

THE
TRAVELS
OF
MIRZA ABU TALEB KHAN,
IN
ASIA, AFRICA, AND EUROPE,

DURING THE YEARS
1799, 1800, 1801, 1802, AND 1803.

WRITTEN BY HIMSELF, IN THE PERSIAN LANGUAGE.

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APPENDIX A.

See Vol. I. p. 189.

COLONEL SYMES returned to India in the year 1801, and early in the following year was again sent, by Marquis Wellesley, as Ambassador to the Court of Ava, between which and the British (Indian) Government a very serious misunderstanding had taken place : which circumstance, added to the intrigues of the French at that Court, rendered this negociation still more difficult than his former mission.

Such was the nature of this dispute, that his Birman Majesty was pleased to say, in public Court, that no other man but Colonel Michael Symes could have reconciled him to the English.

The abilities and zeal manifested on this

occasion induced Marquis Wellesley, some time after the return of the Embassy from Ava, to appoint Colonel Symes to a very high and important situation at the Court of Dehly; but severe illness obliged him to relinquish these flattering prospects, and to embark, in the end of 1803, for Europe.

When the unfortunate expedition under Sir John Moore was planned, Colonel Symes, who was then one of the assistants in the Quarter-master General's department, and in a bad state of health, relinquished his situation to take the command of the 76th regiment. He soon after embarked for Spain, under the command of General Baird, by whom Colonel Symes was employed to inspect the state of the Spanish armies. His reports on this subject have appeared in the account of that expedition. In the performance of this duty, Colonel Symes rode eighty miles post, over bad roads, in one day; which event, being followed by the harassing retreat to Corunna, so

completely exhausted his constitution, that he died two days after the troops had re-embarked.

It was during the interval between Colonel Symes's return from Ava, and his being appointed to Dehly, that Mirza Abu Taleb arrived in Calcutta. The latter lost no time in visiting his friend, and was for several months a frequent guest at his table; where the Translator of this Work had often the pleasure of meeting him, and of hearing him relate a number of anecdotes respecting his travels.

When the Colonel was appointed to Dehly, Abu Taleb requested to accompany him, and to be appointed his assistant: but this scheme having been frustrated by the Colonel's illness, he proceeded up the country, to his friend Mr. Augustus Brooke, at Benaras, through whose interest and recommendation he was appointed Collector of one of the districts of

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Bundecund; and died in that situation, in the year 1806.

As he left but little property, the East-India Company have generously settled a pension upon his wife and family.

APPENDIX B.

See Vol. I. p. 262.

THE following Tract, on the Liberties of the Asiatic Women, was written by Mirza Abu Taleb Khan, during his residence in England, and was translated by his friend and shipmate, Captain David Richardson, who, it is to be feared, has perished in one of the missing ships from India. It was published by the intelligent author and compiler, Mr. Dundas Campbell, in the Asiatic Annual Register of the year 1801.

VINDICATION *of the* LIBERTIES *of the* ASIATIC WOMEN.

BY MIRZA ABU TALEB KHAN.

ONE day, in a certain company, the conversation turned upon LIBERTY, in respect of which the ENGLISH consider their own customs the most perfect in the world. An English lady, addressing herself

to me, observed, that the women of Asia have no liberty at all, but live like slaves, without honour and authority, in the houses of their husbands; and she censured the men for their unkindness, and the women, also, for submitting to be so undervalued. However much I attempted, by various ways, to undeceive her, (and in truth, said I, the case is exactly the reverse, it is the European women who do not possess so much power,) yet it did not bring conviction to her mind. She however began to waver in her own opinion; and falling into doubt, requested of me to write something on the subject, the purport of which she might comprehend at one view, and be enabled to distinguish the truth from falsehood. Since the same wrong opinion is deeply rooted in the minds of all other Europeans, and has been frequently before this held forth, I considered it necessary to write a few lines concerning the privileges of the female sex, as established, both by law and custom, in Asia and in Europe; omitting whatever was common to both, and noticing what is principally peculiar to each, in the manner of comparison, that the distinction may be the more easily made, and the real state of the case become evident to those capable of discernment.

It must be first laid down as a general maxim, that, in social order, respect to the rules of equity and

politeness, and forbearance from injury, is a necessary condition; for, otherwise, the liberty of one would be destructive of the liberty of another: thus, if a person be at liberty to do with his own house what may endanger the safety of his neighbour's, this must be in direct opposition to the liberty of that neighbour; or if, in order to free himself from the inconveniences of the hot weather, he should visit his friends in his dressing-gown or night-shirt, although it would be ease and liberty to him, yet it would be sowing the seeds of ill-breeding: therefore the observance of these rules is essential.

Those things which make the liberty of the Asiatic women appear less than that of the Europeans, are, in my opinion, *six*.

The *first* is, "The little intercourse with men, and concealment from view," agreeably to law and their own habits; and this is the chief of these six; for it has been the cause of those false notions entertained by the European women, that the inclination of the Asiatic women leads them to walk out in the streets and market-places, but that their husbands keep them shut up, and set guards over the door. It may be here observed, that the advantages of this *little intercourse*, which prevents all the evils arising from the admittance of strangers, and affords so much time for

work and useful employments, are so very manifest, that they need not be enlarged upon; and besides, the practice, in London, of keeping the doors of the houses shut; and the contemptible condition of the Dutch at the Cape, are sufficient proofs. Notwithstanding this, the custom of the intercourse of the sexes is allowed in England, and it is owing both to the force of virtue and good manners generally to be found in the English, and to the apprehension of other greater inconveniences, the chief of which are four, as here mentioned, and whose effects are not felt in Asia. *One of these* is, the high price of things, and the small number of servants and rooms; for were there a separate house and table and equipage for the wife, the expense would be too great to be borne; and therefore, of necessity, both husband and wife eat their food, with their guests, in one place, sleep together in the same chamber, and cannot avoid being always in each other's company; contrary to the custom in Asia, where, by reason of the cheapness of work, the women have separate apartments for themselves, and have not to make their time and convenience suit that of their husbands; and when their particular friends are with them, they do not desire their husband's company for several days, but send his victuals to him in the *mur-dannah* (or male apartments); and, in like manner,

when the husband wishes to be undisturbed, he eats and sleeps in the *murdannah*.

A second cause is "The coldness of this climate, which requires exercise and walking, and the husband to sleep in the same bed with his wife: but concealment from view is incompatible with walking; and as for the second case, another cause is the want of room; for, otherwise, it is the natural disposition of mankind, when under distress and affliction of mind, to wish frequently for privacy and unrestraint, and sleep in a room alone."

A third cause is "The people here being all of one kind;" for, in this kingdom, placed in a corner of the globe where there is no coming and going of foreigners, the intercourse of the sexes is not attended with the consequences of a corruption of manners, as in Asia, where people of various nations dwell in the same city; and to allow the women such a liberty there, where there is such danger of corruption, would be an encroachment upon the liberty of the men, which (as shown in the beginning) is contrary to justice; and that a corruption of manners must ensue, where various kinds of people mix together, is too evident to require demonstration. Before the Mussulmans entered Hindustan, the women did not conceal themselves from view; and even yet, in all the Hindu

villages, it is not customary: and it is well known how inviolable the Hindus preserve their own custom, and how obstinately they are attached to them; but now so rigidly do the women in the great towns observe this practice of concealment from view, that the bride does not even show herself to her father-in-law, and the sister comes but seldom into the presence of her brother.

A fourth cause is "The necessity which the European women have to acquire experience in the affairs of the world, and in learning various arts, on account of the duty that belongs to them, to take part in their husband's business," which experience could not be obtained by keeping in concealment: whereas the duties of the Asiatic women, consisting only in having the custody of the husband's property, and bringing up the children, they have no occasion for such experience, or for laying aside their own custom of concealment. What has been just said, was to show that the Asiatic women have no necessity to expose their persons; but it must also be observed, that they have many reasons for preferring privacy. One is, the love of leisure, and repose from the fatigue of motion: a second is, the desire of preserving their honour, by not mixing with the vulgar, nor suffering the insults of the low and rude, who are always

passing along the streets ; a feeling in common with the wives of European noblemen, who, to preserve their dignity, are never seen walking in the streets ; and also with ladies in private life, who when walking out at night, and even in the day, are always attended by a male friend or servant to protect them. The notions which the European women have, that the women of Asia never see a man's face but their husband's, and are debarred from all amusement and society, proceed entirely from misinformation : They can keep company with their husband and father's male relations, and with old neighbours and domestics ; and at meals there are always many men and women of this description present ; and they can go in their palankeens to the houses of their relations, and of ladies of their own rank, even although the husbands are unacquainted ; and also to walk in gardens after strangers are excluded ; and they can send for musicians and dancers, to entertain them at their own houses ; and they have many other modes of amusement besides these mentioned.

The *second* is, "The privilege of the husband, by law, to marry several wives." This, to the European women, seems a grievous oppression ; and they hold those very cheap who submit to it. But, in truth, the cause of this law and custom is the nature of

the female sex themselves; which separates them from the husband, the several last months of pregnancy, and time of suckling; and besides these, the Asiatic women have many other times for being separate from their husbands. This privilege not being allowed by the English law, is indeed a great hardship upon the English husbands; whereas the Asiatic law permitting polygamy, does the husband justice, and wrongs not the wife; for the honour of the first and *equal* wife is not affected by it; those women who submit to marry with a married man, not being admitted into the society of ladies, as they are never of high or wealthy families, no man of honour ever allowing his daughter to make such a marriage. The mode in which these other wives live is this: they who are of a genteel extraction, have a separate house for themselves, like kept mistresses in England; and they who are not, live in the house of the equal wife, like servants, and the husband at times conveys himself to them in a clandestine manner. Besides, these wives cannot invade any of the rights of the equal wife; for although they and their children are by law equally entitled to inheritance, yet, since the equal wife never marries without a very large dowry settled upon her, all that the husband leaves goes to the payment of this dowry, and nothing remains for

his heirs. The opinion that the men of Asia have generally three or four wives, is very ill founded, for in common they have only one; out of a thousand, there will be fifty persons, perhaps, who have from one to two, and ten out of these who have more than two. The fear of the bad consequences of polygamy makes men submit with patience to the times of separation from the equal wife, as much the better way; for, from what I know, it is easier to live with two tigresses than two wives.

The *third* is, "The power of divorce being in the hands of the husband." This is ordained by law, but not practised; for if a great offence be the motive to divorce a wife, and if it be proved against her, she receives punishment by the order of the magistrate, or from the husband, with the concurrence of all her relations; and if the offence be of a trivial nature, such as a difference of temper and unsociability, the husband punishes her, by leaving the female apartments, and living in his own. But the reason for divorce being at the will of the husband, lies in the very justice of the law, and the distinction of the male sex over the female, on account of the greater share they take in the management of the world; for all the laborious work falls to their lot, such as carrying heavy burthens, going to war, repulsing enemies, &c.

and the women generally spend their lives in repose and quiet. Nevertheless, if the wife establishes a criminal offence against the husband, such as an unfair distribution of his time among his wives, or a diminution of the necessaries of life, she can obtain a divorce in spite of him.

The *fourth* is, "The little credit the law attaches to the evidence of women in Asia;" for, in a court of justice, every fact is proved by the testimony of two men; but if women be the witnesses, four are required. This does not arise from the superiority of the one over the other, but it is founded upon the little experience and knowledge women possess, and the fickleness of their dispositions.

The *fifth* is, "The Asiatic women having to leave off going to balls and entertainments, and wearing showy dresses and ornaments, after their husband's death." This is owing to their great affection for their husband's memory, and their own modes and habits; for there is nothing to prevent a woman's doing otherwise, or marrying a second husband, but the dread of exposing herself to the ridicule and censure of women of her own rank.

The *sixth* is, "The Asiatic daughters not having the liberty of choosing their husbands." On this head nothing need be said; for in Europe this liberty

is merely nominal, as, without the will of the father and mother, the daughter's choice is of no avail; and whatever choice they make for her, she must submit to; and in its effects, it serves only to encourage running away (as the male and female slaves in India do), and to breed coldness and trouble amongst the members of a family. But granting that such a liberty does exist in England, the disgrace and misery it must always entail is very evident. The choice of a girl just come from the nursery, and desirous by nature to get a husband, in an affair on which the happiness of her whole life depends, can neither deserve that respect nor consideration which is due to the choice of her parents, who have profited by experience, and are not blinded by passion.

But what the Asiatic women have more than the European, both by law and custom, may be ranked under *eight* heads.

First, " Their power over the property and children of the husband, by custom;" for the men of Asia consider the principal objects of marriage, after the procreation of their species for the worship of God, two things,—the one to have their money and effects taken care of, and the other to have their children brought up; so that they themselves, being left entirely disengaged of these concerns, may turn their whole

endeavours to the attainment of their various pursuits. The chief part, therefore, of whatever wealth they acquire, they give in charge to their wives ; and thus the women have it in their power to annihilate in one day the products of a whole life. Although this seldom happens, yet it is often the case, where the husband having amassed a large fortune in youth and power, has delivered it in charge to his wife, and requires it back in his old age and necessity, she does not allow him more than sufficient for his daily support, and lays the rest up, in a place of security, for the sake of her children. . And so great is the power they possess, as to the disposal of their children, that frequently they are brought up without any education, or die in childhood ; for the women, on account of their little sense, are never pleased to part with their children, by sending them to school, and to acquire experience by travelling ; and when they fall sick, they give them improper medicines, by the advice of their own confidants, or, from their softness of heart, indulge them in whatever it is the nature of the sick to take a longing for, and thus they cause their death.

Second, “ Their power, by custom, as to the marriage of their children, and choice of their religious faith ;” for if the husband wishes to give one of them in marriage to a person the wife disapproves of, the

match does not take place, but the other way it generally does. All the children, both male and female, from being mostly in the company of their mother, and looking upon her as their protector against their father, whom, on account of his wishing to have them educated, they consider their tormentor, follow the religious tenets of their mother, and remain perfect strangers to those of their father. It often happens, where the wife is a Shya, and the husband a Soony, the children, having been Shyas, from their own natural disposition and the instructions of the mother, speak disrespectfully of the chiefs of the Soony sect in their father's presence; and he, who all his life never bore such language from any person, but was even ready to put the speaker of it to death, has no redress, but patiently submitting to hear it from them, as, on account of their want of understanding, they are excusable; and thus, by frequent repetition, his attachment to his faith is shaken, and, in the course of time, he either entirely forsakes it, or remains but lukewarm in it.

Third, "Their authority over their servants;" for the servants of the male apartments, the keeping and changing of whom are in the hands of the husband, through fear of exposing themselves to the displeasure or complaints of the wife, when she finds

a proper opportunity, by their committing some fault, which servants are continually doing, are more obedient to her than to their own master; and the servants of the zenana, whom the wife has the care of retaining or turning off, stand so much in awe of their mistress, that many of them pass their whole lives in the zenana, without ever once coming into the presence of the husband: some of them never perform any service for him at all; and others, who do, enter not into discourse with him: and the women are so obstinate in this respect, their husbands never can turn off one of these servants, but his very complaint against them is a recommendation in their favour; and his recommendation has the effect of complaint, by subjecting them to their mistress's resentment. Contrary to this is the manner of the European ladies, who have not their own will with their children and servants, but live more like free and familiar guests in their husband's houses: and the household establishment and equipage being in common to both, if any part, as the carriage for example, is previously employed by the one, the other has to wait till it is disengaged. Of this there is no doubt, that if a quarrel ensues between an English husband and wife, the wife has to leave the house, and seek her dinner either at her father's or a friend's;

whereas in Asia, it is the husband that has to go out; for frequently the utensils of cookery are not kept in the male apartments.

Fourth, "The freedom, by custom, of the Asiatic women from assisting in the business of the husband, or service of his guests;" whereas this is generally the duty of European wives, whether their husbands be of a genteel business, such as jewellery, mercery, or perfumery, or the more servile ones: I have seen many rise from their dinner, to answer the demands of a purchaser: and although all these duties are not required of the ladies, yet some, especially the entertaining the guests, carving and helping the dishes at table, and making the tea and coffee, are generally performed by them. Now the Asiatic ladies have no such duties at all, but live in the manner before described.

Fifth, "The greater deference the Asiatic ladies find paid to their humours, and a prescriptive right of teasing their husbands by every pretext," which is considered as constituting an essential quality of beauty; for if a wife does not put these in practice, but is submissive to her husband's will in every thing, her charms very soon lose their brilliancy in his eyes. Thus, when a wife goes to visit her father, she will not return to her husband, till he has come himself

several times to fetch her, and been as often vexed by her breaking her promise; and every day when dinner is served, by pretending to be engaged at the time, she keeps her husband waiting, and does not come till the meat has grown cold; and in the same manner at bed-time;—for returning quickly from their father's house is considered as a sign of fondness for the husband, which, in their opinion, looks very ill; and coming soon to dinner they think betrays the disposition of a hungry beggar. In these, and such like, the husband has nothing for it but patience; nay, it ever pleases him. I have known of many beautiful women, constant in their affection, and obedient to their husbands night and day, whom, for not having these qualities, the husbands have quickly tired of, and unjustly deserted, for the sake of plain women who possessed them.

Sixth, “The greater reliance placed by the Asiatic husbands on their wives' virtue, both from law and custom.” For as to the European ladies, although they can go out of doors, and discourse with strangers, yet this is not allowed, unless they have a trusty person along with them, either of the husband's or the father's; and sleeping out all night is absolutely denied them,—contrary to the way of the Asiatic ladies, who, when they go to the house of a lady of

their acquaintance, though their husbands be entire strangers, are not attended by any person of the husband's or father's, and they spend not only one or two nights in that house, but even a whole week; and in such a house, although the master is prohibited entering the apartments where they are, yet the young men of fifteen, belonging to the family or relations, under the name of children, have free access, and eat with and enter into the amusements of their guests.

Seventh, " Their share in the children, by law." For if a divorce happens, the sons go to the father, and the daughters to the mother; contrary to the custom here, where, if a divorce takes place, the mother, who for twenty years may have toiled and consumed herself in bringing up her children, has to abandon all to the father, and, full of grief and affliction, leave his house.

Eighth, " The ease, both by law and custom, with which the wife may separate herself from her husband, when there may be a quarrel between them, without producing a divorce." Thus the wife, in an hour's time after the dispute, sets off with the children and her property to the house of her father or relations, and until the husband makes her satisfaction she does not return: and this she can always do, without a moment's delay.

Besides these eight, as above noticed, of the perior advantages the Asiatic women enjoy over European, there are many others, here omitted brevity's sake. What has been said, is enough people of discernment. Farewell.

I'll fondly *place on either eye,*
The man that can to this reply."

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