

THE
ORIENTAL ANNUAL,
OR
Scenes in India;

COMPRISING
TWENTY-FIVE ENGRAVINGS

FROM ORIGINAL DRAWINGS

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AND

A DESCRIPTIVE ACCOUNT

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CHAPTER VIII.

RAJEMAH'L.—A SUTTEE.—BUDGEROW.

WE now took our passage in a country ship to Calcutta, where we stayed only a few days, when we launched upon the broad bosom of the Hoogly. We were exceedingly struck with its imposing magnificence; and who has ever directed his eye over the wide waters of this celebrated river without being similarly impressed! The varieties of feature which it presents, both of still and active life, the associations it calls up, from the fables and superstitions attached to it, the busy activity of human pursuits which it constantly displays, are all highly interesting to the traveller; while the reverence in which it is held, especially after its junction with the other western branch, when it assumes the sacred name of Ganges, raises those unavoidable emotions that, in defiance even of well-grounded prejudice, inspire almost a veneration for its consecrated waters. Upon the whole, this is, perhaps, the most distinguished river upon the face of the globe, whether we consider the lofty regions of perennial ice, never yet penetrated by mortal foot, in which its unknown source is concealed, the stupendous precipices over which it dashes in its progress to the plain, the natural im-



Engraved by W. Harrison

Mausoleum at Rajah Muhl.

Designed by W. Harrison

to them. When they approach almost to a point of contact, the good frequently imbibes the taint of the evil, until they finally merge in one. The fastidious mercy of the Hindoo, which is carried to such a pitch of extravagance, save in observing the ordinances of his sanguinary ritual, is so microscopic, if I may be allowed the term, that he would shrink from destroying the most noxious reptile, or even the minutest animalcule which floats in the mote of a sunbeam, were he conscious of extinguishing animal life; and yet there is not a more cold-hearted villain alive than your merciful Hindoo. He would smile at the death-pang of a stranger to his idols; he would exult at the most horrible torture that could be inflicted upon one who denied the supremacy of Brahma, the judgments of Siva, and the avatars* of Veeshno. He is only the most civilized of savages.

As we proceeded up the river from Rajemah'l the Colgong hills were exceedingly beautiful. On both sides the country appeared to be well cultivated, while the number of boats perpetually passing up and down upon the broad bosom of the Ganges reminded us of the parent stream of our own dear country, which can only vie with it as a commercial river, for in every other respect it sinks into comparative insignificance before this queen of inland waters. The current was unusually strong for some time after we left our last halting-place, and the stream so tortuous, that we had no little difficulty in tracking round the curvatures which the channel here presents. Our progress being very slow, we had a full opportunity of

* Incarnations.

observing how numerous, as well as mighty in form and horrible of aspect, were the alligators with which the waters of this sacred stream abound, especially in the more level country through which it urges its majestic course. It is astonishing to see the havoc which these monsters make yearly among the native population, and yet with what perfect apathy they are regarded. They seem to excite neither fear nor apprehension. They lift up their huge dark bodies before the boats, which may be said to swarm upon this beautiful river, as if in defiance of human power, and with a consciousness of their own terrific endowments. They sometimes wallow in the shallows with their heads turned towards the sun in all the indolent repose of familiar luxury, regardless of any thing but the stronger among their own species. It is here, however, that they suffer the most signal retribution for their cruel and fearless devastations, as they are frequently shot in this defenceless position, when the only penetrable parts of their bodies are exposed to the deadly aim of the matchlock or the rifle. An immense animal was killed by the tindal* of our budgerow, basking upon a bank, upon which the boat struck almost immediately after. It measured fifteen feet and a half in length. A considerable time elapsed before we got our budgerow off the bank.

The budgerow is a large, unwieldy, flat-bottomed boat, with eighteen oars, more or less, and a lofty poop, covering nearly three fourths of its entire length, under which are two capacious cabins, with Venetian

* A sort of coxswain, to whom is entrusted the management of the boat.

blinds, at once to exclude the sun and admit the air. Every night we moored beneath the shelter of some convenient bank, and got under weigh again in the morning. Whenever we landed above Rajemah'l we found those religious devotees, so well known in India under the name of Gosseins, to be extremely numerous, endeavouring, like all the fakeer tribes, to extort benefactions from every one they happened to meet, and they were invariably successful among the natives, whose superstitious fears of their power and dread of their supernatural influence are quite amazing.

We were induced to land and visit the waterfall of Mooteejerna, but it did not at all realize our expectations, falling far short of what we had seen in the southern extremity of the peninsula. Monkeys were very numerous in the neighbourhood of this fall, and the print of a rhinoceros's foot was visible along the path we were obliged to pursue, which greatly alarmed our native attendants, who have a prodigious horror of this formidable forester. We saw, however, no beasts of prey, but occasionally heard the dismal howlings of the jackals, with which the whole continent of Asia abounds, and which may be considered, though frequently a great annoyance, one of the blessings of a torrid country, since they devour immense quantities of carrion, which, but for them, would scatter contagion and pestilence over its parched though fruitful plains. On our approach to Colgong, whither we proceeded on foot, leaving our budgerow to track up the river, intending to join her at a stated spot, we were hospitably entertained with new bread and delicious fresh butter, which was sent to us by an English