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SCINDE;

OR,

THE UNHAPPY VALLEY.

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BY

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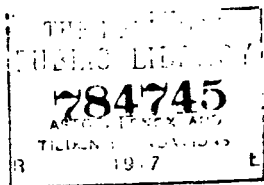
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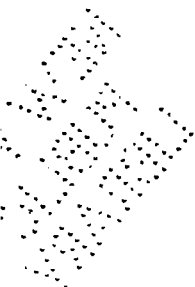
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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER XV.

	PAGE
LECTURES AND PREACHMENTS	1

CHAPTER XVI.

WE PREPARE TO QUIT HYDERABAD	28
--	----

CHAPTER XVII.

REFLECTIONS ON THE FIELD OF MEEANEE	42
---	----

CHAPTER XVIII.

DOWN THE FULAILEE RIVER TO SUDDERAN'S COLUMN—THE STEPMOTHER	78
--	----

CHAPTER XIX.

A RIDE TO MEER IBRAHIM KHAN TALPUR'S VILLAGE	108
--	-----

CHAPTER XX.

MEER IBRAHIM KHAN TALPUR	131
------------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXI.

A BELOCH DINNER AND TEA-PARTY	157
---	-----

CHAPTER XXII.

THE MIMOSA BANK ; ITS GIANT FACE—SCINDIA PETRÆA— THE BELOCH MUSE	183
---	-----

CHAPTER XXIII.

	PAGE
THE LUKKEE PASS, AND ITS EVIL SPIRIT—SCHWAN, ITS BEGGARS AND ITS "ALEXANDER'S CAMP"	206

CHAPTER XXIV.

LAKE MANCHAR—LARKHANA THE PRETTY, AND MAHTAB, THE DONNA OF LARKHANA	231
--	-----

CHAPTER XXV.

THE PICTURESQUE "SUKKUR BUKKUR ROHRI"	248
---	-----

CHAPTER XXVI.

SHIKARPUR, ITS CENTRAL ASIAN BAZAAR, AND ITS HINDOOS	265
--	-----

CHAPTER XXVII.

UPPER SCINDE—DURRANEE HEROISM OF SENTIMENT	278
--	-----

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE SONG OF THE BUNGALOW—DOWN THE INDUS "HOME"	288
--	-----

SCENES IN SCINDE.

CHAPTER XV.

LECTURES AND PREACHMENTS.

“**READING maketh a full man, conference a ready man, and writing an exact man,**”—is a time-honoured maxim to which we now discount credence at sight.

Certainly it is a serious thing to oppose one's opinion to that of Bacon—the paragon of genius, utilitarianism and roguery. But, eminent doctors of the mind do differ on this subject, at least as widely as they do upon others; as they do upon all, in fact, when an opportunity for “differing in opinion” does present itself.

As regards the fulness produced by reading, you, sir, can oppose to him of Verulam an adequate rival, the sage of Malmesbury, who expressly opines that “if he had read as much as other men, he should

have been as ignorant as they." I may join you, and quote a pithy Arabic proverb, which assures the world that those who dabble deep in manuscript are very like asses laden with many books. .

One of the first things the Eastern traveller remarks, is how palpably inferior we are, and we ever have been, with all our boasted science and knowledge, in general astuteness, private intrigue, and public diplomacy, to the semi-barbarous people with whom we have to deal. History shows us that we have been outwitted by the Hindoos; we have been cosened by the Affghans; that the Persians, to use their own phrase, have "made us donkeys;" and that even the by no means subtle Scindian has more than once proved himself the better man in contests where the wits alone were allowed to work. Had we, you may be sure, contended against the Orientals with their own weapons, our cunning of fence would never have won us a foot of ground in the region of spices. Fortunately our strong Northern instinct, dear Mr. John Bull, carried us through all difficulties. When fairly entangled in the net of deceit and treachery, which the political Retiarius in the East knows so well to cast—our ancestors, Alexander-like,

out with their sturdy sabres, and not having time, or patience, or skill to unravel them, settled the knottiest of questions in a moment, infinitely to their own convenience, and as much to the discomfort of their opponents. They undid by power of arm and will, by bull-dog heart, that—

— Stolidum genus

Bellipotentēs—magi' quam sapientipotentēs,*

all the blunders of their Bœotian heads.

Having noticed a phenomenon, it remains to us to ferret out its cause. Our inferiority of cunning to the Oriental, is certainly not owing to want of knowledge of the people amongst whom we live, or to ignorance of their manners, customs, and languages. The Macnaghtens, the Burneses, and generally those who devoted their time and energies, and who prided themselves most upon their conversancy with native dialects and native character, are precisely the persons who have been the most egregiously, the most fatally, outwitted and deceived by the natives. This is a trite remark, but it cannot be too often repeated, too forcibly dwelt upon.

* "A stolid race, strong in war, rather than strong in wits,"—as old Ennius said of the *Æacidæ*, little thinking how remarkably applicable it was to the Ennian tribe, his own compatriots.

Does it not strike you that the uncommon acuteness of Oriental wits, may be simply the result of their ignorance? Instead of dulling their brains with eternal reading and writing, arithmetic, the classics, logic, philosophy and metaphysics, history, divinity, and mathematics, Yankee-like they apply themselves to concentrating their thoughts upon one point,—the business of life, its advancement, its schemes, and the terminus which it proposes to itself. Must not this sharpen the intellect,—sharpen it to almost a preternatural sharpness? Instead of collecting a mass of heterogeneous and uselessly valuable book-matter, in the shape of second-hand lessons and scraps of wisdom—"Orient pearls," when grains of wheat are wanted—they read experience from hard realities by themselves experienced, pondered over, and thoroughly digested, till each lesson and its corollaries come to be part of their mental organisation. Actual experience, you know, is to most men, "like the stern-light of a ship which illuminates only the track it has passed;" by taking thought it may be made to throw a long ray before and around, as well as behind. Instead of pinning their faith upon a chapter of Thucydides, or a leader in the "Times" newspaper,

they, having no Thucydides, and no "Times," to lean upon, are forced to form their own opinions about passing events. They learn no wisdom from the Sir Oracles of their county or coterie. They trouble not their mental digestion with those modern sciences which may be fitly represented by a grain of common sense deep hid in a goodly heap of chaff—for instance, Political Economy. And instead of distracting themselves with the pros and the cons of a dozen differing pamphlets, they work out each problem as it presents itself, by the power of inference with which the knowledge of real life has provided them. Must not all this thinking work acuate the mind? At any rate the observable result of it is, that each man becomes as worldly wise a son of mammon, as his capacity permits him to become.

So—parenthetically to return to our starting point—reading, by which I understand our modern civilized European style of reading, may make a full man, more often makes an empty man by the operation of a mental lientery, and as frequently makes, for practical purposes, a foolish man.

Nature, with her usual acuteness, has set a bar, and a peculiar one too, to the progress of worldly

wisdom amongst Orientals ; the obstacle in question being their utter inability to conceive what "honest" means, to enter even into the lowest sense of the apothegm, that honesty is the best policy. Nothing poses, puzzles, and perplexes our Eastern fellow-creature, reasonable and reasoning being as he is allowed to be, half so much as fair dealing. For instance, you tell him a truth ; he mechanically sets down your assertion a falsehood ; presently he finds that you have not attempted to deceive him ; he turns the matter over in his mind, hitting upon every solution to the difficulty but the right one. He then assigns another and a deeper motive to your conduct ; again he discovers that he is in error. Finally, losing himself in doubt, he settles down into a distressing state of perplexity. You may now manage him as you like, *bien entendu*, that you always employ the same means. Truly said Lady Hester Stanhope—a shrewd woman although a prophetess—that "amongst the English," she might have said amongst Europeans, "there is no man so attractive to the Orientals, no man who can negotiate with them so effectively, as a good, honest, open-hearted, and positive naval officer of the old school."

On the other hand, if you attempt any kind of finesse upon him, the Asiatic, the fellow makes himself at home with you in an instant. He has gauged your character at once. His masterly mind knows what your dishonesty will be doing probably before you know it yourself. He has you on his own ground—he is sure of victory.

Thus you see how it is that many of our eminent politicals—men great at Sanscrit and Arabic, who spoke Persian like Shirazis, and had the circle of Oriental science at their fingers' ends; clever at ceremony as Hindoos, dignified in discourse as Turks, whose "Reports" were admirable in point of diction, and whose "Travels" threatened to become standard works, turned out to be diplomatic little children in the end, which tries all things. They had read too much; they had written too much; they were a trifle too clever, and much too confident. Their vanity tempted them to shift their nationality; from Briton to become Greek, in order to meet Greek on the roguery field; and lamentably they always failed.

So much for active dealings with natives.

When passively opposed to them, that is to say, when they are dealing with me, I would act as follows.

If they assert a fact quietly, I should content myself with believing it to be a falsehood; were they to asseverate, I should suspect it to be a falsehood with an object; and if they swore to its truth, I should feel and act upon the conviction that the falsehood is accompanied by malice prepense—dark and dangerous. But I should content myself with standing *en garde*; I would rarely attempt feinting at them; and finally, I would never try to penetrate into their secret motives, well knowing that there I should be overmatched.

All this may be unpalatable to many—particularly to those who have lived long enough in Europe, after a return from the East, to remember only what they wish to remember. Some have gone so far as publicly to express their opinion, that the word of an Indian is generally as good as that of an European. What a pungent, pregnant little satire upon civilisation and Christianity! The unprejudiced author of it certainly deserved to be avatared at Benares, or to be shrined in effigy over the gateway of Juggunnath!

The distinction one may safely draw between the people of the West and those of the East, in matters of *morale*, is this: among the former there are exceptions—many in the North, in the South a few—to

the general rule, that "all men are liars." There are who would not deceive even with the certainty of self-aggrandisement, and in security that the world would never know the fraud. Amongst Orientals, though it might be unjust and unwise to assert that no such characters exist, you may, I can assure you, live for years, and associate familiarly with all ranks and all classes, and both sexes too, without meeting a single one.

"Charity, good sir, charity," I can read in your countenance.

It is a great virtue, Mr. John Bull, but a very cumbrous and expensive one for a traveller or a politician.

* * * *

Before we start from Hyderabad, I must prepare you, my good companion, by a short lecture upon the manners of the natives, for mixing with them a little more familiarly than we have done hitherto.

As every thing in the world has not yet been written about, printed, and published, in the East, we have nothing like "Hints on Etiquette, by a Lady of Fashion," or "Manuel de la Politesse," to learn from. You must not, however, conclude that

ceremony in the East is an unimportant study. Very much the contrary.

The first thing Oriental people ask about you, whatever you may be, soldier, sailor, or civilian, is, "does he speak our words?" If the answer be "no," then you are a *haiwan*, a brute beast,—or a *jangali*, a savage. If it be a qualified "yes, he can, but he won't," then, by the rule of *Omne ignotum, &c.*, are you a real *magnifico*. To shuffle over this difficulty in your case, as you will not have time to learn Scindee, I must represent you to be a Turk or Tartar, or some such outlandish animal, and declare that you are very learned in Ottoman literature—for which, by the by, may I be pardoned! Whenever any thing is said to you, you will be pleased to stroke your beard gravely, with the right hand for goodness' sake! frown a little, roll your head much with a heavy ferocious roll, and ejaculate syllable by syllable, *Alhamdu l'illah*, "Praise to the Lord,"—*à propos de rien*. When a man shows you any thing admirable, such as his horse or his son, you will perform the same pantomime, and change your words to *Mashallah*, or "What the Lord pleases," (*subaudi*, "be done"): mind, if you do not, and if any accident

happen to the thing praised, your commendation will be considered the cause of it. Whatever action you undertake, such as rising from your seat or sitting down, calling for your pipe or dismissing its bearer, beginning or ending dinner, in fact, on all active occasions, you must not forget to pronounce Bismillah, "In the name of the Lord," with as much pomposity as you can infuse into your utterance. By this means you will be considered a grave and reverend personage; *au reste*, by moving your head much and slowly, by looking dully wise, seldom smiling, and above all things by strictly following the Bishop of Bristol's "First Rule of Conversation"—Silence—you will do remarkably well for a stranger.

The next question our Oriental puts concerning you is, "does he know *adab*, or politeness?" here equivalent to ceremonial. You would scarcely believe how much these few words involve.

It is, I believe, almost always in the power of a European diplomatist sent on a mission to an Eastern court, by mere manner to effect or to fail in the object which his government desires. Manners, literally understood, still make the man here. Sir John Malcolm well understood this when as Elchi—

ambassador—to Teheran, he drilled his *corps diplomatique* to their salaams as carefully and regularly as a manager his *corps de ballet*. Orientals do not dislike our English manners, our brusquerie, our roughness, if it may be called so ; but to please them, indeed not to offend them in deadly guise, it must be gentlemanly brusquerie, native and genuine, *sans malice et sans arrière pensée* ; it must be “well-placed,” not the result of ignorance, and not “antipathetic.” Otherwise it is a dead failure, and the consequences of such failures in the diplomatic field extend far. For instance, we send to the most formal, haughty, and vainglorious court in the world a gentleman whom they were accustomed to consider the Boluser-General of the Embassy. The result is, that the sovereign considers himself slighted, and his ministers and courtiers are not slow to show it. The plenipotentiary, mortally offended, offends all by retorting with British bluntness and slights. He is repaid in kind ; he repays in kind ; and so on till the interests of his country are irretrievably ruined, and the goodwill of the foreign state is not only alienated, but transferred to a rival power. Another gentleman, brave, patriotic, and high-principled, but ignorant, violent, and strong-

headed, is sent to settle certain nice points with the most savage, revengeful old chieftain that ever sewed up subject in a raw cow's hide. What is the consequence? Before he has spent a week at the court he seats himself in full Darbar with the soles of his feet diametrically opposite Majesty's face—a position as appropriate to the occasion as if he had, at a levee, presented his back to his own sovereign—he engaged publicly in a furious polemical discussion, and capped the whole by grossly insulting and abusing, in the presence of the prince and his nobles, a minister who, although decidedly the “most accomplished scoundrel in Central Asia,” was nevertheless a prime favourite with his own monarch.

That envoy never returned to England.

Even in our humble capacity of travellers, Mr. John Bull, we must, if we wish to be comfortable, attend a little to what we ought to do, and what we ought not to do, in society. If we would not be thought “peculiar”—Orientals hate that almost as much as Englishmen—we must not “walk the quarter-deck,” and set every one around us ejaculating—

“Wonderful are the works of Allah! Behold!

That Frank is trudging about when he can, if he pleases, sit still !” *

We must not gesticulate at all when conversing, otherwise we shall see a look of apprehension on every countenance, and hear each man asking his neighbour, whether we be low fellows, or labouring under a temporary aberration of intellect, or drunk.

Standing up, we must not cross our arms over our chests—in Europe this is *à la Napoleon*, in the East it is the posture of a slave. When walking it is advisable to place one hand, not both, upon the hip ; or we may carry a five-foot-long ebony staff shod with ivory : this patriarchal affair provokes respect ; a switch or a horsewhip would induce the query—

“ Are they keepers of dogs ?”

Sitting down, Turkish or tailor fashion—the most easy and enduring attitude—we must be careful to remain quiet for a decent space of time ; if we move about uneasily every ten minutes, we shall not fail to hear the observation—

“ Wallah ! They have no dignity !”

And if musically inclined, we may hum a little in

* So say the Italians, “ it is better to walk than to run, to sit than to walk, to lie than to sit, to sleep than to lie, to die than to sleep.”

