

The custom of polygamy authorizes the Congoese to take as many wives as they judge proper. They are all slaves; nevertheless, when a Black takes to himself a young woman of equal or superior rank to his own, he cannot sell her. Over all others he enjoys this privilege, though he exercises it but very rarely. In domestic concerns the wives are equal. They have no marriage ceremonies—from the moment a man accepts of a young woman in that situation, he becomes her master, without the intervention of the priest. He lives indifferently with all his wives, and distributes his favors among them according to his fancy. Every woman, as we have already observed, lives in a separate house with her children. They commonly live near their husband, especially at the time of vintage. But during these periodical indispositions to which the female sex are subject, they are concealed from all eyes; for six days they are shut out of the society of every living being. If inadvertently or by other means, a woman in that situation happens to be seen by any person, the six days must be recommenced. Her companions bring her food to the door of the cottage, whence she takes it when the attendants are gone. As soon as she recovers, she daubs herself from head to foot with a red kind of earth or paint, in which state she remains till the dirt and moisture of the skin are absorbed by the paint; when she bathes, and comes out of the water blacker and more beautiful than ever.

The Congoese bury their dead; but they mourn a long time before they commit the body to the earth, and the day of the funeral terminates the mourning, and is consecrated to rejoicing. The interment is, therefore, not considered as a day of mourning, but of festivity.

Mourning with them consists in wearing an inferior robe, in suffering their hair and nails to grow, and in never washing themselves, so that when it lasts a considerable time, those who wear the garb have a most disgusting appearance. They are also, on these occasions, enjoined to abstain from brandy; but in this respect the law is not of sufficient obligation; their passion for spirits cannot be overcome. The precept says they shall not drink *malavou*; which word signifying both brandy and palm-wine, they get over the injunction, by abstaining from the latter, while they drink the former as often as they can get it.

A Congoese is no sooner dead, than his friends clothe him in his best apparel, and expose him to view on a bed of honour, placed in the midst of a great court, under a roof supported by posts, in the form of columns; the interior of the apartment they adorn in the best manner possible. His family and friends come and weep over him twice a day; and as brandy is given away upon these occasions, all who had but the slightest acquaintance with the deceased, come to shew their respect and attachment, exhibiting signs of sorrow and concern, with the hope of gaining in return, a few drops of the precious liquor. The author was so much struck with the scene, that he took pains to ascertain whether these persons actually shed tears, and found that they poured them forth with wonderful facility.

The wives of the deceased are ranged about the corpse, and pay the most profound respect to all those who come to mourn over it. The rich always leave behind them a present of fruit or other things. The ceremony is conducted by hired mourners, who walk round the shed under which the body is placed, making all kinds of gesticulations, raising their hands to heaven, and roaring out mournful elegies, demanding in their songs wherefore he left his family, and reproaching him on that account with every species of abuse with which their language can furnish them.—The burden of which song is repeated in chorus by all the visitors. The hired mourners perform at the same time a sort of dance, whirling round continually on one leg. As soon as a friend has made five or six turns

about the body, he retires to make way for another, having first recruited himself with brandy. This exercise lasts about two hours in the morning, and as long in the afternoon.

On the second day the body is removed to another building, and an image substituted in its place, to which the same honors continue to be paid, while other persons are employed in washing the corpse with an astringent or corrosive liquor, which soon brings it as white as chalk. It is then placed in a particular attitude; the face is turned to the west, the two knees are slightly bent, the left foot is raised backward, the right hand is shut and turned to the east, the left is open; the fingers, separated and bent, are turned to the west as if they were in the act of seizing a bird in its flight. In this position the body is left, and, by the assistance of a continual but gentle fire, it voids its intestines, and becomes as dry as parchment. When it is sufficiently blanched, they encrust it with a thick red earth; and when the whole is dry, they begin to cover it with clothes, putting on first coral and whatever is most precious. In proportion to the wealth of the deceased, are the number and finery of his clothes—and when a sufficient quantity is put on, a large pit is dug at a distance, at the bottom of which a house, without a covering, is made, of a size sufficient to contain the dead body. A day is fixed for the burial, which is to terminate the mourning, and the wives and fortune of the deceased pass immediately to the next heir.

On the appointed day the body is brought to the grave, and let down into the house made for it. For a certain time it is supplied with meat and drink; afterwards the earth is thrown in, leaving at the top only a few stones or other things, which may indicate that it is a place of burial.—They believe that the guardian spirit of the deceased perpetually hovers about the grave, and that he watches over it, lest it be violated; on this account, those passengers who have occasion to go near the asylums of the dead, pass by them with rapidity, turning their eyes another way with a superstitious terror, not doubting, that those who should approach too near the tombs would be infallibly killed.

An Extraordinary Character.

Letters from India furnish the following interesting account of an East India Adventurer. The first letter on this subject is dated Lucknow, Aug. 20, 1801.

George Thomas, an Irishman, ran away from a ship, of which he was cabin boy, on the Coromandel coast. He found his way to Hyderabad, the capital of Nizam, where he served as a private soldier. He did not like this service, and spurred on by the spirit of adventure, he crossed the Peninsula, and arrived at the Begum of Sumroo's, who has a country about 150 miles N. W. of Delhi. She took him into her service, and he obtained her favour and confidence. She married him to an adopted daughter of her own, and appointed him to the management of a province, the revenue of which he very soon nearly doubled. The expenses of his mistress exceeded her income. He felt himself sufficiently established to attempt a reform. She had many Frenchmen in her service, whom she supported at a great expence, and who were entirely useless to her. These Thomas intended to have reduced.—The Seiks at this time committing depredations upon the Begum's country, Thomas went to retaliate, which he had often before done with great advantage. During his absence, the Frenchmen found means to make his mistress believe that his plan was to take her country from her, and that for that reason he had wished for their dismissal.

She took the first opportunity of shewing Thomas the change of her sentiments towards him, by insulting his wife, while he was absent. He immediately returned; protected his wife, and left her (the Begum's) service. This was in 1795. He was then at Anopshere. He had not 500

rupees in the world; a proof of his honesty, for he had been for many years Collector of a Province which at first yielded 70,000 rupees, but which he doubled before he left it.—He now went into the service of a Mahratta Chief named Appa Row Cunda. This man ordered him to raise and form some corps, and gave some districts for the payment of them. The districts were unequal to the payment of his troops, but he managed to support them by the plunder he got during the continual state of warfare in which he was engaged. His chief was drowned; and being considerably in debt to Thomas, he kept possession, and at last made a property of the districts under his charge. He is a bold determined fellow. He augmented his troops; he formed, in fact, an army for himself; and by conquest he added to his original territory.—He has often been called in as an ally by the different contending powers in that quarter. On one occasion he was paid a subsidy of 50,000 rupees per month. His former mistress, some time after he left her, went to ruin, was imprisoned, and treacherously deprived of her country. He marched to her relief, and reinstated her.

During the last years he has been more bold, and made conquests upon a grander scale than before. His capital, which is one of the strongest places in India, is about 80 miles west of Delhi. It is called Hansee, and is laid down in some of the maps.—From this point he entered the Seik country, beat them wherever he could find them, and took possession of a country upon the banks of the Sutledge, yielding near two lacks of rupees per annum. The Sutledge is in all the maps; it is the first of the five rivers which form the country called Panjaub. The Mahrattas could not with indifference view the success of this enterprising adventurer. He was in their neighbourhood. They at first offered to take him and his corps into their service, but they could not settle the terms. They then ordered Gen. Perron, their Commander and Chief, to march against him. The General did not, it would appear, like his antagonist, for he settled with him upon his own terms. Thomas had then in the field 10,000 infantry, 1000 good cavalry, and 50 pieces of cannon, and he was not afraid of the Frenchmen. Some friends of mine have been long in the habits of corresponding with him. He has always given them a detail of his different operations; they are wonderful. Our Government cannot assist him; but I know Lord Mornington feels much interested for his success.

In one of his letters he proposes that we shall attack the Seiks, and he says very justly, that these people are the enemies both of the Mahrattas and English. All he desires is that our government will request the Mahrattas not to assist the Seiks.—He wants no money, no arms, no troops; and he engages, in three years, to deliver to the Company his whole army, and all that country called the Panjaub; yielding a revenue of two crores of rupees per annum. He will only require to be paid for his cannon. His ambition is to serve his country, and it is by this means he can do it.

The plan may be thought wild and impracticable by those unacquainted with the Seik nation and with Thomas. With the former I have done all I could to get acquainted; the latter, I believe, to be equal to any thing possible to be performed, and I am fully convinced he will accomplish all he has promised, if the Mahrattas do not interfere. The idea is a grand one. It may give to the nation countries upon the banks of the Indus not less valuable than those they possess upon the Ganges. It was the place where Alexander first saw and fought the armies of India. It is there where George Thomas proposes to plant the British colours.

OCTOBER, 1801.—George Thomas is now opposing the Mahrattas, and is nearly overpowered by the superiority of their resources; but he struggles hard, and hitherto success has attended him. If he succeeds in this contest he will bring about a re-

volution as extraordinary as any the world has yet seen. The last time I saw him, he was not worth 500 rupees, exclusive of his horse. He is now able to contend, and with some success, for no less than the throne of the Mogul. To his own vigorous conduct, to his own exertions and abilities, he owes every thing. He has been assisted by no friend—alone, and always surrounded by enemies. The Frenchman who now opposes him is high in the service of the Mahrattas. A few years ago he was a Cook at Calcutta! Such are the distinguished competitors who at present contend for the Imperial throne of Indostan!

FEB. 1802.—I left George Thomas contending with the Mahrattas for the empire of Hindostan. He fought several battles with them, in all of which he compelled them to retreat; but they were too numerous for him to gain any thing but a name by the victories he had obtained.—Finding that arms would not reduce him, they had recourse to means more certain, though less honourable, and they succeeded but too well. They bribed his chiefs, and, deserted by his army, he was obliged to fly to his strong-fortress. It was distant 100 miles. He reached it in one night, upon one horse. He was soon followed. The few men who remained with him fought bravely for some time, but his enemies subdued them by gold. He found it was in vain, and reluctantly he dictated terms of capitulation. He got 50,000 rupees for giving up his fort, and was besides permitted to carry off his property.

LONDON, October 7.

By the North mail of Monday we had the following unpleasant communication from Aberdeen:—“I have just time to inform you of a dreadful accident which happened here on Friday:—About a quarter before two o'clock, while the workmen were busily employed in completing the principal arch of the large bridge now building, to facilitate the entrance to the town from the south, the cooms by which the arch is supported gave way, and in an instant a great part of it fell in with a tremendous crash. The groans of the sufferers, buried under the ruins, the number of whom could not possibly be ascertained, were truly dreadful. People were immediately set to work to remove the stones and wood, seven persons were brought out, with their limbs terribly torn and mangled. Most of them were carried to the Infirmary; two of them have had each a leg cut off, but there are but faint hopes of their recovery. The sufferers are yet, as far as I have heard, all alive. Two gentlemen were on the top of the arch when it fell; they of course came down with it. One of them, providentially, escaped with little injury: the other had an arm broken, and was otherwise a good deal bruised. It is remarkable that of all the wood in the extensive arch, not a stick stood. Most of the arch has now been got down. These are the particulars that I have been able hastily to collect, but you must wait for accurate information.

Under the auspices of M. Fettes the late Lord Provost, and the Magistrates and Council, the following important improvements have been begun: The New Harbour and Wet Docks, at Leith, on a very large scale; the extension of the new Town to the Northward, betwixt Edinburgh and Leith, and the sewing out for Houses the beautiful Grounds of Bellevue, agreeable to an elegant plan. The number of houses now building, excites the astonishment and admiration of every person.

NOTICE.

ALL Persons having any demands against the Estate of Capt. John Oldham, late of Kingston, deceased, are requested to exhibit their accounts for settlement, within three months from the date hereof.—And those indebted to said Estate, are desired to make immediate payment to

JOSEPH DICKSON,
DAVID PICKETT,
Administrators.

Kingston, (K. C.) 17th Nov. 1802.