brought to light, a more aristocratic type of strangler, whose system dated back to 1802. Apart from its comparative antiquity as compared to the Magpunnaistic Thugs, it was far more select since, forty-six years later, it numbered only some fifty members who plied their murderous campaign principally on the outskirts of Cawnpore. It is amazing to realise that both these special and comparatively modern types of Thug apparently succeeded in remaining unknown even to their fellows of the ancient faith.

A short description of one of these systems will show their character.

In his "Report on the System of Magpunnaism, or the Murder of Indigent Parents for their Young Children," published in 1839, Major Sleeman deals with the question of this system, derived from the word *Mekh-phandiya*, *mekh*, a peg, and *phanda*, a noose, meaning to play tricks with a strap. Having by this time been in India for thirty years, his introduction is certainly strangely prophetic:

"India is a strange land, and live in it as long as we may, and mix with its people as much as we please, we shall, to the last, be constantly liable to stumble upon new moral phenomena to excite our special wonder. Delhi, the great capital of the Mohammedan Emperors, is still a large and populous city, the residence of the Imperial family, and one of the principal seats of our civil and military establishments: Meerut—two or three stages to the east—Muthura, four stages to the south, and Kurnaul, four stages to the north, are three of our largest, most fashionable, and most delightful military stations. The country around these stations and this great city is among the most peopled



and cultivated parts of our eastern dominions; and yet in this, which may be considered the garden of India, has the hideous system which I am about to describe, been practised for the past ten years unknown to, and—as a system—unsuspected by any of the Europeans that have visited or resided in it.

“There seems good ground to believe that the system began with the siege of Bhurtpore in the year 1826. (Note: That it was discovered during a period when India was being closely combed for the ordinary type of Thug by experienced criminal specialists, aided by Thug informers, is proof of the danger, always present in India, of a rapid reversion to ancient and unlawful practices.) Parents had, no doubt, long before this been occasionally murdered for the sake of their young children in that and in every other part of India, where children are largely bought and sold; but we have no reason to believe that there was, before that time, any gang in that or in any other part of India that followed this system of murdering indigent and helpless parents for the sake of their children, as an exclusive trade.

“*Brinjaras* (gipsies) who, all over India, trade in children that have been stolen from their parents; and prostitutes, who purchase those that are good-looking wherever they can get them, will give more for those whose parents are certified to be dead than for any others, because they have less apprehension of such children ever absconding in search of them, or being reclaimed by them. In seasons of great and general calamity, like those by which Upper India has been for some years past afflicted, great numbers of the most respectable families of all castes have been reduced to indigence and obliged to emigrate; and the children of parents of this description, who have been taken great care of and sheltered from the sun, and who are, in consequence, commonly very fair, are those most sought after by these murderers.



“They were in the habit of disposing of the female children thus obtained for very large sums to respectable natives, or to the prostitutes of the different cities they visited; and they found this system more lucrative than that of murdering travellers in good circumstances; and less likely to be brought to the notice of the local authorities, as enquiries were seldom made after the victims by their surviving relations.

“These gangs, contrary to the custom of those Thugs whose proceedings are now so well known to us, invariably take their families with them on their expeditions; and the female members of the gangs are generally employed as inveiglers to win the confidence of the emigrant families they fall in with on the road. They introduce these families to the gang, and they are prevailed upon to accompany them to some place suitable for their designs upon them, where the parents are murdered by the men, while the women take care of the children. When the children enquire after their parents, they are told that they have sold them to certain members of the gang and departed. If they appear to doubt the truth of these assertions, they are deterred from further enquiries by a threat of instant death.

“The numerical strength of these Magpunna gangs, so far as I can yet learn, are between three and four hundred persons, over and above what I have already secured; and many of them have living with them the unhappy orphans of respectable parents whom they have murdered. I fear, however, that the gangs will hereafter be found more numerous, though I have given the names and descriptive roles of all who are known to those whom I have as yet admitted as approvers.”

Sleeman next describes the difficulty he experienced in obtaining evidence to convict this particular type of Thug, for the bodies of their victims were mostly thrown into



rivers, while the girl children they had stolen had either become inmates of the *zenanas* of respectable people, or were confined in the establishments of prostitutes. In addition to these difficulties, the Thugs did not hesitate to murder any children in their possession for whom search was being made. Those who look forward with joyous anticipation to the entire indianisation of India, and are misled into a belief that this will bring relief to an oppressed people, should ponder over the following words—words of a man who, as many distinguished Indians have themselves admitted, knew India better than any Englishman before or since:—

“There is one great evil which afflicts and always has afflicted the country, and which no government but a very strong one could attempt to eradicate. This is the mass of religious mendicants who infect every part of India and subsist upon the fruits of all manner of crime, and upon the fears of the people. They none of them depend, or condescend to be supposed to depend, upon any feeling of charity for their subsistence—they act openly and boldly upon the fears of those from whom they demand assistance. In the time of the Emperor Shah Jehan, some two hundred years ago (this was written in 1839) their numbers were estimated at 800,000 Mohammedan *Fakirs* and 1,200,000 Hindoo religious mendicants, and I should think these have increased since very much. Three-fourths of these rob and steal, and a very great portion of them murder their victims before they rob them.

“There is hardly any species of crime that is not, throughout India, perpetrated by men in the disguise of these religious mendicants. In their holy garb they easily prevail upon the unwary travellers to rest with them in some solitary part of the high road, or in some retired by-path into which they have beguiled them, and to smoke with them tobacco, or drink milk into which they have mixed



up *dutura*, or some other deleterious drug, which deprives him of his senses in a few minutes. Then they rob them and leave them to die from the poison; or strangle them if they happen to be in that part of the country in which they wish to reside, that they may not cross their path again.

“While I was in civil charge of the District of Jubbulpore in the year 1829, a respectable shop-keeper ran out to me one morning, as I rode through the town, in a fit of desperation, and complained that one of these religious mendicants was robbing his family of their bread by exacting every day more than he could pay. The *fakir* was standing at the threshold of his door, with his head leaning forward, and the blood trickling down his nose from a cut in his forehead. I had him brought to me, and I found upon his cheeks numerous dry, unwashed channels over which blood had been flowing upon the threshold of other men, and as many gashes upon his forehead as ever disfigured the crown of Banquo’s ghost. I asked him what he had been about, and he told me that this was the mode in which he gained his bread. He asked charity at the doors of those who could, he thought, afford to give it, and if they did not attend to his demands, he made a cut in his forehead with a little razor he held in his hand, and let his blood drop upon their threshold, which generally brought them to their senses. ‘But,’ said he, ‘the people of this ungodly town are getting worse and worse every day, and you see to what a state they have reduced me by their obstinacy.’ He was severely punished and turned out of the district; and when people found that I was not afraid to bring the curses of these godly people upon myself, they exposed all the modes of this system of exaction of which I had never before heard, though I had been nineteen years in India. I learnt that in almost every city in India were to be found men of the same kind, and



others who exacted money by presenting themselves before the doors of respectable families, with their bodies covered with whatever might be considered the most offensive to the senses of the inmates, and there, standing and performing whatever acts might be considered disgusting, till they got whatever they demanded."

So much for the preface to Sleeman's report on the system of Magpunnaism. Let us hear the cross-examination of Kheema Jemadar, a Magpunnaist Thug approver:—

*Sleeman*: "How long has this system of murdering travellers for their children been going on?"

*Kheema*: "Since the capture of Bhurtpore (1826, or about thirteen years)."

*Sleeman*: "You are in the habit of taking your wives with you on these expeditions? In what manner do you employ them?"

*Kheema*: "Yes, we always take them with us, and employ them in inveigling travellers with their families, and they receive charge of the children while we are murdering their parents."

*Sleeman*: "Are the children of the murdered people sent under the charge of the female Thugs to be disposed of?"

*Kheema*: "Yes."

*Sleeman*: "You say that your operations are conducted under the auspices of the goddess Kali: why? I always understood she forbid the Thugs murdering female travellers?"

*Kheema*: "Yes, she did, and by not paying attention to her mandates, we always thought our associations would be broken up."

*Sleeman*: "You invariably preserve the lives of children and sell them—sometimes to respectable natives. How do you account for their not proving the fate of their parents and thus having caused your apprehension long ago?"



*Kheema* : “We never allow the children to witness the murder of their parents, and the purchasers are always glad to find that there is no chance of their being recognised by their relatives in the event of the children disclosing the fate of their parents.”

Another Magpunnai Thug, Gopaul, is now examined:—

*Sleeman* : “You were, I understand, confined by the Paloundee chief five years ago for kidnapping children; where did you get them?”

*Gopaul* : “Yes. I murdered, in company with a large gang of Thugs, eight travellers at Belochepore and took six of their children with four other Thugs to Paloundee. The Rajah, hearing of our arrival, ordered us to be arrested, and we were kept in gaol four months.”

*Sleeman* : “What became of the children?”

*Gopaul* : “The Paloundee chief took them away from us and sent them to the Commissioner of Delhi.”

*Sleeman* : “After you were released, did you ever go on Thuggee again?”

*Gopaul* : “Yes. I have never had any other occupation.”

*Sleeman* : “What price were you in the habit of getting for the children you obtained?”

*Gopaul* : “We formerly used to get 80 or 100 rupees (£7 to £10) for fair, good-looking children.”

There are many sordid stories of murder in the pages of this report, and the depositions of Rookmunee, the woman whose parents were murdered by Thugs at Delhi, and who was arrested for participating in Thuggee in 1838, may be taken as a good example.

*Sleeman* : “How long have you been living with Roopla?”

*Rookmunee* : “About six or seven years after the murder of my parents near Delhi.”

*Sleeman* : “Did you witness the murder of your parents?”

*Rookmunee* : “No, they were murdered at night, and the following morning, the two sisters of my husband, about



eight or ten years of age, were taken to Delhi and sold to some prostitutes, and I was adopted by Roopla Jemadar."

*Sleeman* : "Were you aware of the occupation of Roopla when you went to live with him?"

*Rookmunee* : "No, I was not at first, but he afterwards told me the manner in which he gained a livelihood."

*Sleeman* : "Did you ever enquire of Roopla what became of your relations?"

*Rookmunee* : "Yes, I asked him frequently and he told me my parents had sold me to him for 80 rupees."

*Sleeman* : "Have you ever accompanied him on Thuggee?"

*Rookmunee* : "Yes, I went with him on three expeditions, and was present at the Kurnaul and Thunaiseir 'affairs'."

*Sleeman* : "Did you see any people murdered on these occasions?"

*Rookmunee* : "No. I was employed in taking charge of the children and preventing them bewailing the loss of their parents, who are always taken some distance from the tents of the gang."

*Sleeman* : "Did you feel no compunction in aiding and abetting in the acts of these assassins, and seeing poor unfortunate children bereaved of their parents?"

*Rookmunee* : "I lived two years with Roopla before I went on an expedition, and became reconciled to the course of life I was obliged to lead, and at the same time knew that his sole occupation was murdering travellers for their children, and therefore felt less compunction than I otherwise should have done in rendering my assistance."

"After the affair at Kurnaul, our two parties went on to Thunaiseir, where we encamped. In the morning a traveller came up with a daughter of twenty-five and a son and daughter younger. We told him that he should bring grass for our ponies and that we would then give him and his children subsistence. After that a Brahman and his wife came up,



with a grown-up son and a daughter fourteen years of age, and two other sons, one ten and the other three years of age. They had a mare with them. After them arrived a carpenter's widow, with her son, ten years of age, and shortly afterwards a Brahman and his wife, with a son two and a half years of age, and two daughters—one fourteen and the other twelve years of age. They all lodged with us and we remained there five days, and then set out for the river Jumna, which we reached on the third day. While I was asleep at night, the gangs took the travellers down to the water's edge and put them to death, and our party got nine children. We all came back with our children and encamped in the vicinity of Beebepore. The girl was sold there, and one girl and boy Dhyan took away; the girl was purchased by a prostitute and taken out in a covered cart to Kurnaul."

A further account of this murder was obtained from Radha, the wife of a Thug, Roopla, captured at Meerut in 1838. After describing the murder, she adds: "They brought the nine children back to us a watch and a half before daylight. They were all crying a good deal after their parents, and we quieted them the best way we could with sweetmeats and playthings. A daughter and a son of the Brahmans were extremely beautiful and these we left with Dhyan Sing for sale. We came on to a village a little distance from Beebepore, where a trooper arrived, saying that he had heard of several people being murdered and suspected us of the crime. The headman of Beebepore, and some of the gipsies, came to our camp with the trooper, and assured him that he must be mistaken, as they knew us all to be very honest, inoffensive people; and taking him back to Beebepore, they treated him with great consideration, and he went away apparently satisfied. A woman who keeps prostitutes came from Kurnaul and purchased and took away all the girl children. One boy was purchased



by an elephant driver, who took him off on his elephant, and another by a Mussulman, while all the rest were taken on in covered carriages by the prostitute. At Thunaiseir another party of Thugs got seven travellers with seven children at the same time that we got ours; and the parents were all murdered at the same time and place that the parents of our children were murdered on the banks of the Jumna."

Enough has been written to indicate the character of the crimes committed by this particular set of Thugs, and it would be wearisome to continue recounting the other nauseating confessions contained in this report. To give some idea of the number of murders for which these Thugs were responsible, one alone confessed to murdering twenty people for the sake of their children within three years! When this report was being prepared, there were still 273 Magpunnaist Thugs at large, forty of whom were arrested before it could be published, showing the speed with which Sleeman and his men worked.

By this time one does not expect to find the slightest evidence of pity or regret on the part of the Thugs concerned, but what is astonishing is the fact that many of the wives who accompanied their husbands on these Thuggee expeditions were children who had been captured after the murder of their parents! They accepted their part in this horrid traffic as if it were one of domestic routine, and the evidence of Radha is typical of such women:

*Sleeman*: "Where were your parents murdered?"

*Radha*: "Near the village of Dunkaree."

*Sleeman*: "Did you wish them to murder your parents?"

*Radha*: "No, they were murdered during the night and I and my two young brothers were entrusted to the charge of the female Thugs and were offered for sale a few days afterwards to some gipsies, who would not give a sufficient sum for me. I was subsequently adopted by Salga (a Thug Jemadar)."



*Sleeman* : "Have you ever heard anything of your two brothers since the murder of your parents?"

*Radha* : "No."

*Sleeman* : "Have you been in the habit of accompanying your adopted husband on Thuggee since you have been living with him?"

*Radha* : "Yes, I have been on three or four expeditions with him."

*Sleeman* : "A poor woman was murdered in your house eight months ago. Did you feel no compunction in taking charge of her children while your husband was employed in strangling her?"

*Radha* : "I was compelled to obey the orders of my husband, who directed me to prevent the children making a noise."

*Sleeman* : "What time of the day was this woman murdered?"

*Radha* : "About twelve o'clock, and her body was covered over with clothes and removed during the night by my husband, Hurree Singh and others."

*Sleeman* : "What became of her three children?"

*Radha* : "They were sold to Koshallee (a prostitute) for 20 rupees."

After reading these true accounts of Magpunnaism in India during 1836-39, it seems almost unbelievable that, with such a people, it was possible to rid the country of the ancient and terrible scourge of Thuggee.



## CHAPTER XII

### THE SYSTEM OF THUGGEE SUPPRESSION

THE stage is set. The principal actors in this hideous drama have made their bow. The act which is to end with their suppression is about to commence. And if it lacks the horror of the tragedies enacted in the former chapters, it will at least bring the comforting knowledge that the characters which stalked malignantly through those corridors of vile murderous history met with their deserts.

The task was no easy one for some twenty scattered Englishmen against thousands of merciless assassins, aided by many who should have supported the forces of law and order. The ordinary principles of British justice were not departed from, easy though it would have been to consider every suspect captured to be a Thug, and every Thug a murderer; and it is to this fact that we owe the knowledge of Thuggee which is ours to-day, for their own depositions constitute the material on which this book is based.

In a description of the way in which Sleeman began his operations, it is best to start with his own words, as recorded in "Rambles and Recollections of an Indian Official":—

"The Thugs went on their adventures in large gangs and two or more were commonly united in the course of an expedition in the perpetration of many murders. Every man shared in the booty according to the rank he held in the gang, or the part he took in the murders; and the rank of every man and the part he took generally, or in any



particular murder, were generally well known to all. From among these gangs, when arrested, we found the evidence we required for their conviction—or the means of tracing it—among the families and friends of their victims, or with persons to whom the property taken had been disposed of, and in the graves to which the victims had been consigned.

“To give an idea of the system by which the Government of India has been enabled to effect so great a good for the people as the suppression of these associations, I will suppose that two sporting gentlemen, A at Delhi and B in Calcutta, had both described the killing of a tiger in an island of the Ganges, near Hardwar, and mentioned the names of the persons engaged with them. Among the persons thus named were C, who had since returned to America, D, who had retired to New South Wales, E to England, and F to Scotland. There were four other persons named who were still in India, but they are deeply interested in A and B’s story not being believed. A says that B got the skin of the tiger, and B states that he gave it to C, who cut out two of the claws. Application is made to C, D, E and F, and without the possibility of any collusion, or even communication between them, their statements correspond precisely with those of A and B, as to the time, place, circumstances and persons engaged. Their statements are sworn to before magistrates in the presence of witnesses, and duly attested. C states that he got the skin from B, and gave it to the Nawab of Rampur for a hookah carpet, but that he took from the left forefoot two of the claws and gave them to the minister of the King of Oudh for a charm for his sick child.

“The Nawab of Rampur, being applied to, states that he received the skin from C at the time and place mentioned, and that he still smoked his hookah upon it, and that it had lost the two claws upon the left forefoot. The minister



of the King of Oudh states that he received the two claws nicely set in gold; that they had cured his boy, who still wore them round his neck to guard him from the evil eye. The goldsmith states that he set the two claws in gold for C, who paid him handsomely for his work. The peasantry, whose cattle graze on the island, declare that certain gentlemen did kill a tiger there about the time mentioned, and that they saw the body after the skin had been taken off, and the vultures had begun to descend upon it. To prove that what A and B had stated could not possibly be true, the other party appeal to some of their townsmen, who are said to be well acquainted with their characters. They state that they really know nothing about the matter in dispute; that their friends, who are opposed to A and B, are much liked by their townspeople and neighbours, as they have plenty of money which they spend freely, but that they are certainly very much addicted to field-sports, and generally absent in pursuit of wild beasts for three or four months every year; but whether they were or were not present at the killing of the great Gakhmuktesar tiger, they could not say.

“Most people would, after examining this evidence, be tolerably well satisfied that the said tiger had really been killed at the time and place, and by the persons mentioned by A and B; but, to establish the fact judicially it would be necessary to bring A, B, C, D, E and F, the Nawab of Rampur, the minister of the King of Oudh, and the goldsmith to the criminal court at Meerut, to be confronted with the person whose interest it was that A and B should not be believed. They would all, perhaps, come to the said court from the different quarters of the world in which they had thought themselves snugly settled; but the thing would annoy them so much, and be so much talked of, that sporting gentlemen, Nawabs, ministers and goldsmiths would in future take good care to have “for-



gotten" everything connected with the matter in dispute, should another similar reference be made to them, and so A and B would never again have any chance.

"Thug approvers, whose evidence we required, were employed in all parts of India, under the officers appointed to put down these associations; and it was difficult to bring all whose evidence was necessary at the trials to the court of the district in which the particular murder was perpetrated. The victims were, for the most part, money-carriers, whose masters and families resided hundreds of miles from the place where they were murdered, or people on their way to their distant homes from foreign service. There was no chance of recovering any of the property taken from the victims, as Thugs were known to spend what they got freely, and never to have money by them; and the friends of the victims, and the bankers whose money they carried, were everywhere found exceedingly averse to take share in the prosecution. To obviate all these difficulties separate courts were formed, with permission to receive whatever evidence they might think likely to prove valuable, attaching to each portion—whether documentary or oral—whatever weight it might seem to deserve. Such courts were formed at Hyderabad, Mysore, Indore, Lucknow and Gwalior, and were presided over by our highest diplomatic functionaries, in concurrence with the princes at whose courts they were accredited; and who, at Jubbulpore, were under the direction of the representative of the Governor-General of India. (Sir William Sleeman.)

"By this means we had a most valuable species of unpaid agency; and I believe there is no part of their public life on which these high functionaries look back with more pride than that spent in presiding over such courts, and assisting the supreme Government in relieving the people of India from this fearful evil."



We are fortunate to possess Sleeman's own explanation of the methods instituted at the beginning of his gigantic task; for his clear and penetrating brain, determination and courage, were not only responsible for evolving this system so fatal to Thuggee, but eventually overcame the difficulties he described.

With immense concentration he threw himself into his task, delving so deeply into its hidden mysteries as to be known ever afterwards as "Thuggee Sleeman," a human bloodhound who never lost the trail until he had run his quarry down. He was fortunate in two main things; first, in the capture of approvers, who supplied such excellent information, and second, in the discovery of the secret language of Thuggee, that spinal cord of its nervous system. The day that Sleeman dragged this into the light hammered the first big nail in the coffin of Thuggee, for until then Thugs, whether free or under arrest, could converse before their victims or gaolers with impunity. Next he prepared family trees of the Thugs, work entailing laborious research, painstaking care and minute accuracy,—a masterpiece of genealogical record, which ensured that every Thug by hereditary descent was ultimately accounted for.

The enormous difficulty which must have been experienced in their preparation will be recognised. Even to-day the compilation of a family tree in peaceful England is a matter of difficulty, and that of members of a secret criminal faith, centuries old, may well be considered a unique achievement. Indeed, if Sleeman's fame depended upon this success alone, it would be greater than most men gain in a lifetime. Supplied with a knowledge of the secret language of Thuggee, with approvers able and willing to inform against their erstwhile comrades, and with these genealogical trees to work upon, the machinery for its suppression revolved with routine-like regularity. But the







capture of Thugs was not the end of the difficulties, for an equally arduous task was that of obtaining the necessary evidence, since British rule has always required the same clear evidence that obtains in the Central Criminal Court in London, and even the most notorious Thug had to have a fair trial. Fortunately for India the meshes of Sleeman's sieve of justice were microscopically small, for it was of the utmost importance to ensure that no Thug, innocent or guilty, should again go free. Hard as this may sound, it was essential, for, being a hereditary religion of murder, the Phoenix would have risen from the ashes and Thuggee grown again with alarming rapidity.

It will be appreciated that the arrest of Thugs was not easy work. Even to-day, with the wealth of communications which now exist, and modern methods of identifying, pursuing and convicting criminals—finger-prints, photography, wireless, X-ray, laboratory tests, telephones, aeroplanes, motor cars, etc.—a certain difficulty is experienced in all countries in arresting those who make life and property insecure. And yet nowhere is the criminal so experienced in the art of secrecy and camouflage, or so screened and protected by custom and authority, as the Thug of India a hundred years ago. This proved work indeed which would have daunted most men, but those charged with this herculean task had been specially chosen, and laboured on despite a thousand difficulties, until the first slow trickle into the prisons of the most unscrupulous scoundrels and skilled murderers ever known developed into a torrent. Those convicted of murder and not required as approvers were hanged; those proved to be Thugs but not actually found guilty of murder, were imprisoned for life. The sons of Thugs, either by birth or adoption, who were too young to have started on a career of murder, were confined in comparative comfort, though forced into



celibacy, and employed in tent or carpet making or other industries, in order that there should not be a native in India living in freedom who could claim to be descended from a Thug. And so this abominable confraternity, which had for centuries infested the roads of India, and made away with over a million of victims, was destroyed.

In her book, "Wanderings of a Pilgrim in Search of the Picturesque," published in 1850, Mrs. Fanny Parks, an intelligent and discerning Englishwoman, devotes several passages to the question of Thuggee. Her account is of great interest, for she stayed some time at Jubbulpore and saw something of Sleeman's work at first hand, as the following extracts show:—

"October, 1830. Captain Sleeman, the acting magistrate, has sent me a present of the dice used by the Thugs; they were taken from a Thug in the magistrate's office. There are three dice, made of brass roughly filed. Two sides are perforated by a large hole that goes through the centre. Two of the sides are marked with three small circles placed in a triangular form; one side has two circles, and four are on the other side. When the Thugs are going out on a strangling expedition, they throw these dice to see what days will prove lucky or unlucky."

"October 16th, 1830. In the *Government Gazette* of this evening is an account of the execution of eleven Thugs, in a letter from a man up country to the editor; the account is so interesting I cannot refrain from copying it:

"Sir, I was yesterday present at the execution of eleven Thugs, who had been seized in the neighbourhood of Bhilsa, convicted of the murder of thirty-five travellers, and sentenced to death by the Agent to the Governor-General, Mr. Smith. As the sun rose, the eleven men were brought out from the gaol, decorated with chaplets of



flowers, and marched up to the front of the drop, where they arranged themselves in line with infinite self-possession. When arranged, each opposite the noose that best pleased him, they lifted up their hands and shouted "*Bindachel ka jae! Bhowani ka jae!*"—"Glory to Bindachel! Bhowani's glory!"—everyone making use of precisely the same invocation, though four were Mohammedans, one a Brahman, and the rest Rajpoots, and other castes of Hindoos; they all ascended the steps, and took their position upon the platform with great composure, then, taking the noose in both hands, made the same invocation to Bhowani, after which they placed them over their heads and adjusted them to their necks: some of the younger ones laughing at the observations of the crowd around them. One of the youngest—a Mohammedan—impatient of the delay, stooped down so as to tighten the rope, and, stepping deliberately over the platform, hung himself as coolly as one would step over a rock to take a swim in the sea! This man was known to have assisted in strangling a party of six travellers at Omurpaten in December last, and, closely pursued, to have gone off, joined another gang and, in less than a month, to have assisted in strangling thirty more in Bhopal; he was taken at Bhilsa, the last scene of his murders.

"Omurpaten is 100 miles east of Jubbulpore; and the place in which the Thug assisted in strangling in the Bhopal territories, a month afterwards, is 200 miles west of Jubbulpore. Such is the rapidity with which these murderers change the scene of their operations, when conscious of keen pursuit! He was taken at Bhilsa by the very man whom he found upon his trail at Omurpaten, 300 miles distant. On being asked whether they had any wish to express to the magistrate, they prayed that for every man hung *five convicts might be released from gaol*, and that they might have a little money to be distributed in charity. Their invocation of Bhowani at the drop was a confession



of their guilt, for no one in such a situation invokes Bhowani but a Thug, and he invokes no other deity in any situation, whatever may be his religion or sect. She is worshipped under her four names, Davi, Kali, Doorga and Bhowani, and her temple at Bindachun, a few miles west of Mirzapore, is constantly filled with murderers from every quarter of India, who go there to offer up a share of the booty acquired from their strangled victims in their annual excursions. This accounts for the invocation "*Jae Bindachel*" made use of by these men in approaching and ascending the drop. These pilgrimages to the temple are made generally at the latter end of the rainy season, and whilst on their road from their homes to the temple, nothing can ever tempt them to commit a robbery. They are not, however, so scrupulous on their way back. The priests promise the Thugs impunity and wealth, provided a due share be offered to the goddess. If they die by the sword in the execution of murders, she promises them paradise in all its most exquisite delights; if taken and executed, it must arise from her displeasure, incurred by some neglect of the duties they owe her, and they must, as disturbed spirits, inhabit mid-air until her wrath be appeased. After they had propitiated the goddess by offering up a share of the preceding year, and received the priests' suggestions on the subject, they prepare for the next year's expedition.

“In the territories of the native chiefs of Bundelcund, and those of Scindia and Holcar, a Thug feels just as independent and free as an Englishman in a tavern, and they will probably begin to feel themselves just as much so in those of Nagpore, now that European superintendency has been withdrawn. But they are not confined to the territories of the native chiefs; they are becoming numerous in our own, and are often found most securely and comfortably situated in the very seats of our principal judicial



establishments; and of late years they are known to have formed some settlements to the east of the Ganges, in parts that they formerly used merely to visit in the course of their annual excursions.

“Your obedient servant, H.”

This extract ends thus:

“I have been greatly interested in the above account; there are numerous Thugs in and around Cawnpore; they never attack Europeans; but the natives are afraid of travelling alone, as a poor bearer with one month’s wages of four rupees has quite sufficient to attract them. They seldom bury them in these parts, but having strangled and robbed their victim, they throw him down a well—wells being numerous by the side of the high roads. In 1844 I visited the famous temple of Bhowani at Bindachun near Mirzapore.”

During the following year, on May 9th, 1831, Mrs. Parks records the execution of twenty-five Thugs:—

“The inhabitants at Jubbulpore were this morning assembled to witness the execution of twenty-five Thugs, who were all hanged at the same time, arrangements having been previously made. It would be impossible to find in any country a set of men who meet death with more indifference than these wretches; and, had it been in a better cause, they would have excited universal sympathy. As it was, there was something dreadful in the thought that men, who had so often imbrued their hands in blood, should meet their death with such carelessness. I believe that they had previously requested to be allowed to fasten the cord around their necks with their own hands; certain it is that each individual, as soon as he had adjusted the noose, jumped off the beam, and launched himself into eternity; and those who first mounted the ladder



selected their ropes, rejecting such as did not please them. One of them, who had leaped off the beam, and had been hanging for more than three seconds, put his hand up and pulled his cap over his face.

“This is the second execution of Thugs that has taken place here, but no accident happened this time, nor did a single rope break. However satisfied with the justice of their sentence, of which from the many sanguinary murders proved, there can be no doubt, still, it cannot but be lamented that the course of justice is so slow; as these men, who were this day executed, had been in prison for more than eight years, for want of sufficient evidence.” This refers to Thugs imprisoned before Sleeman was given charge of the Department created for the suppression of Thuggee. Caught red-handed, many Thugs had been captured and incarcerated in the prisons of Rajahs and native chiefs, where they remained until bribery, escape, or death effected their release. The British Government cannot be accused of unduly delayed justice in this particular case, for the suppression of Thuggee had only been properly organised for slightly over a year. Meanwhile Sleeman, in justice to the accused delivered to him from native gaols, had had to secure evidence of murders committed nine to thirteen years before. Mrs. Parks continues:

“The number of Thugs in the neighbouring countries is enormous; a hundred and fifteen, I believe, belonged to the party of which twenty-five were executed, and the remainder are to be transported; and report says there are as many more in the Saugor jail. Too much credit cannot be given to the principal assistants of this district, who have succeeded in capturing so many of them; and Captain Sleeman has the satisfaction of knowing that by his endeavours these men have been seized. One of the men who were executed this morning was a *chaprasi*



(messenger), who had been sent towards Nagpore to seize the (Thug) party, but who joined himself with them, and by his presence protected them. A guard of a company of sepoy's under the command of Lieutenant G—— was in attendance; but there was not the slightest disturbance, nor did the natives betray the slightest emotion of any kind, except one Nujeeb, who fainted."

Throughout this book an endeavour has been made to present Thuggee not from hearsay or imagination, but from actual associations with its activities, and in this connection the following extract from "Modern India," by Dr. Henry H. Spry, M.D., F.G.S., of the Bengal Medical Service, written in 1837, is of interest:—

"I now come to that extraordinary class of our fellow-creatures whose deeds of blood have been for some time past the wonder and astonishment of every circle in Europe: I allude to the gang-murderers of the East Indies, commonly called Thugs. Soon after Lord William Bentinck entered upon his duties as Governor-General, the Indian Government came to the praiseworthy resolution of taking active measures for the extirpation of these villains from the face of the country. By some it may be asked, how they were ever allowed to spring into existence? The explanation is easy. It must be apparent to all, who reflect for a moment on the subject, that a country which has been for centuries the theatre of anarchy or misrule, can offer no internal security for the protection of the property or the persons of isolated individuals. (Not pleasant words for the critic of British rule to read to-day, written as they were nearly a hundred years ago, when memories of native rule were fresh.) Where escape or evasion from detection is easy, crime in its worst form is sure to abound. With this rule for our guide, we need not be at a loss to account for the frightful head to which the crime of Thuggee has reached in India.



“The supremacy of the country, it is true, has been in the hands of the British nation for upwards of half a century; but it is not in half a century, especially the first half of coming into power, that the peace and safety of the people of such a vast empire as British India can be effectually secured. Hence the Thugs have till within the last six years been permitted to carry on their trade with little or no molestation. The fact of murder being committed in a wholesale manner in the interior, came to the knowledge of the Calcutta Council as early as the year 1809 and 1810, by the discovery of upwards of thirty bodies in different wells of the Dooab. But then this province had only just come into our possession, and police matters were neglected for those of more paramount moment. The subject was, therefore, lost sight of; and although casually adverted to in the periodical reports of different commissioners, no extraordinary efforts appear to have been made on the part of the government to detect or bring the culprits to account. Many, very many Anglo-Indians were indeed sceptical as to whether such beings, as the Thugs were described to be, were really to be found; believing that, if they did exist, it could only be in the ill-regulated territories of the adjoining native princes.

“That thousands of practised murderers, organised into a brotherhood, and bound to each other by mysterious but indissoluble rites, and who held a language only known to themselves, should be congregated at all seasons in every class of society, whether Anglo-Indian or native, and so well initiated in their bloody calling that, however far apart the residence of two Thugs might be, yet they no sooner encountered each other, than immediate recognition should follow, was indeed little suspected; since such a state of things could not enter the imagination of persons living under an efficient government. The histories of Germany, Spain and Italy, harrowing as their details of



cold-blooded slaughter are, offer no counterpart equal in atrocity or extent to the horrible murders which have come to light in the prosecution of the Thugs. Even the fanciful achievements of the notorious Rinaldo Rinaldini, or the black-leagued assassins of Germany, sink into insignificance when placed side by side with the deeds performed by these Thug monsters of the East.

“Lord Bentinck’s resolute conduct, therefore, in determining to suppress Thuggee, forms a noble act in his administration. Captain Sleeman (now at the head of the Department as Superintendent-General for the Suppression of Thuggee, with a number of young military officers under him as assistants) was appointed by Lord Bentinck to devote his time especially to the apprehension of Thugs; while Mr. Smith, his Lordship’s representative in the Nerbudda territories, was charged, in his official capacity as Judge, with the important duty of trying and sentencing them. Saugor gaol is made the depot for the reception of these miscreants; and on my taking charge of the establishment in 1831, I found no fewer than 583 Thugs already in confinement, with cart-loads of fresh ones coming in every week. To set at rest the question of the possibility of all the individuals convicted being Thugs, I will take the mode adopted in apprehending and convicting them.

“At the onset, *undoubted* evidence was with difficulty procurable; but that impediment was soon overcome by gaining over one or two of the most notorious as approvers; so that now, when a party of Thugs are apprehended, the cry is *Sauve qui peut* and everyone tries to be admitted as King’s evidence. These approvers are assured that, provided they disclose every act of their nefarious life, they shall escape hanging. This leads to a detail of different expeditions in which they have been engaged on the various great thoroughfares of India; and among other things,



to the description of the places in which the bodies of their victims are deposited. As soon as their stock of information is exhausted, fresh men are admitted as approvers and their evidence also recorded. These individuals are subsequently marched, under a guard of soldiers, to the identical spots, sometimes some hundreds of miles apart, in which they have described the bodies of the murdered travellers to be buried. The officer of the guard, and the attendant moonshee (clerk), are directed, on reaching the place, to call upon the nearest chief village authority, to be present at the opening of the graves, to attest the correctness of the approvers' evidence. Matters are generally found to be exactly in accordance with the previous statement, and very often the identical tool or implement which the Thug has declared that he has thrown into the pit among the dead bodies of his victims, is discovered in their exhumation.

“I once accompanied a party of Thugs in a search of this kind. They pointed out with the greatest accuracy the spot in which, twelve years before, seven unfortunate travellers had been murdered by them. On clearing away the ground in the gorge of a hill, a little off the path, the men immediately turned out the skulls and other bones. On another occasion, Captain Sleeman's tent was accidentally pitched on the very grave, and before the bodies could be exhumed the carpet had to be removed. This, then, is one convincing proof of the correctness of the evidence, and the next is equally conclusive. As soon as two or three approvers were obtained, by means of a little judicious management, the one caste was set against the other, so that however much disposed these men might be to save their own relatives or caste, the jealous opponent is now sure to *peach*; and as a *free* confession was the stipulation on which life was to be spared, these men dare not withhold the names of any of their friends, their ostensible



occupation, and residence. When this information is obtained, a second party is despatched to seize their denounced companions, and to search their houses. The mounted soldiers and infantry sepoy's acquit themselves most ably when on this duty. Marching in disguise, they are never suspected; and as soon as they arrive in sight of the village inhabited by the stranglers, they hide themselves till dark, and then move on. Under cover of the night the village is effectually surrounded by the troopers and a party of infantry soldiers, while the remainder make the best of their way into the interior. Having by this means made security doubly sure, the headman of the place is called on and desired to point out the particular houses of the men who are named; this information is no sooner obtained than the dwellings are unceremoniously entered and the Thugs generally secured.

“Should the Jemadar of the village have pointed out the wrong house, with a view to afford the culprits time to escape, they are sure to fall into the hands of the piquets, who are on the watch outside. By the time that these fellows are properly secured, the town or village community is in a pretty general uproar at the horrifying idea that their next-door neighbours, Gunga and Sooper Singh, Hosien Ali, etc., should turn out to be Thugs, and they not know of it. In the houses of these miscreants, property to a considerable amount is generally found; consisting of Venetian ducats, pearls, diamonds and other precious stones, Spanish dollars, valuable swords, shields, Cashmere shawls, and the rich manufactures of Benares. So extensive has been the amount of this recovered booty, that after returning to the representatives of the murdered travellers all that was justly proved to belong to them, the remainder sold for the benefit of the government has realised a sum sufficient to pay for the erection of the two new prison-houses at Saugor, as well as all other



incidental charges up to the end of the year 1834. These circumstantial proofs, coupled with the conflicting testimony of their companions who were present at the murders, together with the collateral evidence, present a mass of facts too powerful to be rebutted, so that, very often, the prisoner at once voluntarily acknowledged his offence.

“Sentence of death was pronounced in a very impressive manner, by Captain Sleeman, on different parties of Thugs, executed during my residence in Saugor. The criminals, drawn up in a semi-circle round the bench on which he, as Judge, was seated, were surrounded by a strong guard of musketeers and dismounted cavalry. The warrants were placed before them, and each name, as called out by the court, was repeated by the *sheristhadar* (sheriff officer). At the conclusion of this ceremony, Captain Sleeman addressed them in the Hindustani language, in a few sentences, which may be rendered thus:

“‘You have all been convicted in the crime of blood; the order from the Calcutta Council therefore is, that, at to-morrow’s dawn, you are all to be hung. If any of you desire to make any further communication, you may now speak.’

“Few answered; those who did reply merely requested, as a dying favour, that their bodies on being taken down, might be burnt. One hardened villain, however, as he was turning round to leave the court, disturbed the solemnity of the scene by muttering, ‘Ah, you have got it all your own way now, but let me find you in Paradise, and then I will be revenged.’

“The night was passed by these men in displays of coarse and disgusting levity. Trusting in the assurance that, dying in the cause of their calling, Bhowani would provide for them in Paradise, they evinced neither penitence nor remorse. Stifling their alarm with boisterous revelling, they hoped to establish in the minds of their comrades



who could hear them through the wall, a reputation for courage, by means which at once proved their insincerity and belied their fortitude. Imagine such men on the last night of their existence on earth, not penitent for their individual errors, or impressed with a sense of the public mischiefs to which they had contributed, not even rendered serious by the dismal ordeal which in a few hours was to usher them into an unknown world, but singing, *singing*, in the condemned cell, and repeating their unhallowed carols while jolting along in the carts that conveyed them to their gibbets!

“When morning came, numerous hackeries drew up at the gaol door, taking five men in each. They looked dreadfully haggard. As one cart was laden after the other, it was driven away, surrounded by sepoy with fixed bayonets and loaded muskets. The place appointed for the execution was on the north side of the town of Saugor, about a mile and a half from the gaol. ‘*Rooksut, Doctor Sahib,*’ ‘*Salaam, Doctor Sahib,*’—meaning ‘*Adieu, Doctor Sahib,*’ or ‘*Compliments to you, Doctor Sahib,*’ were the salutations which I received as I rode by the wretched tumbrils which were jolting them to execution. The gibbets were temporary erections, forming three sides of a square. The upright posts which supported the cross-beams were firmly fixed in stone masonry five feet in height. From either side of these walls foot-boards were placed, on which the unhappy criminals were to land on reaching the top of the ladder. The cross-beams were each provided with ten running halters equi-distant from one another. As each hackery load of malefactors arrived, it was taken to the foot of the respective ladders, and as one by one got out he mounted to the platform or foot-board. Their irons were not removed. All this time the air was pierced with the hoarse and hollow shoutings of these wretched men. Each man as he reached the top



of the ladder, stepped out on the platform and walked at once to a halter. Without loss of time he tried its strength by weighing his whole body on it. Everyone having by this means proved the strength of his rope with his own hands—for none of them were handcuffed—introduced his head into the noose, drew the knot firmly home immediately behind the right ear, and amid terrific cheers jumped off the board and launched himself into eternity! Thus in the moment of death we see a scrupulous attention paid to the preservation of caste. To wait to be hung by the hands of a *chumar* (skin-curer) was a thought too revolting for endurance. The name would be disgraced for ever, and, therefore, rather than admit to its degradation every man hung himself.”

Dr. Spry's account of his actual experience of Thugs is of the utmost interest, for he was a very close student of Indian affairs. The manner in which the Thugs met their death, as described by him, might suggest to those unfamiliar with the strictness of caste of India an element of bravery, but it must be borne in mind that they firmly believed in the hereafter, and thought their chance of a future life would be utterly destroyed if they were hung by men of lower caste. They were, indeed, faced with a choice between the devil and the deep sea, and they took the initiative thinking that, by so doing, they would gain that Paradise which their goddess Bhowani had reserved for them.



## CHAPTER XIII

### THE END IN SIGHT

THE good work of ridding India of Thuggee went forward in spite of every obstacle and by 1840 Sleeman found himself able to say in his "Report on the Depredations committed by the Thug gangs":

"The only part of India in which there are any Thugs still at large and not entered in these lists are, I believe, the eastern districts of Bengal, where we have reason to believe that the crime still prevails to a small extent; and Midnapore where Captain Vallancey and Mr. Ewart have recently discovered some traces of an isolated colony. Measures are being taken to put down these associations should they, on further enquiry, be found really to exist. After trying long in vain to trace the murderers of the numerous travellers whose bodies have been found, Captain Vallancey succeeded in arresting a gang of twelve persons with the property of some travellers, whom they had recently murdered, upon them. Making a judicious use of the information of some of the party who volunteered their services as King's evidence, upon the usual conditions of exemption from the punishment of death and transportation beyond seas for all past offences, and having the advantages of the aid of a magistrate of great energy and sagacity in Mr. Ewart, and the support of an able commissioner in Mr. Mills, he has been enabled to effect the arrest and conviction of the whole of the gangs, with the exception of two members of no great note. At least so far as our present information



extends these gangs are unconnected with any others, and these two are the only members of these gangs left at large."

Captain Vallancey's report reads as follows:—

"During these two years (1837-39) I kept my parties constantly on the look-out on the roads, but without success, as the murders still continued. At length, in September last year, one of my parties met in this district a gang of twelve fellows calling themselves Pundah Brahmins, travelling the country with the consecrated rice of Jugurnath, but the property found upon their persons placed it beyond a doubt that they were the Thugs I was so anxiously searching for. Just at this period the attention of the magistrates of Cuttack was aroused to the fact that the Thugs had visited their district, as human bodies, partly decomposed, were discovered in four or five places along the roads; they offered rewards and exerted themselves to find out the perpetrators, but without effect. The would-be Brahmins I had apprehended, after mature enquiry, proved to be low caste Golahs, and inhabitants of a small village on the western border of the Pooree district. In a short time I succeeded in making some of them approvers and obtained a knowledge of their history.

"This colony had existed in the Pooree district for generations; they appear ignorant how the system of Thuggee came amongst them. The secret has been confined to their own clan, strangers never having been admitted; although I believe they are acquainted with other classes who carry on Thuggee. The initiated of this caste amount to forty-five but there are a dozen young hands ready to be admitted. These fellows have been most determined murderers; all castes were alike to them—they spared neither sex. They had been for years protected by a petty independent Rajah, but of late years his exactions became so severe that they quitted his territory, and found shelter in the villages in which the body of them were arrested, under the protection



of a revenue officer, who was well acquainted with their practices, and well paid for his protection; this man is to be brought to trial for his connection with the Thugs."

Sleeman ends this portion of his report with these words:

"I have now given you, in as brief a manner as possible, the history of those colonies of Thugs which I have been especially employed in suppressing. Hereafter my exertions are chiefly to be confined to the Cuttack district and I have some information which leads me to believe that, ere long I shall be able to trace out more colonies in that quarter. The day that sees this far-spread evil completely eradicated from India and known only in name, will greatly tend to immortalise British rule in the East. Except in the parts I have mentioned, and in Oudh, I believe the roads are now, from one end of India to the other, free from the depredations of Thug gangs; but there are many leaders and leading members of the old gangs still at large; and some of them may perhaps be in situations which enable them occasionally to destroy solitary travellers, though they have—for the most part I believe—found service with the military and police establishments of native chiefs. All these persons would return to their old trade and teach it to their sons and to the needy and dissolute of their neighbourhood, and thus reorganise their gangs, should our pursuit be soon relaxed. To prevent the system from rising again it will be indispensably necessary to keep up the pursuit for some years, till all those leaders and leading members of the old gangs die or become too old to return to their old trade. Under the pressure of this pursuit the Thugs will take to honest industry, seeing no prospect of being able to follow successfully that of their ancestors."

And how satisfactory it must have been for Sleeman and his small band of Thug-hunters to receive about this time the following two reports from among many of a similar nature:

"During the last twelve months no dead bodies have



been discovered in the districts under my charge, which there was reason to believe were those murdered by Thugs. No instance has been brought to my notice during the above period of travellers or other individuals having been suddenly missed. I am happy to state to you that from the circumstances of no dead bodies having been discovered, which were not fully accounted for, in the district under my superintendence, I have every reason to believe that the system of Thuggee is entirely suppressed in those districts, and from the general observations of natives from other parts of the country I should say it was equally so throughout the Nizam's dominion.

“(signed) H. DIGHTON, Hyderabad, 5th August, 1840.”

“Sir,

“I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of this day's date, requesting me to state whether the system of Thuggee is still carried on in the Nizam's territory, or if it has been already suppressed.

“In reply I beg to inform you that in the district entrusted to me by the Nizam's government, there does not appear any depredation of the Thugs, and to the best of my knowledge, I believe that during the last twelve months no travellers or other individuals were suddenly missed or fallen victims to them. I frequently get information from my several Naibs about the cases of murders caused from burglaries, etc., but not a single instance was shown from which it would appear to suppose that it had been done by the violence of the Thugs; and for this reason I have no doubt to believe that the Thuggee system in the Deccan must have been suppressed.

“(signed) PESTONJEE MERJEE, Hyderabad, 5th August, 1840.”

But although these reports were correct regarding the suppression of Thugs by hereditary descent, another and



totally different class of Thug was discovered which had to be dealt with. Just as a log fire, apparently on the point of dying out, will suddenly blaze up, so Thuggee, when thought to be ending, flared up in quite an unexpected direction. The example of Europeans in the East has ever been a powerful factor for good or evil, and it is a curious fact that this particular type of Thuggee was started in 1802-03 by the example set by a soldier named Creagh, a private in a British regiment stationed at Cawnpore. He initiated three natives—Dhownkul Aheer, an artillery man, Suhiboo, a regimental cook, and one Gjunseya Bowryah—into the peg-and-strap trick, a game then practised by rogues in England. To such purposes did these natives turn this simple swindling trick that there sprang up three separate gangs of Thugs skilled in its use, of which they were the leaders.

By 1848—eighteen years after operations for the suppression of Thuggee of the hereditary type had been begun—the Tushmabaz Thugs were discovered and found to number forty-seven, who resided about the cantonments of Cawnpore. They differed from the hereditary Thugs by killing for the sheer sake of money, but were similarly protected, and even encouraged in the practice of their horrid trade, by police and other Indians holding high positions. The following extract from a letter signed by J. Graham, Assistant General-Superintendent and Joint Magistrate, gives an account of these Thugs:—

“Agra, 5th July, 1848. In the course of my long experience I have never met with so debased and hardened a set of offenders. They do not pretend to any religious motives, and have none of the restraints or observances of the old Thug fraternity; but have sallied forth, under a false guise, resolved on getting money in any and every way; nothing loath to destroy life to effect that purpose; and I have not a doubt in my own mind that they have been the perpetrators of almost all the crimes that have abounded on the



highways of the Dooab for some years, and that many more of their deeds will be developed now that I have been successful in bringing a case to conviction. A very serious feature of this investigation is the collusion of the police with these people. The fact is placed beyond doubt with regard to those at five towns that the police have, on occasions, received as high a rate as five rupees per diem and at Gullowgee, where some Tushmabazees were once arrested, they got free by a payment of twenty-four rupees. Had the police not winked at their proceedings, it would have been impossible for these people to have carried on their depredations for so long a time."

For further evidence of these Thugs we have also the testimony of Mrs. Fanny Parks, who returned to India in 1844 and thus describes them:

"Thuggee and Magpunnaism are no sooner suppressed than a new system of secret assassination and robbery is discovered, proving the truth of Colonel Sleeman's remark that, 'India is a strange land; and live in it as long as we may, and mix with its people as much as we please, we shall to the last be constantly liable to stumble upon new moral phenomena to excite our special wonder.' As anticipated, at least one set of new actors have to be introduced to the public, and these are the Tushmabaz Thugs. The Thugs formerly discovered went forth on their murderous expeditions under the protection of a goddess; the Tushmabazees have for their genius a European! Who in England would be prepared to credit that the thimble-riggers of English fairs have, in India, given rise to an association that, in the towns, bazaars and highways of these provinces, employs the game of stick-and-garter as the lure for victims destined to be robbed or murdered? Yet this is the simple fact.

"The British had hardly gained possession of this territory before the seeds of the flourishing system of iniquity, brought



to light almost half a century afterwards, were sowed in 1802 by a private soldier in one of His Majesty's regiments, stationed at Cawnpore. The name of this man was Creagh. He initiated several natives into the mysteries of the stick and garter, and these afterwards appeared as the leaders of as many gangs, who traversed the country gambling with whomsoever they could entrap to try their luck at this game. It consists of rolling up a double strap, the player putting a stick between any two of its convolutions, and, when the ends of the strap are pulled, it unrolls, and either comes away altogether or is held at the double by the stick, and this decides whether the player loses or wins. A game requiring apparently no peculiar skill, and played by parties cleverly acting their parts as strangers to each other—being even dressed in character—readily tempted any greedy simpleton to try his luck and show his cash. If he lost, he might go about his business; if he won, he was induced to remain with the gamblers, or was followed, and as opportunity offered, was either stupefied with poisonous drugs, or by any convenient method murdered.

“Many corpses found from time to time along the Grand Trunk Road, without any trace of the assassins, are now believed to have been the remains of the Tushmabazees victims; and distinct information has been obtained from their own members of murders committed by them. The merest trifle, it seems, was sufficient inducement to them to commit the crime, there being one case of three poor grass-cutters murdered by those miscreants in a jungle, merely for the sake of their trifling personal property. Indeed, these gangs seem to have been of a more hardened character than any other yet discovered, for their sole aim was gain, however it might be secured, without the plea of religious motive which regulated the proceedings of the other fraternities. Parties of them used to visit all the chief towns and stations of the



Dooab and its neighbourhood, and established themselves in the thoroughfares leading to the principal cities. Under the guise of gamblers, they were often brought to the notice of the authorities and subjected to trifling punishments due to minor offences; but this was the very thing that lulled suspicion as to their real character. They were constantly in the power of many dangerous acquaintances; but these were bribed to silence out of their abundant spoils. The police almost everywhere seem to have been bought over. In the city of Gwalior the headman got one-fourth of their profits; and in the British territory, five rupees a day has been paid as hush-money to the neighbouring district. Amongst their friends was the mess steward of a regiment at Meerut, the brother of one of their chiefs, and an accomplice. Gold and silver coin, and ornaments of pearl and coral, formed part of the remittances that used to be sent to their headquarters at Cawnpore. Indeed, they seem to have carried on a very safe and lucrative business, until the magistrates of Boolundshuhr and Cawnpore pounced upon them in the beginning of this year."

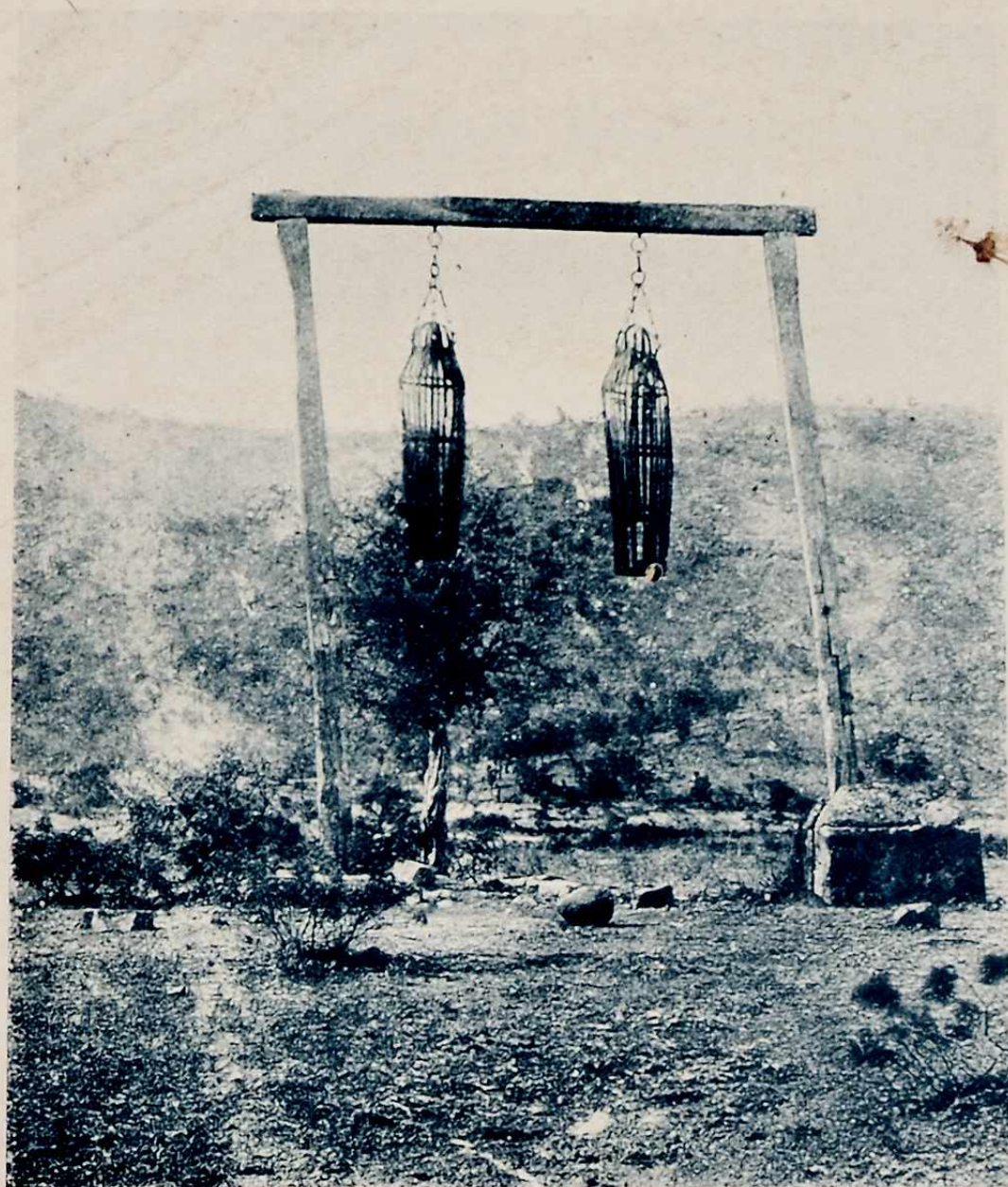
Although the Tushmabaz were not members of the Thuggee clan of antiquity—indeed, they were mere *nouveaux riches* as compared with aristocracy—their toll of human life must have been considerable, and the ignorance of their existence which persisted for so long a period is remarkable testimony to their secrecy.

So far the suppression of Thuggee has been looked at from the point of view of the Thugs themselves, and it will not be amiss, therefore, to include the following appreciations from responsible people of the period.

In "The History of India," James Grant says:

"To Captain W. H. Sleeman was assigned the task of punishing and suppressing these gangs as fast as they could be discovered. That officer organised a body of sepoy as a detective police at Saugor—the headquarters of the com-





### THE PRICE OF FOUL MURDER

Two Thugs hanging in chains on the old deserted road from Bangalore to Bellary, six miles from Penukonda, Madras. Both these were Mohammedans hung on December the 26th, 1837.  
*(Taken from a photograph of 1859.)*



mission. Arrests were then made; others were invited to turn approvers; link after link was added to the chain of evidence; the whole of the nasty network was exposed and, amid the gangs, the work of retributive debt went on unsparingly; and in many instances they hanged themselves! And now happily Thuggee, as an organised fraternity of assassins no longer exists in British India."

The following extract is from "The King Emperor and his Dominions," 1911:

"The most terrible crime of Thuggee was practically suppressed by the energetic action of a department formed for the purpose of dealing with it during the Lieutenant-Governorship of Lord William Bentinck and under the command of Major (afterwards Major-General Sir William) Sleeman.

"Information concerning these remarkable criminal associations was first brought to the notice of the English authorities at Fort St. George by Dr. Richard C. Sherwood and Captain Sleeman as early as 1816. Phansigars, or stranglers, had been apprehended shortly after the siege of Seringapatam, in 1799, but it was not until the capture of Feringeea, afterwards immortalised in Eugene Sue's famous work, 'The Wandering Jew,' that the widespread and dangerous character of these associations was disclosed. This arch villain was laid by the heels by Major Sleeman, and to this extremely able and intrepid officer of the Bengal Army was entrusted the task of stamping out Thuggee in the dominions under the British control. The special department formed for the suppression of Thuggee and Dacoity remained in operation up to the year 1884, but its main task was achieved in the first ten years of its existence under the leadership of its heroic commander (Sir William Sleeman). The difficult task was accomplished and to-day, though crimes of violence occasionally occur, Thuggee—as an organised system of theft and murder—is only a memory of the past."



## CHAPTER XIV

### THE PRICE OF VICTORY

FROM 1809 till 1840, a period of thirty-one years, Sleeman had spared no effort to deal with Thuggee, and had he been content to rest upon his laurels, he would already have done far more than falls to most men in a long lifetime. But he was not of that kind, nor was higher authority satisfied to allow such a valued and trusted servant of State to remain at his post, once it became evident that Thuggee had received its death blow, and that the mopping-up process was but routine work which could be entrusted to less experienced men. In India at that time one of the most difficult and most coveted posts in the gift of the Government was the Residency of Lucknow, an appointment which carried with it the responsible and anxious task of advising and endeavouring to control the depraved King of Oudh and his equally dissolute Court, whose misgovernment of the kingdom of Oudh is now historic. Only the best were fitted for such responsibility, and Sleeman's reward for his success in defeating Thuggee was to be offered this appointment in 1841, which had become vacant owing to the resignation of Colonel Low. It was accepted with gratitude, and Sleeman was preparing to take over his new duties when Colonel Low became involved in the failure of his bank and lost the whole of his savings. With many a lesser man such a catastrophe would have excited nothing more



than an expression of regret on the part of one who had succeeded to one of the "plums" of Indian service, but immediately Sleeman heard of this loss, moved by a generous impulse, he approached Colonel Low and begged him to retain his appointment—an action worthy of a great man, and an offer most gratefully accepted. Having thus forfeited his right to the Residency of Lucknow, Sleeman's reward—as if he had not already had his full share of peril—was to be given special duty in Bundelkhand, where his experience was required in order to suppress grave disorders in that province. Later he was promoted to be British Resident at Gwalior, an appointment which was to bring him additional fame, for during the troubles which were to culminate in the battle of Maharajapore, fought on 29th December, 1843, he was busily employed in hazardous work and was actually in Sindhia's camp, attempting negotiations with the enemy, when the battle commenced, fortunately succeeding in making his escape and receiving this rare Star.

In 1848 the Residency at Lucknow again fell vacant, and Lord Dalhousie, Governor-General of India, offered it to Sleeman in the following terms:

"MY DEAR COLONEL SLEEMAN,

"The high reputation you have earned, your experience of civil administration, your knowledge of the people, and the qualifications you possess as a public man, have led me to submit your name to the Council of India as an officer to whom I could commit this important charge, with entire confidence that its duties would be well performed. I do myself, therefore, the honour of proposing to you to accept the office of Resident at Lucknow, with a special reference to the great changes which in all probability will take place. Retaining your Superintendency of Thuggee affairs, it will be manifestly necessary that you should be relieved of the duty of the trials of Thugs usually condemned at Lucknow. In the hope that you will not



withhold from the Government your services in the capacity I have named,

“I have the honour to be, dear Colonel Sleeman,

“Very faithfully yours,

“DALHOUSIE.”

Although Sleeman was still to control the measures required to keep Thuggee from again bursting into flame, it was necessary for someone else to act as Assistant Superintendent to the Thuggee Department which he had established and controlled at Jubbulpore. By this time there was scarcely a criminal in India, Thug or otherwise, who had not learned to fear the name of Sleeman, and the Government in its search for a suitable successor were doubtless guided by this fact when it appointed to this office his nephew, afterwards Colonel James Sleeman, C.B., who had performed most distinguished service in the Thuggee Department almost from the start of its operations. It was fortunate that he was available, for Sir William's only son, Henry Arthur, born in 1833 in a tent near Saugor—unknowingly erected over Thug graves—was then a Lieutenant in the 16th (Queen's) Lancers, and far too young to have been employed in such responsible duty.

Four years later, in 1852, when Sleeman was Resident at Lucknow, Lady Login relates this amusing story in her “Recollections”:

“When it was decided that the Maharajah (Duleep Singh) was to be allowed to go to England, we proceeded by slow stages towards Barrackpore, where Lord Dalhousie offered him the use of his country house. We stopped a few nights at Lucknow where we were invited to the Palace and a special investiture given to my husband, the King insisting on my accepting a pair of diamond bracelets and a ring as a souvenir. Colonel Sleeman was then Resident and was exceedingly interested in Duleep Singh and very anxious that he should understand that he was



of the same race as the man of Kent! Colonel Sleeman was an ardent ethnologist, and had satisfied himself that the Jats of the Punjab and the Juts of Jutland (a race of Hengist and Horsa) were originally the same, and came from about Kashgar and the Caspian. He was celebrated, too, as the man who put down 'Thuggee,' the devotees of Kali, who murdered to do her honour; and many a time have I been left on the verandah with a number of venerable and mild-looking convicts from the gaol (the guard, of course, within call), who entertained me with tales of how they enticed their victims, and obligingly illustrated with a handkerchief how they strangled them in their sleep, while my husband and Colonel Sleeman took measures of their crania to make casts for the medical ethnological museums. There is a story to the effect that, as these skulls were only numbered and my husband included a cast of their guardian's (Sleeman's) head as well, the *savants* at home pitched on this last as the one that showed the most undoubtedly ferocious criminal propensities!"

A photograph of actual Thugs in captivity giving an exhibition of how they strangled is shown at the beginning of this book.

The remainder of Sleeman's official life in India was spent as Adviser to the King of Oudh and British Resident at Lucknow; his Residency, with its noble buildings and pretty park to be the scene, in 1857, of that historic siege of the Indian Mutiny.

These years were devoted to ceaseless and hopeless endeavours to reform the dissolute King's administration and to relieve the sufferings of his grievously oppressed subjects. It might be thought that the immense strain of the work he had accomplished in grappling with Thuggee would have entitled him to a more peaceful employment, while many would have contented themselves by attempts to get this depraved monarch to realise his responsibilities.



But the cry of a tortured people penetrated the thick walls of Sleeman's Residency, and he responded to it with all the fire and zeal that had characterised his former work for India, both in peace and war.

Not content with hearsay evidence, he determined to make a personal tour of the whole of Oudh, and on 1st December, 1849, began that remarkable journey, lasting for six weeks, so admirably described in his book, "Diary of a Tour Through Oudh." This contained a full report upon the exactions, extortions, tortures, anarchy, and injustice prevailing, and, as may be imagined, surrounded as he was by Court spies, it was of the utmost importance that its publication should be kept private. And yet many copies of this Diary were required, in order that those concerned with the Government of India might become fully acquainted with the whole sordid story. To-day the typewriter would solve the problem, but in 1850 the solution was found in a small "Parlour" press, which "Thuggee" Sleeman purchased and had installed with the utmost secrecy in a cellar of the Residency—that same cellar which seven years later, was to offer shelter to the English women and children from the shot and shell of the mutineers, and in which Jenny Brown was to dream of the sound of approaching bagpipes so accurately. And in this cellar we may imagine this great Resident at Lucknow, with the lives of millions of unhappy people depending upon his success, spending every spare hour in superintending the setting of the type and the preparation of a Report which ran into some 40,000 words. It was no modest effort, although the work of an amateur, and the copy of this Report, now so rare, in the author's possession is indicative of the immense care with which it was both compiled and printed, and its two volumes contain a story comparable only to Thuggee in its hideousness. Its Preface speaks for itself:



“My object in writing this ‘Diary of a Tour Through Oudh’ was to prepare for submission to the Government of India as fair and full a picture of the real state of the country, condition and feeling of the people of all classes, and character of the government under which they at present live, as the opportunities which the tour afforded me might enable me to draw. In order to facilitate the perusal I have had the Diary printed at my own expense, in a small parlour press which I purchased, with type, for the purpose.

“I may, possibly, have succeeded in this my object; but I can hardly hope that anyone unconnected with the Government of India generally, or with that of Oudh in particular, will ever find much to interest or amuse him in the perusal of the diary of a tour without adventures through a country so devoid as Oudh is of commerce and manufactures, of works or ornament or utility, and above all of persons, places and things associated in the mind of the reader with religious, poetical, or historical recollections.

“The Diary must, for the present, be considered as an official document, which may be perused, but cannot be published wholly or in part without the sanction of Government previously obtained.

“W. H. SLEEMAN.”

Printing this Diary was slow work, for he was a busy man, encompassed by a host of enemies, and secrecy always entails delay. His memorable tour ended in January, 1850, but it was 1852 before this strange effort of the publishing art saw the light. It would not be wrong to say that this book, published by a British Resident under such peculiar conditions, was destined to confirm Lord Dalhousie in his determination to annex Oudh, but it would be unfair to Sleeman’s memory not to add that he himself was



opposed to such annexation, consistently advocating reform of the administration in its stead. Oudh supplied a large percentage of recruits for the native army at that time, and Sleeman feared that annexation would result in a mutiny. That his fears were well-founded was soon proved, for scarcely had he left India than Oudh was annexed, and a year later the Indian Mutiny occurred.

The following extract from "India, Its Administration and Progress," by Sir John Strachey, G.C.S.I., published in 1903, will show, better than any words of the author, the enormous difficulties which Sleeman had to contend against in Oudh:—

"There has been, but only in recent years, a marked and satisfactory improvement in the administration of the Native States. To this I shall refer again, but as lately as 1883, Sir Lepel Griffen, than whom no one could at that time speak with greater personal knowledge, declared that, although there were many honourable exceptions, the Native States of India were for the most part 'a wilderness of oppression and misrule.' This conclusion was that of all those most competent to judge, and it was certainly my own.

"I think it useful to refer to the former condition of some of these States, because it cannot be doubted that if the vigilance of the British Government were relaxed that condition would often become no better than it was not long ago. It is to our intervention before misrule became altogether insufferable that many of these States owe their continued existence. Without going back to more distant times, when all conditions were different, if we examine the history of the principal Native States during the greater part of the latter half of the past century, we can hardly find a single case in which the record was one of uninterrupted tranquillity and fairly good administration. From time to time there was a just and benevolent



chief, but sooner or later came almost always the same story; our interference for the protection of the people against this ruler became inevitable. Even within the last few years it has sometimes become necessary for the British Government to assume the administration of the State, and on several occasions the chief has been deposed because he was guilty of atrocious crimes.

“I will give some instances in which interference has been inevitable, and as the first of them I will take the annexation of Oudh. Although this is now an old story, for the Native Government ceased to exist in 1856, it is still an instructive example of what has happened in a time not very distant, and I wish to refer to it for another reason. We will sometimes hear the annexation of Oudh quoted as one of the iniquitous proceedings of the British Government, and as an illustration of its lust of dominion.

“General Sleeman, the representative of our Government in Oudh, gave from personal observation a description of the country at that time, and its accuracy has never been called in question. I will give some account, often in his own words, of his report.

“Oudh is naturally one of the richest countries in India, as large as Holland and Belgium together, with a population at the present time of nearly 13,000,000. Government in Oudh, deserving the name, there was none. The King did not pretend to concern himself with any public business. His ambition was limited to that of being reputed the best drum-beater, dancer, and poet of the day. Sometimes he might be seen going in procession through the streets of Lucknow, beating the drum tied round his neck. Singers, fiddlers, poets, eunuchs, and women were his only associates. The Prime Minister, ‘a consummate knave,’ after keeping an enormous share for himself and his creatures, distributed the revenues and patronage of the country. The fiddlers controlled the administration of



civil justice; that of criminal justice was made over to the eunuchs; each of the King's favourites had authority over some court or office through which he might make a fortune for himself. The minister kept the land revenue, and 'employed none but knaves of the worst kind in all branches of the administration.' Every office was sold, commands in the army were put up to auction every season, or oftener, and the purchase money was divided among the minister, the singers, the fiddlers and the eunuchs. The principal singer had two regiments at his disposal. The minister was as inaccessible as the King himself. Petitions and reports were usually made over by him, if he gave any orders at all, to the commander-in-chief, who was an infant, to the King's chamberlain, or footman, or coachman, chief fiddler, eunuch, barber, or any person uppermost in his thoughts at the time. Courts of justice were unknown, except as affording means of extortion to the judges. The charge of the so-called police throughout the country was sold to the highest bidders. There was only one road that deserved the name in Oudh, made for the benefit of English travellers from Lucknow to Cawnpore, a distance of about forty miles. The atrocities that went on throughout the country would pass belief, if the evidence of the truth were less complete. I will give a few illustrations, taken from General Sleeman's narrative.

"The districts of Bahraich and Gonda have an area of more than 5,000 square miles, and they now contain more than 2,000,000 inhabitants. Shortly before General Sleeman's visit, a man called Raghubar Singh was their local Governor, with large bodies of the King's troops and of his own armed retainers at his disposal. In two years his extortions and crimes had reached such a point, that these districts, which had once been in a flourishing condition, and noted for their fertility, had become for the most part uncultivated. The English officer deputed by



the Resident to inquire into the facts reported that 'villages completely deserted in the midst of lands devoid of all tillage everywhere meet the eye; and from Fyzabad to Bahraich he passed through these districts, a distance of eighty miles, over plains which had been fertile and well cultivated till Raghubar Singh got charge, but now lay entirely waste, a scene for two years of great misery, ending in desolation.'

"The Raja of Bondi was one of the principal landholders in this part of Oudh; his estates contained some three hundred villages. He objected to the extortionate demands of Raghubar Singh, and this was the consequence. Parties of soldiers were sent out to plunder and seize all the respectable residents they could find. They sacked the town of Bondi, pulled down the houses of the Raja, and those of his relations and dependents; and, after looting all the towns and villages in the neighbourhood, they brought in 1,000 captives of both sexes and all ages, who were subjected to every sort of outrage until they paid the ransom demanded. The Raja escaped, but his agents and tenants were horribly tortured. Soon afterwards, detachments of soldiers were again sent out to plunder; 15,000 men and 500 women and children were brought in as prisoners, with 80,000 animals. All were driven off pell-mell through the rain for three days. The women were driven on by the troops with the butt-end of their muskets; many of the children were trodden to death. The prisoners were tied up and flogged and tortured, red-hot ramrods thrust into their flesh, their tongues pulled out with hot pincers. Many perished from torture and starvation. The women and children were all stripped of their clothing. For two months these atrocities continued. Similar horrors went on in other parts of Bahraich, and not very many years ago the English officer in charge of that district reported that its population would at that time have undoubtedly been



much larger but for the former atrocities of Raghubar Singh. General Sleeman tells us that no single person concerned in these crimes was ever punished.

“There were in Oudh 250 forts in the possession of the great landholders, with 100,000 men, maintained to fight among themselves, or against the Government. General Sleeman’s two volumes are filled with descriptions of the enormities that were going on, almost under his own eyes, of open war, of villages attacked and plundered, of horrible murders and outrages.

“‘Every day,’ he writes, ‘I have scores of petitions delivered to me by persons who have been plundered of all they possessed, had their dearest relations murdered or tortured to death, and their habitations burnt to the ground by gangs of ruffians, under landlords of high birth and pretensions, whom they had never wronged or offended. In these attacks neither age, nor sex, nor condition are spared.’

“In General Sleeman’s narrative I have found hardly anything to relieve the uniformity of his terrible story except this:—‘In the most crowded streets of Lucknow, Europeans are received with deference, courtesy, and kindness. The people of the country respect the British Government, its officers, and Europeans generally. Though the Resident has not been able to secure any very substantial or permanent reform in this administration, still he has often interposed with effect in individual cases, to relieve suffering and secure redress for grievous wrongs. The people of the country see that he never interposes except for such purposes, and their only regret is that he interposes so seldom, and that his efforts when he does so should be so often frustrated or disregarded. In the remotest village or jungle in Oudh, as in the most crowded streets of the capital, a European gentleman is sure to be treated with affectionate respect, and the humblest



European is as sure to receive protection and kindness, unless he forfeits all claim to it by his misconduct.'

"For many years one Governor-General after another had gone on protesting against the atrocities of which some illustrations have been given. At last came 'the great Proconsul' Dalhousie. He knew that since the British Government, without moving a soldier or spending a rupee, had absolute power to put an immediate end to these abominations, it was on the British Government that the responsibility really rested for suffering them to continue. There was only one complete remedy, and Lord Dalhousie applied it by declaring the whole of Oudh to be British territory. There was one defect only in his most wise and righteous action: he was too merciful to the miserable King and to the demons who had been destroying one of the most populous and fertile countries of India. There could be no greater contrast than that presented by Oudh under Native and under British government: it is now as peaceful as any part of England: life and property are safe, and justice is honestly administered."

Even the most bigoted opponent of British rule in India would find it difficult to make out a case against it after reading the foregoing. Of its truth there can be no question, for when the author, over thirty years ago, was stationed in Oudh many Indian gentlemen still survived who lost no opportunity of testifying to the miracle which had been wrought in the condition of Oudh, largely owing to his grandfather's revelations. The gratitude of these men, who had experienced both forms of government, was at times embarrassing to a young officer. When the author revisited India in 1929, all these old friends had passed to their last account, but their descendants whom he met were equally sure of the benefits which British government had brought to Oudh in particular and India in general. Indian judges of the High Courts and Rajahs



professing both the Mohammedan and Hindu religions, assured him that rulings laid down by General Sir William Sleeman on points in Indian law were still referred to and accepted as unbiased and correct. What higher testimony could be desired?

Sleeman's efforts to suppress crime and to improve the faulty administration of Oudh, naturally aroused most bitter resentment on the part of its debauched King, who, deputing business of State to ministers influenced by the basest motives, sacrificed justice to bribery and low intrigues, and gave himself up to the effeminate indulgence of his harem, or to the society of eunuchs and fiddlers. The wretched people of Oudh, neglected, tortured, and plundered, found in Sleeman a champion who did all that was possible to rectify these evils, with the inevitable result that on several occasions attempts were made on his life by those who feared exposure. He encountered these dangers with his accustomed bravery and coolness and was not for an instant diverted from his purpose, continuing his self-sacrificing labours to improve the lot of a harshly treated people.

But Sleeman had now been in India for forty-seven years without a break, ever since he had left his Cornish home as a boy of nineteen: years of strenuous effort mostly spent in the hot Plains, at a time when it was customary for the European to return home for a year's leave in every four of service, and Nature was at long last to demand the price of such heroism. Powerful as his constitution had been, great his determination, and immense the importance of his work, almost half a century spent in India had written *Finis* to his splendid career. He had by this time completed six years as British Resident at Lucknow, and it was in that historic Residency that the ultimatum was delivered to him by his medical officer, later to become one of the heroes of the siege, Sir Joseph Fayrer, Bt. Forty-



six years later the author was privileged to hear from Sir Joseph's lips the story of his grandfather's last tragic days as Resident. Apparently Sleeman proved as stubborn an invalid as he had been a Thug-hunter, and resolutely refused to give up his work, although his state of health was very grave. Vainly Sir Joseph tried to prevent him wrestling with mighty problems which, to the fittest man, would have been harassing and difficult, until at last the day arrived when no amount of will-power could compel the execution of his task. It then fell to Fayrer's lot to make it clear to Sleeman that his Indian service was over—for ever. As may be imagined, this opinion, true though it was, was quite unacceptable, and in the silence of his Residency—so soon to be the target for mutineer guns—Sleeman prepared to continue work, preferring to die at his post than to give up before his duty to Oudh was completed. But that indomitable spirit had received a summons which no man can evade, and Fayrer had to break the news to his beloved chief that his life was even then drawing to a close. Accepting this verdict with characteristic courage, and thanking Fayrer with a brave smile, Thuggee Sleeman then laid down the reins of office for the last time. Few Englishmen have given forty-seven years' continuous service to India; none can have had them filled with greater peril or with such triumphant success, and he might well have been content to lay down the heavy burden carried for so long. But to men of his type the sunset of life must always come with a sense of uncompletedness, and the days remaining to him were to be the saddest of his life. Not that he feared the end, but he knew that he was leaving Lucknow at a time when his great experience, knowledge and influence were of the utmost moment.

If ever a life was sacrificed upon the altar of Empire, it was Sleeman's, dedicated as it was to the good of a



people more accustomed to be maltreated than helped, and so used to extortion and injustice as to be indifferent to the safety of their own lives. In Oudh he had fought against pathetic resignation, corruption in high native quarters, bribery, jealousy, ignorance, and open and concealed hostility, having already suppressed the most devilish organisation of murder ever known. Sadly and slowly he proceeded to Calcutta, an ill and crippled man with a battered body but a gallant soul, his last days in the country he had served so nobly and well being lightened by the following letter from the Governor-General, Lord Dalhousie:

“Barrackpore Park,  
“January 9th, 1856.

“MY DEAR GENERAL SLEEMAN,

“I have heard to-day of your arrival in Calcutta, and have learnt at the same time with sincere concern that you are still suffering in health. A desire to disturb you as little as possible induces me to have recourse to my pen, in order to convey to you a communication which I had hoped to be able to make in person.

“Some time since, when adjusting the details connected with my retirement from the Government of India, I solicited permission to recommend to Her Majesty’s gracious consideration the names of some who seemed to me worthy of Her Majesty’s favour.

“My request was moderate—I asked only to be allowed to submit the name of one officer from each Presidency. The name which I selected from the Bengal Army was your own; and I ventured to express the hope that Her Majesty would be pleased to mark her sense of the long course of able and honourable service through which you have passed, by conferring upon you the Cross of a Knight Commander of the Bath.

“As yet no reply has been received to my letter—but as you have now arrived at the Presidency, I lose no time in making known to you what has been done; in the hope that you will receive it as a proof of the high estimation



in which your services and character are held, as well by myself as by the entire community of India.

“I beg to remain,

“My dear General,

“Very truly yours,

“DALHOUSIE.”

Sleeman's reply is typical of the man, wracked as he was at the time by suffering which was to end with death exactly a month later:

32, Chowringee, Calcutta.

11th January, 1856.

“MY LORD,

“I was yesterday evening favoured with your Lordship's most kind and flattering letter of the 9th inst., from Barrackpore.

“I cannot adequately express how highly honoured I feel by the mention that you have been pleased to make of my services to Her Majesty the Queen, or how much gratified I am by this crowning act of kindness from your Lordship, in addition to the many favours I have received at your hands during the last eight years.

“Whether it may, or may not be my fate to live long enough to see the honourable rank actually conferred upon me, which you have been so considerate and generous to ask for me, the letter now received will, of itself, be deemed by my family as a substantial honour, and it will be preserved, I trust, by my son, with feelings of honest pride, at the thought that his father had merited such a mark of distinction from so eminent a Statesman as the Marquis of Dalhousie.

“My right hand is so crippled by rheumatism that I am obliged to make use of an amanuensis to write this letter, and my bodily health is so much reduced that I cannot hope to be able before embarking for England to pay my personal respects to your Lordship.

“Under these unfortunate circumstances, I now beg to take my leave of your Lordship; to offer my unfeigned and



anxious wishes for your health and happiness, and with every sentiment of respect and gratitude to subscribe myself,

“Your most faithful and obedient servant,

“W. H. SLEEMAN, Major-General.”

The actual recommendation of Lord Dalhousie is dated the 20th September, 1855, and is here quoted:

“There is no task more grateful, no duty more imperative, for one who is about to lay down high authority and power, than the endeavour to obtain their due reward for those who, under his command have well and truly served the State.

“The time of my departure is already so near at hand that I shall venture now to bring under the notice of the Hon. Court of Directors, the names of those officers whose individual labours have, in my judgment, done most of late years for the honour and welfare of this Indian empire. I earnestly trust that the Honourable Court will be pleased to reward my endeavours to obtain for each of these distinguished men some mark of grace and favour from the Crown. From the Presidency of Bengal I have the honour to recommend Major-General William Henry Sleeman. General Sleeman, after nearly fifty years of service, is about to retire from active employment. In the course of his service he has borne a large share in important political questions and in the administration of civil affairs. He long held a high and responsible office in the Saugor and Nerbudda territories. From this he was transferred by me to the Residency of Lucknow in consideration of his proved abilities and of his high character. These were fully sustained by the manner in which he discharged the irksome duties of that thankless and repulsive office. But it is upon his connection with the extirpation of the infamous system of Thuggee that the reputation of General Sleeman is chiefly founded. The wide prevalence and the horrible results of that system are well known in Europe, and in the East. It is to the acuteness and determination of General Sleeman that the British Government owes the unravelling of its secret organisations, and the execution of the measures



which were found efficacious for its detection and punishment. It is to him that we owe the right to boast that Thuggee has already become almost unknown throughout the East, whilst his suggestions have devised throughout the means whereby the numerous descendants of imprisoned Thugs have been restored to society and rescued from the influence of a murderous superstition."

Alas, this high mark of approval and the well-merited reward were not to be enjoyed, indeed, he was never destined to hear of its bestowal, for on February 1st, 1856, less than a month following the receipt of Lord Dalhousie's letter, Thuggee Sleeman sailed from Calcutta in the *Monarch*. But he was never to see again the Cornish home he loved so dearly, for ten days later, on the 12th, his gallant soul passed to its last account when his ship was off the Island of Ceylon, his body being buried at sea just six days after he had been granted the dignity of a K.C.B. The extract from the log of the *Monarch*—a log now in the author's possession—on the day in question, reads as follows:

"Sunday, Feb. 10th, 1856. Courses SW.6.W. Unsteady breeze and fine. 3.45 a.m. Departed this life Major-General William Henry Sleeman.

"7.30 a.m. Tacked ship. 10.30 a.m. Mustered Ship's company and performed Divine Service on the quarter deck.

"Monday, Feb. 11th, 1856. Courses E.N.E. Light and fine throughout.

"6.30 a.m. Committed the body of deceased to the deep with the usual ceremonies."

Remembering the deep interest shown by Her Majesty Queen Victoria in all matters connected with India, it is probable that, had Sir William lived, a Baronetcy would have been his. But neither Royal favour nor the plaudits of the multitude were really in keeping with a life of such



self-sacrifice and abnegation, and there is something curiously fitting in that his last resting-place should be a lonely ocean grave, so close to the land to which he had devoted his life and energies.

That keen and splendid brain, the master-mind of the suppression of Thuggee, would function no more; the conqueror of that age-old religion of murder, the saviour of millions of human lives had ceased to be, and India had claimed yet another Englishman who had given of his best to her service. Few have done more for Empire than Major-General Sleeman and his gallant little band, who, like David and Goliath, finally overthrew the Giant Murder after a battle lasting almost a quarter of a century; and yet to-day, search England or India as you may, no memorial exists to their memory, while even Thuggee itself remains unknown to the majority of their fellow-countrymen. It is forgetfulness such as this which elevates war, and its attendant bestialities, to a pedestal in the eyes of youth, while relegating the deeds of mightier men to obscurity. Were merit, indeed, to count, half the memorials of the civilised world would be scrapped and their places taken by those of men and women, now unknown, who have contributed far more to human happiness. And so the conquerors of Thuggee rest in unknown graves, their heroism, self-sacrifice and super-human labours for the cause of civilisation forgotten.

Such is fame! And yet, if there was one feature peculiarly characteristic of these men, it was their modesty. They were specially selected for their pluck and character, as men who could be depended upon to hold on when most would give up, and who would work for conscience sake and not for applause or reward. This being so, there is something curiously fitting in the fact that these few Englishmen, who toiled in the vineyards of Thuggee and bore the heat and burden of most ghastly days, should be thought



less deserving of remembrance or of a place in history than the poet or artist. And yet, since art enriches life, surely the suppression of Thuggee deserves a place in artistic achievement, bringing in its train, as it did, safety and happiness to millions of the human race.

Close to that land where he worked out his destiny, the ocean bed his tomb, and the gratitude of a people saved from murder and oppression as his monument, "Thuggee" Sleeman awaits the last roll call.



## CHAPTER XV

### THE AFTERMATH

THE anarchic and disrupted condition in which we found India was gradually transformed and the British Government worked hard to make a fit country for its people to live in. The evils of Thuggee, Suttee and Dacoity were slowly subdued, injustice and persecution were dealt with, while the alleviation of famine, drought and disease was also included in our humanitarian policy. But of all these evils Thuggee must stand alone—a secret religion of murder unknown even to the Indians, which had battered on their life blood for centuries before the introduction of British government. For that reason the suppression of Thuggee must be accounted one of the outstanding successes of British rule and a personal triumph for Sleeman and his assistants, who fought this twenty-seven year battle of the few against thousands—this open fighting against a cunning, well dug-in enemy, with their secret methods as dug-outs and trenches, and the protection of powerful land-owners as their barbed wire entanglements. Indeed, the downfall of Thuggee constitutes one of the finest stories in British Imperial history, and one certainly too splendid to remain in the obscurity into which a sequence of circumstances has permitted it to fall.

But in case it may be felt that the judgment of the author is biased in favour of his grandfather, it will be well to quote the opinions of contemporary journals subsequent to the death of Sir William Sleeman.



"*The Times*, May 20th, 1856. The announcement of the death of Sir William Henry Sleeman, made in our columns yesterday, has caused the greatest regret in all circles connected with India. The deceased General entered the service of the East India Company in 1808, so that he has devoted a life of nearly half a century to active employment in the East. For several years he had discharged with the greatest zeal and ability the duties of British Resident at Lucknow, in the Kingdom of Oudh, and it is in connection with that country that his name will be longest remembered. In the earlier part of his official career he had been assistant in the Saugor and Nerbudda district, where he gained an immense amount of experience, and an accurate knowledge of Central India which afterwards was turned to good account. In 1843, we find him British Resident at Gwalior; this appointment he held during the critical times which ultimately led to hostilities in that quarter, and resulted in the battle of Maharajapore. It may be remembered that, soon after his arrival in India, Lord Ellenborough thought fit to make extensive changes among the military and civil officers who conducted the judicial and revenue departments in the Saugor and Nerbudda district. Among those whom he appointed to the vacant posts was General Sleeman, who lost no time in proving that, if he had been an efficient servant in an inferior position, he was an able organiser and administrator as well. It should be mentioned to General Sleeman's credit that he was one of the very first persons in high authority who commenced the good work of suppressing the system known as 'Thuggee'; that official papers drawn up upon the subject were mainly the work of his pen; and that the department which was specially commissioned for this important purpose was not only organised, but worked by him. Such being his antecedents, it is not surprising, therefore, that General Sleeman became intimately and extensively acquainted with the



native character, and proved himself the right-hand man of Lords Ellenborough, Hardinge, and Dalhousie, the latter of whom frequently refers in despatches to General Sleeman's diary. Neither is it surprising that, in dealing with such a State as Oudh, Lord Dalhousie should have looked to his Resident at Lucknow for trustworthy information and steady support.

“General Sleeman had not resided in that capital without observing that its internal administration was hopelessly corrupt, and that no course was open to the British Government but one: namely, that of bringing it under British laws. General Sleeman beheld a fertile soil looking like a desert, with villages plundered and deserted; a Court wallowing in luxury and effeminacy; the Minister careless and negligent of all public duties; the towns infested with murderers and assassins, and the whole country marauded by noble robbers called ‘Zemindars,’ at constant war with the no less noble body of ‘Chucklidars,’ or representatives of the King. Added to this, so far had matters gone that on one occasion, in July, 1854, a Bengal paper, the *Hurkaru*, states that, ‘Colonel Sleeman, the able and cautious Resident of Lucknow, detected a letter sent from the King of Persia to His Majesty of Oudh, in which the former monarch spoke hopefully of a Persian invasion of India and promised in that event to do all that he could for the stability of Oudh.’ As a proof of the insecurity of life in Lucknow, we may mention that only a few months previously an attempt was made by night upon the life of General Sleeman himself in his own house, which attempt he only escaped by having fortunately changed his bedroom that evening. In the summer of 1854, it became too evident to his Indian friends that General Sleeman's health was breaking, and in the August of that year he became alarmingly unwell.

“‘Forty-six years of incessant labour,’ says a writer in *Allen's Indian Mail* of that date, ‘have had their influence





MAJOR-GENERAL SIR WILLIAM HENRY SLEEMAN, K.C.B.

This portrait was painted by George Duncan Beechey in 1851, when General Sleeman was British Resident at Lucknow. It hung upon the walls of that historic Residency throughout the siege of the Indian Mutiny, suffering severe damage from enemy fire; a silent witness of brave deeds and awful tragedy. On the 22nd of November, 1857, the heroic garrison was ordered to evacuate the position it had held so splendidly, by dead of night, and the last troops had left when Colonel Ouvrey, of the 9th Lancers, remembered this portrait of his old friend, and going back in the darkness alone—into a deserted Residency surrounded by mutineers—cut this portrait from its frame and brought it back; an action as generous as it was courageous. It was then carried, rolled about the rifle of a soldier, until safety was eventually reached, and constitutes to-day a portrait of great historic interest for these several reasons.



upon even his powerful frame; and he has received one of those terrible warnings believed to indicate the approach of paralysis. . . . With Colonel Sleeman will depart the last hope of any improvement in the condition of this unhappy country of Oudh. Though belonging to the older class of Indian officials, Colonel Sleeman has never become Hindooised. He had appreciated the misery created by a native throne; he has sternly and even haughtily pointed out to the King the miseries created by his incapacity, and has frequently extorted from his fears the mercy which it was vain to hope from his humanity.' Later in the same year General Sleeman went to the hills for change of air and scene, and transacted the business of Resident by a deputy for some time. He had the satisfaction of thus prolonging his life to witness the actual annexation of Oudh, and the Residency superseded by Sir James Outram as Commissioner. About the same time he was promoted to the rank of Major-General. Still, in spite of all the remedies of medical science, he gradually sank, and, after a long illness, died on his homeward passage from Calcutta on the 10th of February last, in the sixty-eighth year of his age, leaving behind him a name which will be honoured both in England and in India. He was advanced to the dignity of a K.C.B. so lately as January last, and could scarcely have received the intelligence of the honour bestowed upon his signal merits when he left Calcutta, early in the following month.

"His experience of Indian nations, their manners and religion, he embodied in a book entitled 'Rambles and Recollections of an Indian Official,' which was published about eight or ten years ago, and which is, perhaps, the best suited of all the many works written upon India to give a European a general insight into Indian Life."

"*Allen's Indian Mail*, June 3rd, 1856. Major-General Sir William Henry Sleeman, K.C.B. This officer was born in



September, 1788, and had therefore attained the age of twenty-one years when, in October, 1809, he was appointed a cadet of Infantry on the Bengal establishment. The dates of his commissions were as follows:—Ensign, 23rd September, 1810; Lieutenant, 16th December, 1814; Brevet-Captain, 24th April, 1824; Captain, 23rd September, 1826; Major, 1st February, 1837; Lieutenant-Colonel, 26th May, 1843; Colonel, 24th November, 1853; Major-General, 28th November, 1854." This obituary notice then gives details of his career, similar to those already quoted, and ends with these words: "His career of Indian service was long and his labours most meritorious. They will cause him to be long remembered with honour; and if his services in the suppression of Thuggee alone were to grace his memory, he would have left behind him a name never to be forgotten. He was one of those men whom the Indian service has never failed to produce whenever an emergency called for them. Had his lot been cast under ordinary circumstances, he would have discharged his duties, whatever they might have been, well and satisfactorily; but India was the proper field for him, and he adds one more to the number of distinguished men who, from Clive downwards, have there gained a reputation which as long as either India or England has a place in history, may well be pronounced immortal."

Vincent Arthur Smith, I.C.S., in his republication of Sir William's "Rambles and Recollections of an Indian Official," published in 1915, writes:—

"The greatest achievement of his busy and unselfish life was the suppression of the system of organised murder known as Thuggee, and in the execution of that prolonged and onerous task he displayed the most delicate tact, the keenest sagacity, and the highest power of organisation. His knowledge of the customs and modes of thought of the natives of India; rarely equalled and never surpassed, was



more than half the secret of his notable success as an administrator."

This record would be incomplete without a particular reference to a devoted colleague, Lieut.-Colonel Gould Hunter-Weston, father of that distinguished leader in the Great War, Lieut.-General Sir Aylmer Hunter-Weston, of Hunterston, K.C.B., D.S.O., G.J.St.J., M.P.

Arriving in India in 1840 on board the *Amherst*, his knowledge of the Thugs began early, for aboard were 97 Thugs awaiting transportation, all of whom were murderers. When he asked one why he had been punished, the reply was that he did not know, for he had only strangled six men! All were heavily ironed, and had their names and offences tattooed on their foreheads. From the life of "Lieut.-Colonel Gould Hunter-Weston of Hunterston," by W. L. Low, D.D., may be given the following extract:—

"On the 18th of October, 1845, he (then Lieut. Weston) started in command of a detachment to escort the celebrated Colonel W. H. Sleeman on his annual tour over Bundelcund and down the Nerbudda. This was the beginning of his long and interesting connection with this remarkable man, who was at that time Superintendent for the suppression of Thuggee; Governor-General's Agent in the Saugor and Nerbudda territories; Superintendent of Gwalior affairs; and Commissioner for the suppression of Dacoity. Sir William Sleeman's career in India extended over a period of forty-seven years, during which his services were highly appreciated by three Governors-General, namely, Viscount Hardinge, the Earl of Ellenborough, and the Marquis of Dalhousie. Their appreciation they showed by appointing him to the most difficult and delicate duties. He was one of those superior men whom the Indian service is constantly producing, who have rendered the name of Englishmen respected throughout the vast Empire of British India, and



whose memory will endure as long as the British power shall remain in the East. Not only was he trusted by his superiors, but he carried with him the prestige of a name second to none in India, as that of a friend to the poor, protector of the weak, and a redresser of their wrongs."

In 1849 Sleeman appointed Weston an assistant for the suppression of Thuggee, and to quote from this book again:—

"In Sleeman he found a man entirely after his own heart; never ceasing to look up to him while he lived; and cherishing his memory when he died. By nature liberal, humane, and just, he lived all his adult life in India; had mingled with the natives, conversing freely with them in their own language and thus, by long intercourse, had come to understand their character and modes of thought, and to comprehend the whole situation in India with a thoroughness approached by very few."

The following letter to the author from Lieut.-General Sir Aylmer Hunter-Weston speaks for itself:—

"2nd May, 1932.

"My dear Sleeman,

"I can truly say that of all the many big men in India under whom my father had the good fortune to serve, there was no one for whom he had so high an official admiration and personal regard as for your grandfather, Sir William Sleeman. Nothing would give my father, therefore me, greater pleasure than that my father's great admiration for that great man should be recorded in any book dealing with the career of Sir William. My father constantly talked of the time when he served under your grandfather, and used to tell me as a boy most thrilling and interesting stories of your grandfather's and his experiences in the work of the suppression of Thuggee and Dacoity.

"Yours ever,

"AYLMER HUNTER-WESTON."



Thirty years ago when the author reached India as a young subaltern he was fortunate enough to be stationed at Sitapur in Oudh, close to the scene of his grandfather's final years in India. He soon appreciated the respect and affection of the Indians of all classes for his memory, for welcome and kindness were extended by native chiefs and Rajahs and the humblest natives, anxious to show their regard for Sir William Sleeman. Many of these men had known him intimately, and it was the author's privilege to shoot tiger and other big game as the guest of Indian gentlemen who had actually shot in company with his grandfather fifty years before. They had, of course, been young men then, and were now old, but they spared no effort to show their appreciation for what "Thuggee" Sleeman had done for India, and took great pleasure in pointing out trees beneath which he had sat for shelter, and even one where he had wiped his forehead, so clear were their recollections of the man for whom they had such deep regard. Kaur Mandhata Shah, uncle of the Rani Sahiba of Kherigarh in Oudh, was foremost among those whom the author met: a charming, courteous gentleman of the old school, who gave much sound and kindly advice to the grandson of the man he had loved so well.

On one occasion, after expressing surprise that the mysterious Indian method of communicating information had sometimes proved superior to our own, the author was rebuked by this dear old gentleman, in a tone of gentle admonition, "Sahib, even you, with all your Indian connection, forget that we were civilised two thousand years before you were!" He was, however, far-sighted enough to see that European education was going to unsettle the Indian and make him unfitted for his ordinary vocation, and expressed himself forcibly against the practice of Indians sending their sons to English Universities, since



this resulted so often in their returning to India not only discontented, but with lessened respect for Europeans generally—a somewhat pathetic reflection upon our civilisation. It is pleasant to record that his son, Kaur Bahadur Shah, who shot with him thirty years ago and was an equally fine sportsman as his distinguished father, was one of the first to greet the author when he returned to India in 1929. The Rani Sahiba of Kherigarh, whose ancient aristocratic family had cause to be grateful to Sir William Sleeman in the days of the dissolute King of Oudh's persecution, showed the author the greatest kindness, lending him elephants and arranging for his shooting in the famous jungles of the Nepal Terai.

Other kindly friends were the two charming brothers, Bala Khan and Mangal Khan of Sherpur, Philibit, in Oudh, charming and delightful old gentlemen, whose kindness remains so fragrant a memory. Magnificent sportsmen, there was nothing they did not know about wild animals, and the author's surprise can be imagined when he accepted their shooting invitation and arrived to find his camp a seething mass of elephants, camels, horses, attendants, magnificent tents and other paraphernalia far beyond the wildest dreams of a humble subaltern. Though there were thirty-two elephants provided for this shoot, this was no mere ostentatious show, but a desire to express the respect they felt for the great man they had both known fifty years before. And this was the case with countless other Indians who still remembered "Thuggee" Sleeman and his great work for India. This affectionate memory was not confined to the aristocracy, for in 1908 it was the author's duty to make a reconnaissance across a great Indian desert, and when half-way across a very old Indian approached his tent, a pathetic-looking ancient in tattered garments, who inquired in a trembling voice if it were true that one E'Sleeman Sahib—for an illiterate Indian



cannot say an S without the prefix E—was present, having been told so by some camel drivers. Upon assuring him that this was the case, the old man asked most earnestly and excitedly whether he was any relation to the *Great E'Sleeman Sahib*, and upon hearing that he was a grandson, threw himself on the ground in a very ecstasy of pious respect for his grandfather's memory and kissed his boots with joy. When the man was more composed, it transpired that he had served with Sir William Sleeman during the Maharajapore campaign, and he added that to the natives "Thuggee" Sleeman was known as the "Holy" man, for it was his practice to pray in his tent before engaging in battle or other dangerous enterprise. Not content with this expression of affection, the poor old man, who must have been at least eighty, sent a messenger across the desert, and when the author's expedition reached the other side twelve days later, it was to find the old man's brother waiting for him, who had also served under his grandfather and did all in his humble power to show his deep regard for his memory.

On another occasion the author and a senior officer were the guests of an Indian gentleman of high repute, and the conversation resolved itself into a discussion regarding the power of the European mind to understand the Indians. While recognising the benefits brought to India by the British, he considered it impossible for the European to appreciate the Indian point of view, and he was finally asked whether he had ever known an Englishman who understood the Indian thoroughly and yet not become Indiafied in his ideas. This was evidently a perplexing question, for the old gentleman was most anxious to be fair, but at length, after considerable thought, he exclaimed: "Only one—Sleeman sahib!" This was said with great sincerity and with obviously no desire to conciliate the grandson.



But the name of Sleeman in connection with Thuggee was not to end with "Thuggee" Sleeman's death, for the mantle of his glory was to fall upon the most capable shoulders of his nephew, later Colonel James Sleeman, C.B., who had assisted him since the early days of the suppression of Thuggee, and to whose personal courage he owed his life on more than one occasion. Arriving in India in 1827, James Sleeman had served with the 73rd Regiment of the Bengal Army, which fought in the war against Afghanistan, and was then selected for this appointment, in which he did more than most of Sleeman's assistants to bring to light the mysteries of the horrible practices of Thuggee. The Government of India were wise to choose, as a successor to Sir William, one bearing the same name—a name which every criminal in India had by this time learnt to fear—and a man so well equipped with the necessary knowledge and strength to keep the sparks of Thuggee from bursting into flame. Within a year the wisdom of this selection was put to the most severe test when the Indian Mutiny broke out suddenly upon the small British garrison. This terrible and unexpected blow fell at a time when the prisons at Jubbulpore were filled with Thugs, unscrupulous scoundrels, with powerful friends and confederates outside, suffering severe financial losses owing to their incarceration.

In times of peace its garrison was small, so small that when revolt broke out the many hundreds of Thugs could quite easily have overcome their guards, massacred the white women and children, as at Cawnpore, and escaped, to begin their hideous work once more. Had this happened, and the Thugs scattered again throughout India, it is questionable whether Thuggee would ever have been completely suppressed. But such was James Sleeman's prestige and personality, indomitable courage and understanding of the Indian character, that he succeeded in the



almost impossible task of keeping these terrible assassins in subjection throughout the whole period of the Mutiny of 1857-8. With India ablaze, and British garrisons besieged and massacred around him, not a single Thug escaped, nor was a single life lost of those under his charge during this catastrophe. By one Sleeman the Thugs had been discovered, caught, and imprisoned; by the other kept in confinement during these perilous days, so that the operations for the suppression of Thuggee may be said to have begun and ended with a Sleeman at the head. A splendid sportsman, Colonel James Sleeman was renowned as a pig-sticker and killer of man-eating tigers, and he lived to return to England, where *he* spent many happy days in the hunting field. His best epitaph is contained in the following newspaper report of his death in 1889:

“In the golden reminiscences of childhood the ‘Dear Colonel’ at the Wier End at Ross, Herefordshire, will long have a place, and, as a restful figure in his chequered journey of life, he will live in the memories of those men and women who knew his blameless genial character. Thackeray’s ‘Colonel Newcome,’ as the human embodiment of manly uprightness, simplicity of heart, and singleness of mind, naturally occurs to us when sketching Colonel Sleeman’s characteristics.”

The Thugs who were then imprisoned at Jubbulpore were those who had committed murder, but by turning approvers, had saved their necks and suffered imprisonment for life instead; there were also male members of Thug families, no matter what their age, who would take to strangulation by hereditary instinct directly manhood was attained. Many of these were young boys, and although doomed to compulsory bachelorhood, the conditions of prison life were made as pleasant as possible under the circumstances. They were taught useful handicrafts, such as weaving carpets and making tents, and their high intelligence—for at least this must be admitted, enabled them to



become so good at this work that the articles they manufactured soon became noted throughout India as the best of their kind.

As we may assume that few Thugs were fully qualified murderers before the age of eighteen years, it is clear that the youngest practising Thug captured in 1830 would have departed this life before 1895, while the last Thug murderers must have died before the Great War. It is a stroke of good fortune that the author has succeeded in getting into touch with two of the last Superintendents of Thuggee, and a magistrate who was connected with the last remaining Thugs placed in prison by his grandfather. The following extracts from their letters will therefore be of interest:—

From A. H. Giles, late Superintendent of the Thuggee and Dacoity Department, 18th December, 1910:

“I had, for many years, several of the committed Thugs in my charge, and shortly before my retirement secured their release—they being very old men and quite incapable of reverting to crime. One of them practically implored me not to recommend his release, as he had no one to support him and could not earn his own living. He was retained as a punkah-puller in my office at Bankipur.”

From Bannatyne MacLeod, 11th December, 1910:

“As to Thugs, they are—thanks to your grandfather’s work—a thing of the past. In 1881, when as a young assistant magistrate I visited the Cuddapore gaol, I saw an old prisoner, a Thug, who had been imprisoned since boyhood, and who could not be released lest he should resume work as a Thug murderer.”

From E. W. Payne, 17th September, 1931:

“About a couple of years after I took over charge of the School of Industry at Jubbulpore (which the Thuggee



gaols were subsequently called), I was ordered to send home the few remaining Thugs there, as Government wanted the place turned into a Reformatory School. This was done much to the disgust of the Thugs who had been there—some of them fifty years—and had no homes to go to. The Thugs, as I fancy you know, were employed in tent making, and the tents had the reputation of being the best in India. The Thugs I dealt with were nothing remarkable in appearance, though their methods were certainly effective.”

The Thugs referred to in the first two letters were approvers and others who had actually followed Thuggee as a profession, and who were then very old men. Those in the third, written some fifty years after the majority of practising Thugs had been imprisoned, were the sons of Thugs, too young when arrested to have been initiated into Thuggee, who had been confined in order to prevent them engaging in murder or perpetuating the Thuggee family.

But it can be shown that—even in 1933—the Suppression of Thuggee was found to be complete, as witness the following extract from a letter from the Commissioner of the Jubbulpore Province, as this book was going to print:—

“Camp Piparia,  
 “Tahsil Sohagpur,  
 “District Hoshangabad,  
 “The 21st December, 1932.

“My Dear Colonel Sleeman,

“I must apologise for the delay in sending you any information about the Thugs.

“As a matter of fact I have come up against a blank wall of ignorance wherever I have made enquiries, and the work of your grandfather seems to have been so thorough that there is practically nothing left in the way of memories of the Thugs.

“Yours Sincerely,  
 “C. J. IRWIN.”

What better commendation could his memory possess than this, a century after Sir William's efforts were commenced?



## CHAPTER XVI

### A MILLION MURDERS

It is impossible to read about Thuggee without speculating as to the total number of murders committed by the Thugs before their suppression. To establish this with any degree of accuracy would be difficult, for even an ordinary murderer is reticent concerning his occupation, and the Thug was the most secretive of any. Fortunately, however, we need have no recourse to any other sources of information than the Thugs themselves, to establish the fact that they must have assassinated a total of considerably over a million people, probably nearer three millions than one. As has been shown in these pages, the Thugs, captured between 1829 and 1856, themselves confessed to the murders they had committed, or had taken part in, or were given away by approvers. This total alone ran into many hundreds of thousands of victims, killed within the lifetime of the Thugs interrogated by Sir William Sleeman. But his investigations were carried further, for the Thugs were as proud of the prowess of their ancestors in Thuggee as we are to-day concerning famous deeds of those from whom we are descended. As a consequence, family tradition made it possible to calculate accurately the murders which had been committed by the fathers, grandfathers, and even great-grandfathers of the Thugs captured during Sir William's operations. Knowing the pride of the Thug concerning his family's reputation for murder, once it stood revealed to



the world, "Thuggee" Sleeman took particular pains to check each confession not only in order to test the accuracy of his witnesses, but also to prevent the presentation of an exaggerated case, and by this means arrived at an approximate estimate of the total number of murders committed by the Thugs during the three hundred years of their known existence.

This is fortunate, for many a man entrusted with such a difficult task would have been content to have caught those engaged in murder, caring nothing for past history, while it need scarcely be added that, for obvious reasons, no family archives existed of the members of this horrible religion of murder, from which it would be possible now—a hundred years later—to glean this information. We are, however, assisted in this enquiry by yet another fact, the curiously level standard maintained by Indian statistics in regard to such matters—one abnormally constant and thus a sufficient check in itself to extravagant exaggeration. Taking, for example, the number of people estimated as having been killed by wild animals and snakes in India over a long course of years, this number will be found to be between 31,000 and 33,000 annually, a variation of but a few hundreds occurring in these figures of awful tragedy, which not even modern civilisation has succeeded in reducing to any considerable extent. And let it be clearly recognised that no savage animal or poisonous reptile ever created was capable of killing on a more wholesale scale than the Thug at his best.

It is difficult enough to obtain exact information concerning three centuries of existence of even reputable organisations: with a religion of murder depending for its existence upon strict secrecy it is impossible; and we are, therefore, forced to base our judgment of the loss Thuggee inflicted upon the law of averages. In this we are assisted by such excellent authority as the "History of the Administration



of the East India Company, 1853," by John William Kaye, in which the following passage occurs:—

“There are truths not to be arrived at except by long and patient induction. There are secrets buried deep beneath the surface which is a work of time and toil to extricate from the deceptive clay which clings around them. Institutions, purposely veiled in darkness, of a strange, mysterious, almost incredible character, were likely to have escaped the notice of the European eye. It was long before we suspected the systematic war against life and property which had been carried on for years in almost every part of the country from Oude to the Carnatic. It was long before we could bring ourselves to understand that organised bands of professional and hereditary murderers and depredators, recognised and indeed to a certain extent tolerated by their fellow men, were preying upon the uninitiated and unwary sections of society, and committing the most monstrous crimes with as much forethought and ingenuity as though murder were one of the fine arts, and robbery a becoming effort of human skill; nay, indeed, glorying in such achievements, as welcome to the deity, and bringing them to perfection with a due observance of all the ceremonial formalities of a cherished religious faith.

“But in time we began to understand these things. We obtained a clue and we followed it up, until the hideous mystery was brought out into the clear light of day. There is not an intelligent reader at the present time who does not know what a *Thug* is. The word, indeed, had been adopted into our own language, and has been applied to other depredators than those who worship the Goddess Davi. It is well known that a Thug is a professional murderer. We found the Thugs carrying on their fearful trade, and as soon as we came to understand them we made war upon, and struck them down. The servants of the East India Company have extirpated Thuggee. It is an exploit worthy



to be celebrated by every writer who undertakes to chronicle the achievements of the English in the East, one which it is impossible to dwell upon without pleasure and pride."

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

The opinion of such an able and impartial historian carries considerable weight in making an approximate calculation of the toll of human life taken by Thuggee. For this dependable Indian journal estimated that the two rivers, Nerbudda and Sutlej, witnessed 10,000 murders annually. This was a century ago, when Thuggee was being slowly throttled and when every opportunity existed for ascertaining the true facts: hence it is quite clear that this was considered a conservative estimate. Now the area defined by this journal represents less than one-fourth of India, so, as Thuggee extended throughout that continent, it may safely be assumed that on this basis alone forty thousand people fell to the Thug *ruhmal* every year, possibly.



in its heyday fifty thousand would be nearer the mark. Staggering as these awful figures may seem, such is the wealth of human life in India that this toll would seem a mere flea bite, for wild animals and snakes still annually account for almost as many.

For the purpose of arriving at a correct estimate, however, we will not assume fifty thousand a year, nor yet forty or thirty, but content ourselves with the number estimated by the *Sumachar Durpan* as occurring in this one small area a hundred years ago, namely 10,000. Neither shall we assume this to be the annual toll of three hundred years of killing, but the most modest estimate of 10,000 Thug victims a year for a hundred years. In other words, in order to err on the side of caution and to avoid the least trace of exaggeration, the estimate of a million murders is based upon one-fourth of the area of the country over which the Thugs operated, and for one-third of the period only during which this hideous faith is known to have existed.

After prolonged research in all the Thuggee records available to him, the author is convinced that a mere million murders is very considerably below the true figures, and is unkind to the memory of Thugs who gloried in their crimes and boasted of their murders. The shade of that arch-scoundrel Buhram, with almost a thousand murders to his credit alone, appears to rise up and accuse him of belittling what Thuggee could do, backed by a succession of his ancestors, no doubt equally as skilful, capable, and dexterous human devils.

But the object of this book has not been to revel in the horrors of Thuggee, but to show what it was: to reveal the awful burden it had inflicted upon India, and how this was lifted from the shoulders of a suffering people by British rule and courageous Englishmen. We will try the Thug on the major charge, and let the few millions of murders we suspect but cannot prove, go by. To many Thuggee is



unknown and their million murders will seem incredible, but a moment's reflection will show not a probability, but a certainty that Thuggee inflicted this loss at least before it was suppressed. The *Sumachar Durpan* estimated that a hundred Thugs slaughtered on an average eight times that number in a month—that is, eight murders to each Thug in thirty days, which, judging from the established records and the evidence given by Thugs when arrested, would seem a reasonable assumption. We will leave the achievements of the Thug ancestors, that long chain of sanguinary links stretching back into antiquity, and will concentrate upon those Thugs discovered by Sir William Sleeman and his assistants, from first to last of the operations never more than a dozen in total numbers, in order to remove any trace of doubt as to their ability as wholesale killers of men. Between the time when the suppression of Thuggee began in 1830, and the handing over of the charge of the Department of Thuggee by Sir William to his nephew, some 4,500 Thugs had been arrested. At eight victims to a fully-qualified Thug per working month, assuming that a Thug's active life was thirty years, and that the average length of his annual Thuggee expedition was two months, a little calculation gives a total per Thug of over 400 victims.

However incredible such a huge total may seem at first sight, the fact remains that many Thugs confessed to far more than that number of murders—some to considerably over twice that amount, for the Thug, as has been shown, gloried in his bag and was indiscriminate in the slaughter of his fellow-men. And, for the purpose of this estimate, it matters little whether they were all active members of Thuggee gangs, or Thugs in embryo, for, sooner or later, all would have engaged in this impious but hereditary duty. And doubtless fond Thug wives and mothers parted with their murderous spouses and sons with anguish made the more bitter by the knowledge that no womb



would ever again bear a Thug, no woman bring into the world a child destined from birth to murder his fellows for sport and robbery. Thuggee was like a building alight in five thousand places: to extinguish all save one would have seen the conflagration burst into flames again with redoubled fury. All honour to those who recognised this danger and suppressed it firmly.

To quote from Mr. James Hutton's book, "A popular Account of the Thug and Dacoit," published in 1857:—

"It was not until 1829-30 that the task of suppression was fairly commenced. The honour of the initiative was reserved for Lord William Bentinck, who passed certain Acts rendering Thuggee the object of a special judicature, and giving a wider discretion to the officers employed in its suppression. His lordship was fortunate in his selection of special officers. It is needless to do more than mention the names of the late Major-General Sir William Sleeman, K.C.B., Colonel Borthwick, Colonel Stewart, Captain Paton, Captain Malcolm, Captain G. Hollings and Mr. F. C. Smith. The best proof of the ability and energy displayed by these gentlemen is the fact that by the year 1840 the committals amounted to 3,689. Of this number, 466 were hanged, 1,504 transported, 933 imprisoned for life, 81 confined for different periods, 86 called upon to give ample security for their future good conduct, 97 acquitted, and 56 admitted as approvers. Twelve effected their escape, and 208 died a natural death before sentence was passed.

"In the course of the next seven years, 531 more Thugs were apprehended and committed for trial. Of these, 33 were hanged, 174 transported, 267 imprisoned for life and 27 for shorter periods, 5 called upon to put in bail, 125 acquitted, and 46 admitted as approvers; besides 11 who died and 2 who made their escape. It was no easy matter to prevent the last contingency, so great was their patience



and ingenuity. Towards the close of 1834, twenty-seven escaped from the Jubbulpore gaol by cutting through their irons and the bars of their windows with thread smeared with oil and then encrusted with finely powdered stone. In 1848 also there were 120 committed, of whom 5 were hanged, 24 transported, 11 imprisoned for life and 31 for a limited period, 7 required to find substantial bail, 12 acquitted, and 9 admitted as approvers; 2 died and 10 remained under trial.

“Since that year Thuggee appears to have quite died out. In 1853, indeed, some cases occurred in the Punjab, but vigorous measures being at once adopted, under the superintendence of Captain Sleeman (afterwards Colonel James Sleeman, C.B.), whose happy lot it was to complete the good work inaugurated by his distinguished uncle, its final suppression was almost coincident with its revival. The question that next presented itself for the anxious consideration of the Government was the means of providing for the families of the approvers. If left to their own devices, or the suggestions of want, there was too much reason to apprehend that the elder members, who had already witnessed the taking of human life, might be tempted to revert to the practices of their forefathers. Accordingly, in the year 1838 (on the recommendation of Sir William Sleeman and Captain Charles Brown), a school of industry was founded at Jubbulpore, for the purpose of teaching the sons of the approvers a trade or craft by which they might earn an honest livelihood. At first their parents were opposed to the idea, but soon joyfully acquiesced when they came to understand the benevolent motives of the Government. For a time the old Thugs continued to speak with animation of their past achievements, but, gradually weaned from their former habits and associations, they learned to look back with shame upon their antecedents and studiously avoided



any further allusion to them. By the end of 1847 the school possessed 850 inmates, of whom 307 were employed as guards, brickmakers, builders, cleaners, etc., while the remaining 543 applied their superior ingenuity to the manufacture of lac dye, sealing wax, blankets, druggets, fine cloth, tape, cotton wicks, stockings, gloves, towels, tents and carpeting. In that year the products of their labour mounted to 131 tents, 3,324 yards of Kidderminster carpeting, 46 woollen carpets, and a vast quantity of towels, table cloths, plaids, checks, etc., which realised upwards of £3,500. Of this sum £500 was given to the Thugs as an encouragement, and to form a capital for such as were allowed after a time to establish themselves in Jubbulpore on their own account. And nearly £300 was paid to their wives for spinning thread for the factory.

“Let British supremacy in India cease when it will, the suppression of Thuggee will ever remain a glorious monument to the zeal, energy and judgment of the civil and military servants of the East India Company. It is easy to direct epigram and innuendo against the idea of a body of merchants ruling a vast empire with enlightened and disinterested beneficence. But the impartial student of Anglo-Indian history can readily adduce many such examples as the preceding—for instance, the suppression of suttee, human sacrifices, and infanticide; the repression of torture, gang robberies, and voluntary mutilation—in order to prove that these merchants were truly princes, these traffickers the honourable of the earth.”



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