

XII.

ON THE MANNERS, RELIGION, AND LAWS OF THE CUCIS, OR MOUNTAINEERS OF TIPRA.

Communicated, in Persian, by John Rawlins, Esq.

THE inhabitants of the mountainous districts to the east of *Bengal* gave the name of *Patiyan* to the Being who created the universe; but they believe that a deity exists in every tree, that the sun and moon are Gods, and that whenever they worship those subordinate divinities, *Patiyan* is pleased.

If any one among them put another to death, the chief of the tribe, or other persons who bear no relation to the deceased, have no concern in punishing the murderer; but, if the murdered person has a brother, or other heir, he may take blood; nor has any man whatever a right to prevent or oppose such retaliation.

When a man is detected in the commission of theft or other atrocious offence, the chieftain causes a recompense to be given to the complainant, and reconciles both parties; but the chief himself receives a customary fine: and each party gives a feast of pork, or other meat, to the people of his respective tribe.

In ancient times it was not a custom among them to cut off the heads of the women whom they found in the habitations of their enemies; but it happened

once that a woman asked another why she came so late to her business of sowing grain: she answered, that her husband was gone to battle, and that the necessity of preparing food and other things for him had occasioned her delay. This answer was overheard by a man at enmity with her husband; and he was filled with resentment against her, considering, that, as she had prepared food for her husband for the purpose of sending him to battle against his tribe, so, in general, if women were not to remain at home, their husbands could not be supplied with provision, and consequently could not make war with advantage. From that time it became a constant practice to cut off the heads of the enemy's women; especially if they happen to be pregnant, and therefore confined to their houses. And this barbarity is carried so far, that if a *Cuci* assail the house of an enemy, and kill a woman with child, so that he may bring two heads, he acquires honour and celebrity in his tribe, as the destroyer of two foes at once.

As to the marriages of this wild nation; when a rich man has made a contract of marriage, he gives four or five head of *gayals* (the cattle of the mountains) to the father and mother of the bride, whom he carries to his own house: her parents then kill the *gayals*, and, having prepared fermented liquors and boiled rice, with other eatables, invite the father, mother, brethren, and kindred of the bridegroom to a nuptial entertainment. When a man of small property is inclined to marry, and a mutual agreement is made, a similar method is followed in a lower degree: and a man may marry any woman, except his own mother. If a married couple live cordially together, and have a son, the wife is fixed and irremoveable; but, if they have no son, and especially if they live together on bad terms, the husband may divorce his wife and marry another woman.

They have no idea of heaven or hell, the reward of good, or the punishment of bad actions; but they profess a belief, that when a person dies, a certain spirit comes and seizes his soul, which he carries away; and that whatever the spirit promises to give at the instant when the body dies, will be found and enjoyed by the dead; but that, if any one should take up the corse and carry it off, he would not find the treasure.

The food of this people consists of elephants, hogs, deer, and other animals; of which, if they find the carcasses or limbs in the forests, they dry and eat them occasionally.

When they have resolved on war, they send spies before hostilities are begun, to learn the stations and strength of the enemy, and the condition of the roads; after which they march in the night; and two or three hours before daylight, make a sudden assault with swords, lances, and arrows. If their enemies are compelled to abandon their station, the assailants instantly put to death all the males and females who are left behind, and strip the houses of all their furniture; but, should their adversaries, having gained intelligence of the intended assault, be resolute enough to meet them in battle, and should they find themselves over-matched, they speedily retreat and quietly return to their own habitations. If at any time they see a star very near the moon, they say, "to-night we shall undoubtedly be attacked by some enemy;" and they pass that night under arms with extreme vigilance. They often lie in ambush in a forest near the path where their foes are used to pass and repass, waiting for the enemy with different sorts of weapons, and killing every man or woman who happens to pass by. In this situation, if a leech, or a worm, or a snake should bite one of them, he bears the pain in perfect silence;

and whoever can bring home the head of an enemy which he has cut off, is sure to be distinguished and exalted in his station. When two hostile tribes appear to have equal force in battle, and neither has hopes of putting the other to flight, they make a signal of pacific intentions, and, sending agents reciprocally, soon conclude a treaty; after which they kill several head of *gayals*, and feast on their flesh, calling on the sun and moon to bear witness of the pacification: but if one side, unable to resist the enemy, be thrown into disorder, the vanquished tribe is considered as tributary to the victors, who every year receive from them a certain number of *gayals*, wooden dishes, weapons, and other acknowledgment of vassalage. Before they go to battle, they put a quantity of roasted *alus* (esculent roots like *potatoes*) and paste of rice-flour into the hollow of bamboos, and add to them a provision of dry rice, with some leathern bags full of liquor: then they assemble and march with such celerity, that in one day they perform a journey ordinarily made by letter-carriers in three or four days, since they have not the trouble and delay of dressing victuals. When they reach the place to be attacked, they surround it in the night, and, at early dawn, enter it, putting to death both young and old, women and children, except such as they chuse to bring away captive. They put the heads which they cut off into leathern bags; and if the blood of their enemies be on their hands they take care not to wash it off. When, after this slaughter, they take their own food, they thrust a part of what they eat into the mouths of the heads which they have brought away, saying to each of them, 'Eat, quench thy thirst, and satisfy thy appetite. As thou hast been slain by my hand, so may thy kinsmen be slain by my kinsmen!' During their journey, they have usually two such meals; and every watch, or two watches, they send intelligence

of their proceedings to their families. When any of them sends word that he has cut off the head of an enemy, the people of his family, whatever be their age or sex, express great delight, making caps and ornaments of red and black ropes; then filling some large vessels with fermented liquors, and decking themselves with all the trinkets they possess, they go forth to meet the conqueror, blowing large shells and striking plates of metal, with other rude instruments of music. When both parties are met they show extravagant joy, men and women dancing and singing together; and if a married man has brought an enemy's head, his wife wears a head-dress with gay ornaments, the husband and wife alternately pour fermented liquor into each other's mouths, and she washes his bloody hands with the same liquor which they are drinking; thus they go revelling, with excessive merriment to their place of abode; and, having piled up the heads of their enemies in the court-yard of their chieftain's house, they sing and dance round the pile; after which they kill some *gayals* and hogs with their spears, and, having boiled the flesh, make a feast of it, and drink the fermented liquor. The richer men of this race fasten the heads of their foes on a bamboo, and fix it on the graves of their parents; by which act they acquire great reputation. He who brings back the head of a slaughtered enemy, receives presents from the wealthy of cattle and spirituous liquors; and if any captives are brought alive, it is the prerogative of those chieftains who were not in the campaign, to strike off the heads of the captives. Their weapons are made by particular tribes; for some of them are unable to fabricate instruments of war.

In regard to their civil institutions, the whole management of their household affairs belong to the women; while the men are employed in clearing fo-

rests, building huts, cultivating land, making war, or hunting game and wild beasts. Five days (they never reckon by months or years) after the birth of a male child, and three days after that of a female, they entertain their family and kinsmen with boiled rice and fermented liquor; and the parents of the child partake of the feast. They begin the ceremony with fixing a pole in the court-yard; and then, killing a *gayal* or a hog with a lance, they consecrate it to their deity; after which all the party eat the flesh and drink liquor, closing the day with dancing and with songs. If any one among them be so deformed, by nature or by accident, as to be unfit for the propagation of his species, he gives up all thought of keeping house, and begs for his subsistence, like a religious mendicant, from door to door, continually dancing and singing. When such a person goes to the house of a rich and liberal man, the owner of the house usually strings together a number of white and red stones, and fixes one end of the string on a long cane, so that the other end may hang down to the ground; then, paying a kind of superstitious homage to the pebbles, he gives alms to the beggar; after which he kills a *gayal* and a hog, and some other quadrupeds, and invites his tribe to a feast. The giver of such an entertainment acquires extraordinary fame in the nation: and all unite in applauding him with every token of honour and reverence.

When a *Cuci* dies, all his kinsmen join in killing a hog and a *gayal*; and, having boiled the meat, pour some liquor into the mouth of the deceased, round whose body they twist a piece of cloth by way of shroud. All of them taste the same liquor, as an offering to his soul; and this ceremony they repeat at intervals for several days. Then they lay the body on a stage, and, kindling a fire under it, pierce it with a spit, and

dry it: when it is perfectly dried, they cover it with two or three folds of cloth; and, enclosing it in a little case within a chest, bury it under ground. All the fruits and flowers that they gather within a year after the burial, they scatter on the grave of the deceased; but some bury their dead in a different manner, covering them first with a shroud, then with a mat of woven reeds, and hanging them on a high tree. Some, when the flesh is decayed, wash the bones, and keep them dry in a bowl, which they open on every sudden emergence; and fancying themselves at a consultation with the bones, pursue whatever measures they think proper, alledging, that they act by the command of their departed parents and kinsmen. A widow is obliged to remain a whole year near the grave of her husband, where her family bring her food: if she die within the year, they mourn for her; if she live, they carry her back to her house, where all her relations are entertained with the usual feast of the *Cuci*.

If the deceased leave three sons, the eldest and the youngest share all his property, but the middle son takes nothing: if he have no sons, his estate goes to his brothers; and if he have no brothers, it escheats to the chief of the tribe.

NOTE.

A party of *Cuci* visited the late CHARLES CROFTES, Esq. at *Jafarabad* in the spring of 1776, and entertained him with a dance: they promised to return after their harvest, and seemed much pleased with their reception.