

**THE VIRGIN WIDOW; OR,
THE TRIUMPHS OF GOSPEL
TRUTH OVER HINDU
ASCETIC SUPERSTITION**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649545193

The Virgin Widow; Or, the Triumphs of Gospel Truth over Hindu Ascetic Superstition by W. Hickey

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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W. HICKEY

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THE VIRGIN WIDOW;

OR,

THE TRIUMPH OF GOSPEL TRUTH

OVER

HINDU ASCETIC SUPERSTITION.

BY

A CHRISTIAN MISSIONARY.

L. H. Wickes

"Rous'd by affliction's chastening might
To energies more calmly bright,
Like the wild harp of airy sigh,
Woke by the storm to harmony,
[She far] in mountain holds hath sought
A refuge for unconquer'd thought,
A charter'd home, where freedom's child,
Might rear her altars in the wild,
And fix her quenohless torch on high,
A beacon for eternity."

MRS. HEMANS

LONDON:
JOHN SNOW, 35, PATERNOSTER ROW.

1857.

147. d. 24.

TO
PETER CARSTAIRS, ESQ.,
MADRAS.

MY DEAR MR. CARSTAIRS,

That you have been a zealous and valued friend to our community for many years, is thankfully acknowledged by multitudes in each of the three Presidencies of Bengal, Madras, and Bombay. The *Madras Widows' and Orphans' Fund* will be a lasting monument of your active benevolence and your enterprising and successful public spirit.

Permit me, as a friend, to add to the general tribute of respect and esteem for your virtues, private and public, by allowing the dedication to you of this Poem—a humble offering in the service of God.

Your Missionary spirit is as well known as is your public spirit: and your piety, I flatter myself, will approve of my humble endeavours to awaken sympathy for the perishing heathen, by exposing their superstitions in a legend which indicates the triumph

of divine truth over such religious error as is still found influencing the Hindu mind, and "bringing it into captivity to the law of sin," even in the purest forms of their pietism.

Wishing you, my dear Mr. Carstairs, a safe and a prosperous voyage to England, and with sincere prayers for your happiness,

I remain,

Your obliged and faithful Friend,

WILLIAM HICKEY,
Missionary, S. P. G. F. P.

Bethel, Dindigul,
7th February, 1855.

PREFACE.

Few have trodden the classic scenes of India to collect the flowers of poesy growing there in rich luxuriance and variety, but which have failed to attract the genius of Europe.

India is indeed full of interesting and heart-stirring legends, and its grand, its variegated scenery accords well with the sublimest and the tenderest sentiments of the poet. Would that there were many more conversant with its hidden treasures of literature, and who could give the world the means of appreciating the sublime, the thrilling poetry of the East!

A dim mist of religious pretension overcasts this sunny region, as if the cloud of superstition were needful to obscure the moral atmosphere, or that sensible objects should be invested with greater attractiveness by refraction, and spiritual things derive importance from imposing mythology. Hindu mythology consecrates every hill and dale, every fountain and river, every wood and plain. There are gods many and goddesses

many; the whole length and breadth of the peninsula is hallowed and enchanted ground, and the people have their minds stored up with legends of their tutelary divinities, which influence them both at home and abroad.

But the most startling form of their religious *εθουσιασμος* is found in the retired contemplation of *recluses*. The rigid, self-denying vow of the Yogi is *intense and all-excluding*. It places him above the requisitions of society, it severs his connection with a common humanity, and it renders him indifferent to cold and heat, to hunger and nakedness.

The following passages from a prize essay, of the Rev. Jos. Mullens, of Calcutta, will afford needful information to some of the readers of this poem:—

“The Yogi must consider everything unreal except Brahma. The casting away of all desires must necessarily precede the knowledge of the supreme soul. He must exclude from his mind every object which does not refer to Brahma. He must endure cold and heat without knowing a difference between them. Gold, iron, and stones are the same to him. He plants his seat upon a spot that is undefiled. There he should sit with his mind fixed on one object alone in the exercise of his devotion for the purification of his soul. . . . He is compared to a lamp standing in a place

without wind, which waveth not. Wisdom inculcates exemption from attachment and affection for children, wife and home, and a dislike to the society of men. The moment the soul knows Brahma, it overcomes death and sins, and, freed from all earthly loves and desires, turns itself to its own nature. Upon the death of the body, the soul of him who has obtained the knowledge of Brahma proceeds immediately to a reunion with the supreme, in whom it is entirely absorbed. The name and form equally cease."—(*Vide Mr. Mullen's Authorities.*)

Such is the highest and most subtle form of fanaticism in India. Its insinuating influence extends even to the tender sex, some of whom are driven into it by persecution of a peculiar character. Chastity, like the hedgehog, thus protects herself by a sort of intense concentration of the noblest powers of mind, which present only hostile points to the bold hand that would molest her.

The Yogi's life is abstraction, and his death (as he vainly hopes) will be absorption into the divine essence. This species of self-renunciation has something in it which, to the ignorant, is very imposing and awful. But, alas, it is the delusion of religious phrensy, which, when it is most intense and most repulsive to earthly solicitations, is most unlike the truth of God, and—

"Wears a shadow cast from bell."

Nevertheless, there is poetry in this kind of high-wrought fanaticism, and the imaginative pen may be tempted to "turn it to shape," and give to it "a local habitation and a name."

As every work has a design, our attempt is to exalt Christianity, by placing it in juxtaposition with the most plausible and the most abstract form of Hindu superstition, and we conceive this may be effected best by exhibiting the spirit of Yogiism in the person of a youthful female. Woman's passions, though soft and attractive, are at the same time ardent and resolute. Her firmness is equal to her patience, and her fortitude is the guard and support of her virtues. Indeed woman, constitutionally, is more fervent than man, and her enthusiasm, as an ascetic, will be more urgent and aspiring, when her soul is given up to the high and abstract contemplation which leads to absorption in the supreme soul of the universe.

We can testify to the fact of having seen a female Yogi, as we have described her in the first canto, and therefore we feel no hesitation in exposing the *most attractive form of superstition*, with becoming regard to conventional ideas of decorum. The religious Hindu entertains no sentiments like ours when he discards his earthly connections, and, in a state of nudity, dedicates his life to his god. This is the highest and most approved species of Vedanti pietism. We should