

At sacred spots, such as Benares, one hundred thousand men are often seen assembled on the banks of the Ganges, especially at the time of an eclipse. As soon as the shadow of the earth touches the moon, the whole mass, upon a certain signal given, plunge at once into the stream; and, from the pressure of the water, a mighty wave rolls towards the opposite shore, which sometimes upsets boats filled with people. When all is over, the poor people get out of the water, and return home, under the delusive idea of having obtained remission of sin and perfect purity. The sins which are afterwards committed run over to a new account, which is to be cleared off at their next visit. In performing these ceremonies, not the least idea of a deeper or symbolical meaning enters the mind of the Hindu—the Shasters teach nothing of the kind; no, the river is a god personified—it is the WATER which cleanses, sanctifies, and raises the soul to heaven. The mind has been petrified by the religion which ascribes divine virtue to visible and material things.

The Ganges is the dying-bed and the grave of the Hindu. He is very anxious to breathe out his soul on its banks, in order that his last sins may be blotted out by the sight of its water. When the patient appears to approach death, he is removed from the circle of his friends, and carried away. Let the heat be parching, or the wind blow cold, the dying man is set down on the river's brink, being, when poor, sometimes barely covered with a rag.

I have often been a spectator of this revolting scene. Once, I remember two sons prepared their aged father for death. It was a morning in January, when the piercing northerly wind is severely felt in Bengal. They poured several basins full of water over his head; and then they placed the shivering body in the stream, and rubbed the upper part of it with mud, at the same time calling the names Gunga, Ram, Narayan, in his ears. The sight of the dying father went through my heart; but this is to die happily, in the opinion of the Hindus. The Shasters promise him all the glories of Shiva's heaven; he will shine there brighter than a thousand suns; and millions of virgins are standing ready for his service, with coaches and plankeens in abundance. Surely the shores of the Ganges belong to "the dark places of the earth, which are full of the habitations of cruelty."

Once a wicked Brahman died, and Yama, the god of the infernal regions, took him into hell. His corpse was, as is usual, burned; a crow flew away with one of his bones, and let it fall into the Ganges; no sooner had it reached the water, than his soul left hell, riding in a splendid chariot to heaven. "Truly," said an excellent missionary, with the River Ganges in his sight, "no tyrant has ever brought greater misery over the earth, than those religious legislators have done who made a god of that river." Millions, are annually, drawn away from their homes; fornication, and other crimes are committed by the pilgrims on the way; and hundreds and thousands are dragged from a dry and clean dying-bed, to breathe out their lives in this watery grave. The dying person often sees the stake erected on which his corpse is to be burned: nor is the body allowed to get cold; but as soon as life is extinct, it is put on the pile, and the fire kindled. Instances are not rare, when the body was not really dead, and when it rose up, as the flame began to scorch it. In such case the Hindus believe a bad spirit has entered the corpse, and knock it down with bamboos. The skull, which cannot be consumed in the fire, must be crushed by the nearest relative, that the soul may escape. In performing this dreadful operation he often sprinkles his garment with the brains, which have become liquid in the fire; the ashes are then thrown into the river. The poorer classes make far less ceremony, and throw the body in as it is, and frequently it is again cast on the beach. I have seen dogs, jackals, and vultures, fighting for and devouring the corpses, and crows sitting on the floating carcasses, tearing off the flesh. In times when fever and cholera prevail in large towns, hundreds and thousands of bodies are daily and weekly thrown into the river, and the fires on which they are consumed continue burning day and night: in those seasons the shores of the Ganges resemble a charnel-house.

One day witnessed on the shores of this river a striking contrast between Christianity and Hindunism. On walking along the banks near the town of Colgong, I discovered a monument in memory of the child of a British officer. During his passage down the river, from a distant station, his infant died, and he had to perform the mournful duty of burying the body on the shore, desecrated by heathen abominations. The following epitaph, which I read on the tombstone, called forth my deep sympathy—

"Dear little babe, thy spirit's fled,  
Thy tender frame lies here,  
And o'er thy loved remains we shed  
The bitter, bitter tear;  
But Faith within the Saviour's arms  
Views thee removed from pain,  
And Faith the sting of Death disarms,  
And says "We'll meet again;"  
When we through Christ shall be like thee—  
Heirs of a blest eternity."

Shortly afterwards, I saw near the same spot two Hindus carrying the body of their deceased or dying relative to the river side. They deposited it on the sand, and walked several times round it, making various ceremonies. One of the men then laid hold of the head, and another of the feet, and having walked slowly into the water, and torn off the cloth in which it was rapped up, they flung the corpse into the stream; they then washed their hands, and walked away in sullen apathy.

Suicide is thought peculiarly meritorious when committed near the river. The wife belongs to her husband, even after his death, and great is her sanctity if she follow him immediately on his disease; hence the suttee, or the burning of widows with the bodies of their husbands; but this inhuman custom has been abolished by a law enacted by the East India Government. There are, according to an anatomical sketch of the Shasters, thirty-eight millions of hairs on the human body. The widow who allows herself to be burned will dwell as many years with her husband in heaven. In most instances the poor creatures are said to have been persuaded to it by the Brahmins. Many have jumped down from the pile as soon as the flames touched them, but have been forcibly thrown into the fire again.

In holy places where two rivers meet, suicides by drowning are frequently committed. Leprous people kill themselves by having a grave dug on the banks; a fire is kindled therein, and the poor wretch throws himself into it. By this means he hopes to acquire the merit of entering into a healthy body at his next transmigration.

And who can number the crowd of innocent babes who were sacrificed to Gunga, before the Government made it a capital crime? At a great festival in the island of Gunga Sagor, near the mouth of the Ganges, hundreds of mothers, who had made the cruel vow, threw their little ones into the water, to be devoured by sharks and alligators. One thing is certain—so long as Hindunism exists, human sacrifices will never be entirely abolished, though the government may continue to issue orders against it. Many a cruel mother is yet throwing away her helpless babe to the jackals at night, especially if it be a girl.

From a Review of Eliza Cook's Poems.  
THE GRANDFATHER'S STICK.

'Twas as bonnie an ash-staff as ever was seen  
In the hands of a pilgrim or paths of a wood;  
'Twas as tough as the bow of Ulysses, I ween;  
Its polish was high and its fibre was good.

'Twas the grandfather's stick—it was his stick alone—  
Of its forty years service how proudly he'd tell;  
'Twas all very just—he might CALL it his own,  
But every one else seemed to claim it as well.

'Twas his when the soft Sabbath chimes floated by,  
When the sun might be hot or the mud might be thick;  
The church was up-hill, and the youngsters would fly  
To carry his prayer-book, and find him his stick.

'Twas his when they coax'd him for wickets or bat,  
Now pleading with tears, and now trusting a laugh;  
'Twas not half-a-mile to the village—and that  
He could manage right well with the help of his staff.

But often he wanted his faithful supporter,  
When as often 'twas asked for and sought for in vain;  
Perhaps Master Dick had it down by the water,  
Or the young ones had carried it out in the lane.

'Twas not a whit safer for all the close hiding,  
For corners were peeped in and cupboards explored;  
Till some urchin came shouting, careering, and riding  
On his grandfather's stick like a tournament lord.

There were sticks in abundance, from bamboo to oak,  
But every hand singled out that from the rest;  
For business or fun that old staff was the one,  
For all times and all purposes that was the best.

The herd-boy, perchance, had to cross the bleak waste,  
When the sky had no star, and the winter blast wailed;  
His eye lost its light, and his red lips turned white,  
While 'twas easy to see that his rude spirit quailed.

He thought of the murdered ghost haunting the spot,  
Of the gibbett's loose beams—and the boy's heart turned sick,  
But half of the soul-thrilling fear was forgot  
If he might but take with him the grandfather's stick.

"Look, Susan, the tulips!" was cried in alarm;  
"See! see! the old sow's in the garden—quick! quick!"  
And the very next moment found Susan's strong arm  
Belabouring Bess with the grandfather's stick.

When the dust-laden carpets are hung on the line,  
And brave endgels were chosen—the strong and thick;  
It would not take Sibylline art to divine  
That among them was always the grandfather's stick.

A branch of the pear-tree hung drooping and wide,  
And the youngsters soon joined in the pilfering trick;  
'This, this will just reach all the ripest!" they cried,  
As they scampered away with the grandfather's stick.

Rich autumn came on, and they roved far and near,  
With the sun on each cheek and red stain on each mouth;  
They basked in the rays of the warm harvest days  
Till their faces were tinged with the glow of the south.

Luscious berries and nuts formed the vineyard they sought,  
And branches were highest where fruit was most thick;  
Hooks and crooks of all sizes were theirs, but none caught  
The tall bramble so well as the grandfather's stick.

Full often they left the long willow behind,  
The dandified cane was forgotten and lost;  
What matter? who cared? not a soul seemed to mind  
The pains in the cutting, the shilling it cost:

But that old bit of ash, let it fall where it might,  
In the briar-grown dell, or the nettled-bed's mound,  
Every eye was intent, every heart in a fright—  
For they dared not go home if that stick were not found.

Old winter stepped forth, and the waters were still,  
The bold hearts were bounding along on the slide;  
And the timid one ventured, all trembling and chill,  
If he had but the grandfather's stick by his side.

But the grandfather waned from the earth day by day,  
Hoards must be opened and treasures must fall;  
No selfish heart watched o'er his "passing away,"  
Yet that stick was the coveted relic by all.

Serenely the old man went down to his grave,  
Looking on to a future with faith, hope, and joy;  
But ere the flame died in the socket, he gave  
His favourite stick to his favourite boy.

That boy was a spendthrift, all reckless and gay,  
Keeping nought but a warm heart and fair honest name;  
He was wild in his home—a few years rolled away,  
He was out in the world, but the MAN was the same.

He parted from all, from his land and his gold,  
But, with wealth or without, it was all one to Dick;  
The same merry laugh lit his face when he told  
That he'd nothing more left save his grandfather's stick.

The merry laugh still echoed out, though he found  
That friends turned their backs when money was spent:  
He sung "The world's wide, and I'll travel it round,"  
And far from his kindred the wanderer went.

He lives and yet laughs in the prodigal's part;  
But whatever his fortune—wherever his land,  
There's a lock of white hair hanging close to his heart,  
And an ash staff, the grandfather's stick, in his hand.

From Lyell's North America.  
NIAGARA.

We first came in sight of the Falls of Niagara when they were about three miles distant. The sun was shining full upon them—no building in view—nothing but the green wood, the falling water, and the white foam. At that moment they appeared to be more beautiful than I had expected, and less grand; but after several days, when I had enjoyed a nearer view of the two cataracts, had listened to their thundering sound, and gazed on them for hours from above and below, and had watched the river foaming over the rapids, then plunging headlong into the dark pool—and when I had explored the delightful island which divides the falls, where the solitude of the ancient forest is still unbroken, I at last learned by degrees to comprehend the wonders of the scene, and to feel its full magnificence. Early in the morning after our arrival, I saw from the window of our hotel, on the American side, a long train of vapoury clouds hanging over the deep chasm below the falls. They were slightly tinted by the rays of the rising sun, and blown slowly northwards by a gentle breeze from the pool below the cataract, which was itself invisible from this point of view. No fog was rising from the ground, the sky was clear above; and as the day advanced, and the air grew warm, the vapour all disappeared. This scene reminded me of my first view of Mount Etna from Gatania, at sunrise in the autumn of 1828 when I saw dense volumes of steam issuing from the summit of the highest crater in a clear blue sky, which, at the height of more than two miles above the sea, assumed at once the usual shape and hues of clouds in the upper atmosphere. These, too, vanished before noon, as soon as the sun's heat increased. Etna presents us not merely with an image of the power of subterranean heat, but a record also of the vast period of time during which that power has been exerted. A majestic mountain has been produced by volcanic action, yet the time of which the volcano forms the register, however vast, is found by geologists to be of inconsiderable amount, even in the modern annals of the earth's history. In like manner the Falls of Niagara teach us not merely to appreciate the power of moving water, but furnish us at the same time, with data for estimating the enormous lapse of ages during which that force has operated. A deep and long ravine has been excavated, and the river has required ages to accomplish the task, yet the same region affords evidence that the sum of these ages is as nothing, and as the work of yesterday, when compared to the antecedent periods, of which there are monuments in the same district.

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS.  
A SKETCH OF HIS LIFE.

Christopher Columbus was of lowly parents, but his mathematical education was assiduously and successfully secured. At fourteen years of age he was engaged in nautical business: Charts and Maps were his delight. A high poetic temperament beat in him. His whole soul laboured with one thought. His eyes followed the setting sun, then gazed on the stars which stood over it, and he seemed to dwell in those far-off confines of enchanted beauty and ex haustless wealth. To bear Christianity to those strangers whom he loved as brethren, was the inward fire which animated all his hopes. He emulated not the oppressor's rod—he sought not the buccaneer's treasure. He would lead the old world to the new for the benefit of both. He erred, and more than once. His errors became occasions of hateful wrongs; but his judgement, though misinformed, was ever sincerely and nobly pure. His intentions were perverted; but in their native consciousness they were full of philanthropy. What man, what historic man, stands out in such dimensions of greatness? Who has had an equal due upon his species? His name is not graven on a pillar, but on the keystone of the arch which spans and binds the earth! What countries might have won the honor of that true hero, and of his illustrious expedition!—The little Adriatic republic spurned its ship-boy. Portugal then received the proffer of his service but opposed all his plans, though having learnt them, it meanly attempted to anticipate their execution. Venice was the next state at whose door the adventurer knocked. Had it opened to him—had it but smiled upon him—what a jewel had shone in its ducal bonnet! How truly might it have wedded the sea! What a dowry would have been exchanged for its affianced ring! Britain had well nigh grasped the renown.—Henry VII. graciously received Bartholomew, the brother of Columbus; but there was delay, he being taken captive on his way thither, and by long imprisonment was prevented pleading the case. In the mean while, another determination was taken. He entered Spain, and endeavoured to enlist it in the solution of the stupendous problem. The war with Granada was at its height. The mind of the nation was too agitated for cool calculation. The sovereigns submitted the application to a council of examination. The report was discouraging. Five years delay and trifling had almost broken his heart. He had resolved to seek the favor of Castile no more, disgusted with the intrigue of Cordova, and the stolidity of Salamanca. He was now on his way to France, whose king had written to him during these trials of his hope.

The procrastination had consumed him, but his confidence he had never lost. A sudden change took place in his affairs. He was invited to the camp at Grenada, rather to Santa Fe, that city which superseded the camp, the work of only three months, that rose with solid masonry and watch-tower, braving the metropolis and fortress of ages. He arrived in time to witness the subversion of the Moorish state: he saw all the ceremonies of that exchange of sceptres and religions. He then stood a spectator in that crowd—few knew him; yet of all that thronged array of title, wealth, and power, who could compete with him? Could that great host be summoned back to earth, as it then gathered, who is the individual that we should first search out with an instinctive preference to all beside? Isabella was so moved by his arguments, that she avowed her readiness to pawn her jewels, if the treasury should prove insufficient for the undertaking. But the greatness of his character raised an apparently insurmountable obstacle. Others may read simply his vanity and his capacity in his terms. They were not likely to be conceded. He would not abate them. He challenged what he thought his rights. He spake as a creditor, and pointed to the debt. He was a sublime prophecy. He went forth on no forlorn hope or possible failure. The pauper, the mendicant, leading a motherless child by the hand, thankful for the food apportioned at the convent gate, projects for himself hereditary honors and possession, the fee of which lies in worlds yet to be substantiated and sought. All is present to him. He grasps his birth right. The realms are unfolded. The mines are upheaved. He is surrounded by kingdoms and spoil. A new world blesses him for throwing open its gate, and for entering it with Christianity. The wanderers belighted in his affections, unprovided with to-morrow's meal, scorned for his poverty, and still more for his rhapsody, exacts a price greater than the ransom of kings, and only less than their honors, while he has not a raft for the achievement on which all depends! We dwell on his lofty bearing at this crisis, when his spirit might have drooped, when his confidence might have tottered, as the augury of a supernatural inspiration. We behold, in the allowance of his demands, a marvellousness only short of their agency. His dignities are patented and his rewards, vested, here he has cleared a wave.

In Palos, a little port of Andalusia, is presently seen his humble craft. No gallant navy rides there—no tall admiral's galleons, are moored there. Two carravels, without a deck and a larger bark for stores, are all the allotted