

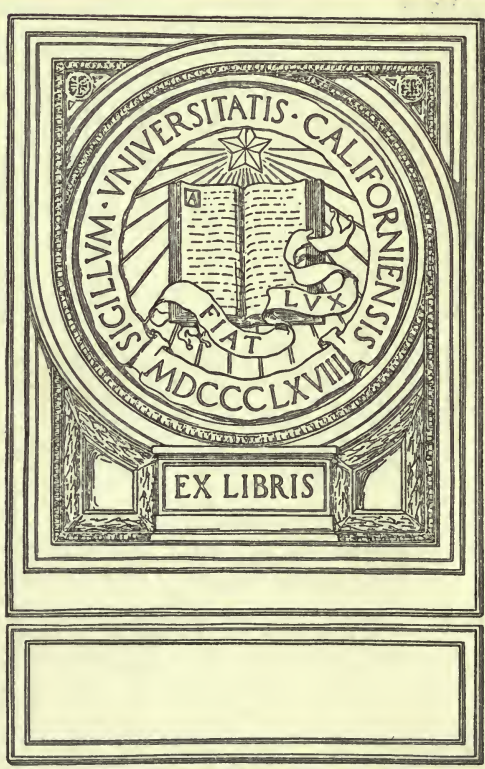
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To Annie Holland
with the kindest regards
of Louisa Burt

Book

A H A L Y A B A E E :

A Poem.

BY

MRS. JOANNA BAILLIE.

LONDON:

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INTRODUCTION.

THE observations I have made in my preface to the former legends, apply equally to this of Ahalya Bacc. I have added no fictitious circumstances to the story or characters. I have only taken those liberties regarding supposed feeling and description, which a person detailing what he has in a general abridged way, but with no intention of altering the truth, naturally takes; in short, the difference of the story from a bare record, or from the story-teller when the story-teller is warmed and interested by his subject. It may perhaps be thought that, in representing the daughter of Ahalya as so young at the time of her brother's death, and soothing her mother's sorrow with so many childish endearments, I have stepped beyond this rule; for we are told in another place that she was already married. But when we consider how very early betrothments take place in that country, her being still as a child with her mother is by no means inconsistent with that fact. That she should be so amiable and affectionate, and that Ahalya should be so strongly attached to her, agrees

well with what is related of her melancholy end and her mother's behaviour on that dreadful occasion. In all the descriptive passages regarding her popularity, and the feelings even of the children towards her, I think myself fully entitled to go as far as I have done on Sir John Malcom's authority, though no direct mention of children may there be found, for their light warm hearts are ever ready for grateful acclamation. It is their play and their privilege and propensity, which Providence has given them for benevolent purposes. As the history of this wise and good sovereign is given in the account of Central India, necessarily intermingled with the quarrels, and expeditions, and wars of all the native princes bordering upon her dominions, it is difficult to give any distinct view of what is immediately belonging to herself; and it is only by descriptions of what must naturally be supposed or taken for granted, that an impressive idea can be given of her extraordinary merits. Had graver historians been more descriptive as to the different states and conditions of the same country under a warlike and under a peaceful sovereign, we should not so frequently hear young people complain of a peaceful reign being so dull, or, as the little boy said to his mother, "the reigns of the wicked kings are so much *prettier* than the reigns of the good kings."

That Sir John Malcom was powerfully charmed by the character of Ahalya Bae, is very plain; but

being jealous of his own partiality, and having therefore strictly examined into the truth of what is said of her, which he from his high official situation had every facility for doing, there cannot be any reasonable cause for distrust, extraordinary and perfect as her character appears.



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A H A L Y A B A E E .

A VOICE from Sinai's sacred summit came,
What time, enrob'd and hid in smoke and flame,
Israel's assembled hosts the wonder saw
From its extended base, a sight of awe,
In stilly silence waiting to behold
What dreadful vision'd change it might unfold ;
With up-cast, pallid faces, shrunk with fear,
They stood, the awful words of God to hear :
They heard and felt that Israel's God alone
Is Lord of heaven and earth, and shares his power with
 none.

The terrors of that awful day, though past,
Have on the tide of time some glory cast ;
As when the sun, whom cloudy state conceals,
From his pavilion's curtain'd side reveals
Some scatter'd rays, that, through the general gloom,
Headland, or tower, or desert rocks illumine :
So did that mighty revelation throw,
O'er Prophets, Judges, Seers, a feeble glow
Of pure religious light, and Judah's king
With psalms of praise made his smote harp to ring —

A soul-reviving light, that did impart
 Devotion's warmth to many a noble heart ;
 Till *He* appear'd, in whom God's Spirit dwelt,
 Unmeasur'd, and for helpless mortals felt
 More than a brother's love, whose majesty,
 Subdued and mild, struck not man's garish eye.
 His mien, his motions, spoke of inward love —
 His blessed words and acts of power above
 All human excellence ;—till, in the eternal name,
 The Son of God, the Son of Man, the Son of David came.

But deem not that the Parent of mankind,
 Maker of all, hath to one race confin'd
 The gifts his blessed Spirit can bestow
 On all Earth's scatter'd nations here below.
 His revelations to a chosen race
 With pow'r were manifested, yet we trace
 In the bewilder'd heathen's heart, who bows
 To Idols dumb, and pays devoted vows
 To Wood and Stone, a conscious inward feeling
 Of higher things o'er heart and fancy stealing.

Perhaps a sudden quick'ning thought
 Across his musings strangely brought ;
 Aye, then God's Spirit with his soul is dealing.

And have not the philosopher and sage,
 The generous and good of every age,
 In silent hours of meditation high,
 Contemplating the sun, the stars, and sky,
 The earth, the ocean, — all that bounteous store
 Of fair and good, — been strengthen'd to adore

One Mighty Lord and Parent of all good :
 Nature's own worship, not to be withstood
 By partial rites which heathen power impos'd ?
 And have not those to other minds disclos'd
 Their elevated thoughts, and held communion
 With kindred minds, — a blest, ennobling union ?

'Mid shepherd hordes, for ever changing
 Their tented-homes, o'er deserts ranging ;
 'Mid seamen on the ocean bred ;
 'Mid bandits fierce on plunder fed ;
 Wherever mental light hath shown
 In circling darkness bright and lone,
 As beacon on a distant hill
 This message sends, though hush'd and still
 The midnight air broods on the ear, —
 “ Gird on your mail, the foe is near ! ” —
 That is a mission'd light from heav'n,
 By the Almighty Father giv'n,
 And hath its sacred mission well fulfill'd,
 Although its path to trace we mortals are unskill'd.

Behold that female form so meekly bending
 O'er a pale youth, who is the night-air rending
 With many a sudden shriek, and many a cry
 And lengthen'd groan of utter misery !
 It is a regent Mother, one whose fate
 By heav'n is fix'd to rule a warlike state ;
 Who, by the laws or custom of the land,
 Appointed is to hold supreme command.
 Yet one of gentle mind, who had been meet
 On Sion's hill to sit at her Redeemer's feet,

And listen to His words with humble love,
And see His looks benign her pious heart approve.

But she hath been in heathen darkness nurs'd,
Hath been with much misguiding lore accurst,
Which with the worship of one God supreme
Had woven in full many an odious dream.
Vague and perplexing seem'd her future doom :
Her present world is dark, and darker that to come.

Close in her own his burning hands she prest¹,
And to some pow'r unseen were words like these
address.—

“ Leave him, fierce Spirit of th' unhallow'd dead!
O, let him rest awhile his wretched head!
O, quit possession of his wasted frame!
Nor with his lips and alter'd voice blaspheme
To bring down blasting vengeance from the skies;
Upon him now enough of misery lies.
He slew thee wrongfully, and for that deed
Remorse has dealt to him a fearful mead.
It was the sudden act of jealous youth:—
He was deceiv'd, and could not know the truth.
But he has tried to make amends; rich stores
He on thy widow and thy children pours.
An honourable tomb shall give to fame
With graven record thy unsullied name.
O from this wretched body, Spirit dire!
Come forth; what does thy fell revenge require?
Can all his misery, can all his pain,
E'er make thyself a living man again?”

Thus day and night full many tears she shed,
 And watch'd and pray'd and struggl'd by his bed,
 Whene'er his fiercest, wildest fits prevail'd ;
 But neither watching, prayers, nor tears avail'd.
 At length deep silence through the palace reign'd,
 And for a solemn term its rule maintain'd.
 The dire disease its cruel task hath done ;
 The princely stripling's mortal course is run.

What lamentations, mingl'd, loud, and shrill,
 Did courts and halls and stately chambers fill,
 Bursting from that deep silence and repose,
 We say not, but the scene of sadness close.
 The corse is on its pyle consum'd,
 The bones within their urn inhum'd.

But the sad Mother, so bereft,
 Had she no tie of comfort left ?
 Yes, heav'n extremes of woe restrain'd ;
 One little Daughter yet remain'd.
 She to console her Mother tried,
 And play'd and prattl'd by her side.
 Her own soft cheek to hers she laid,
 And simple words of kindness said
 Right coaxingly, that sometimes broke
 The spell of grief ; a gentle stroke
 Slow sliding down her Mother's arm,
 Repeated oft, work'd like a charm ;
 Then would her dark eyes glance around
 To see what farther comfort might be found.
 With feather'd fan she cool'd her brow,
 And when the tears began to flow,

Her small hand plied its kerchief well,
 And softly wip'd them as they fell.
 Her fingers next, belike, would try
 The Ranie's raven locks in braids to tye,
 That, like torn, tangl'd wreaths, from altars flung,
 Dishevell'd, o'er her stooping shoulders hung.
 Aye, every simple, youthful, winning art
 This gentle creature us'd to sooth the wounded heart.
 Nor was that simple ministry in vain ;
 Her Mother's heart was sooth'd, and she again
 Caress'd her little Maid, as heretofore,
 And dearly lov'd her in her bosom's core.

But Brahma to her care consign'd
 A family of far other kind,—
 Of various castes, a mingl'd brood,
 Dull and untoward, fierce and rude ;
 And she must brace her for the task,
 Nor leave of tend'rer passions ask.
 Offers of large possessions to resign²
 The right of sov'reignty did she decline
 Indignantly, with duty still in view
 To her own house, and to her people true ;
 And gave effect to her determination
 With prompt display of warlike preparation.
 Each soldier of her race, with glancing eyes,
 Upon her elephant's arm'd howdah spies
 Quivers with arrows stor'd, and bows unstrung,
 Just ready for the bent, in order hung,
 That to their warm devoted hearts declare,
 She will with them their fate and dangers share.

Yet, in his place, whose hapless race is run,
 She must adopt another heir and son,
 That in his settl'd right she still may guide
 The councils of the state, — may still preside,
 The careful regent Mother, over all,
 And to her aid, troops, chieftains, Brahmins call.

And hath she chosen wilily
 An Infant on the Nurse's knee,
 Whose lengthen'd nonage may maintain
 O'er subject lands her settl'd reign,
 As prudent Ranies who pursue
 One selfish end are wont to do?
 O no! her noble nature spurn'd³
 Such narrow thoughts; her choice she turn'd
 Upon a soldier tried and brave,
 Faithful of heart and firm to save
 The country from all threaten'd wrong
 By hostile Rajas-fierce and strong;
 Of generous nature too, who fought
 Beneath a woman's rule, nor sought
 Undue extension of his pow'r,
 Her active champion, till her dying hour.
 He call'd her Mother, though his life had run
 More years by far than hers — a true and noble son.

Of Holkar's valiant race was he,
 Though somewhat distant in degree.
 But no suspicions e'er found way
 To her most generous mind, which lay
 In steady confidence, reposing
 On his tried worth, nor once disclosing,

By word or look, an inward doubt
 Of his fidelity throughout
 A lengthen'd course of years, in which he serv'd
 Nobly his noble Dame, nor from strict duty swerv'd.
 They were a state-constructed Son and Mother,
 A blessed twain, each worthy of the other ;
 United firmly to their native land,
 She the considerate head, and he the ready hand.

War on her distant frontiers, never ending,
 Was wag'd by chiefs for booty still contending
 Ev'n more than power ; but round her seat of sway,
 Peaceful and bright, a charmed circle lay.
 There she the even scales of justice held,
 And all oppressive wrong and faction quell'd.
 There to her subjects, of whate'er degree,
 It was, I trow, a joyous sight to see ⁴
 Their noble Bae her seat of judgment fill,
 Dispensing justice with impartial skill.

They gather'd round her unrestrain'd,
 Buoyant and happy if they gain'd
 Such words of her sonorous speech,
 As might their distant station reach ;
 Some looks of meaning from her eye,
 While perjur'd knaves, belike, would try
 A simple statement to perplex,
 The poor unwary hind to vex.
 And, if no better they might have,
 Ev'n o'er the crowd to see her wave
 Her little hand with queenly grace,
 Warm'd the good Ryot's heart and gleam'd his dusky face.

The children rais'd a joyous cry,
 When from afar they could descry
 Her palanquin so gay and bright,
 By coolies borne—a burden light!
 And cluster'd in the narrowest lane
 To see her pass with all her train;
 And urchins dar'd aloud to call,
 “She is our Mother, and she loves us all.”

The Parrei and the meanest hind
 Did to her presence access find;
 To her might tell with much detail
 His wearisome and lengthy tale,
 Circuitous and slow, nor fear
 To tire her patient ear.
 But when she question'd him again
 To make the knotted matter plain,
 Away would awe and caution wend!
 He felt conversing with a friend.
 And her shrew'd mind, the while, quick to discern
 The human character, did useful knowledge learn.

Woe, want, and suff'ring to assuage⁵,
 Would still her daily thoughts engage;
 On this her mind was most intent.
 She knew she was by Brahma sent;
 For works of mercy, by her hand
 To be dispens'd through all the land,
 He had committed to her care,
 Nor might she toil or trouble spare.
 She thought upon the pilgrim's woes,
 Who over plain and mountain goes,

His sinking steps, his visage gaunt,
 And eager glare of hungry want,
 His still increasing hourly pain,
 Ere he may reach his Idol's distant fane.
 She thought upon wayfaring strangers,
 Braving of wood and wild the dangers,
 Who yet by thirst subdu'd are found
 Stretch'd fainting on the parched ground.
 She thought of age and infancy
 Left on the river's brink to die :
 Yea, ev'n on animals her thoughts would dwell,
 Who have no words their sufferings to tell.

And still to kindly thoughts succeed
 Full many a charitable deed ;
 Her agents watch'd the pilgrim's track,
 To give him what his need might lack ;
 From river's weedy margin took the child,
 And bade the aged live in accents mild.

They caravansaras would build,
 Poor strangers from the night to shield,
 And many a well and cooling tank
 Upon the traveller's route they sank.
 The thirsty oxen in the plough,
 See help at hand, and stop to bow
 Their heads unto the trough beneath,
 And drink the welcome draught with seething, long-
 drawn breath.

Upon her heart *they* had their claim,
 Yea, Ahalya Bae ev'n cared for them.

And here with humble zeal I must disclose
 A further bounty, strange, belike, to those,
 Who in a better, purer faith were born :
 Yet pause awhile, I pray, and check your scorn ;
 Ye who acknowledge freely your descent
 From those, in former days, who humbly bent
 At shrines of many a carv'd and gilded saint —
 Aye, saints who, when their earthly race was run,
 Full many a black and ruthless deed had done ;
 Will ye despise the simple blinded zeal
 Which now my truthful legend must reveal ?

Water, in vessels closely pent,
 From Ganges' sacred waves she sent
 The holy idols to bedew,

And at their shrines her vows would oft renew.

Brahma, supreme o'er all above,
 She did as humble daughter love ;
 And other gods, set by his will
 O'er Hindus' race for good or ill,
 She would invoke, at needful hours,
 Subordinate but awful powers.
 Fell powers, who rul'd in nether air,
 Who bade War's weapons kill or spare ;
 Sent pestilence, all human joy
 To blast, to poison, and destroy, —
 Those still she tried her friends to make,
 For her own weal, and for her people's sake.

With wise and learned Brahmins to converse,
 To hear them many lines of lore rehearse ;
 And from the sacred shasters to recite
 Maxims, and rules, and laws, was her delight ;

And many a solemn, wide-sleev'd sage, I ween,
 Was in her special courtly circle seen,
 Mingl'd with stately chiefs of high degree,
 And watchful, wary scribes, and merchants free.

But ne'er a Brahmin of them all
 Could win her for his blinded thrall,
 Could e'er her noble mind persuade
 To do what inward rectitude forbade.
 And if from district far or near,
 Some fact of ruthless rapine reach'd her ear,
 Or base oppression to the poor,
 Who must too oft such grievous wrong endure,
 How quickly did her alter'd brow⁶,
 Her inward indignation show !
 Nor durst the boldest culprits dare
 To front her presence ; and if there
 They were at her imperious call assembl'd,
 The bravest chief and holiest Brahmin trembl'd.
 Her countenance, so mild by nature,
 Grew sternly fix'd in ev'ry feature ;
 Her dark eye flash'd like kindl'd leaven
 Sent from a rifted cloud of heav'n ;
 Her stature low and figure slight,
 Strangely dilated grew, and grand,
 Like ruling spirit of the night,
 Through misty vapour seen, by some benighted band.
 Her voice, whose tones so kindly sweet,
 Made widows' hearts with gladness beat,
 Is now a sound of awe and fear,
 Swelling like onward thunder to the ear ;
 In sooth, a strange, unwonted sound to hear !

It was her solace and her pride
 O'er peaceful districts to preside,
 And keep around, remote or nigh,
 Her country in prosperity.
 Erewhile, her blessed reign before⁷,
 It was a country to deplore ;
 Where war and bloodshed, want and strife,
 Had made a hell for human life.
 Chiefs were by turns or weak or strong,
 All interlac'd in deeds of wrong ;
 Fiercely attacking town and village,
 And fenced forts for sordid pillage ;
 Treasure they did so vainly reap,
 Which all could gain, but none could keep.
 He who to-day had home and hold,
 Grain on his fields, sheep in his fold,
 To-morrow with his family fled,
 And had not where to lay his head.
 He who to-day hath kept his state
 In princely hall where menials wait,
 May soon in ruin'd haunts abide,
 Or in the perilous jungle hide,
 Where foul and fair are side by side ;
 A place of fear and admiration. There
 The brindled tiger in his reedy lair,
 Purrs gruffly, while aloft is singing
 The Loorie gay, on light spray swinging ;
 There oft the baleful snake is seen,
 Through flow'ry slopes and thickets green,
 Where roses blush and blossoms blow,
 And lilies sweet profusely grow,

Moving his sluggish, lothly length,
 Then rearing up his stiffen'd strength,
 At moving prey to take his aim,
 And swaith and crush the vital frame.

Horsemen and spearmen o'er the plains
 In dusky masses mov'd, while trains
 Of heavy cannon in the rear,
 By harness'd bullocks dragg'd, appear ;
 And high, belike, above the crowd,
 Upon his elephant some chieftain proud,
 Sits stately, though less rational in nature
 Than that on which he rides, — a noble sapient creature.

But now, how chang'd ! Upon the frontiers far
 Her brave adopted son wag'd ceaseless war
 With every restless robber-chief who dar'd
 Her rightful boundary to invade, and spar'd
 The centre districts. Peaceful, still, and bright,
 They gleam'd on the admiring stranger's sight,
 Like green oases of some desert land,
 Encircl'd round with brown and barren sand ;
 As many learned travellers indite
 Who of far distant countries love to write ;
 For all, within the guarded girdle bound,
 Were peace and wealth, content and comfort found.

The Ryot plough'd his native soil, —
 His Father's fields, a pleasing toil ;
 Who, as he guides his sturdy steers,
 With kindly voice their labour cheers ;
 For well he knows the produce will
 In season due his garner fill, —

Will, on his quiet, daily board
 Food for his mate and little ones afford.
 Beside her door the Matron stands
 And deftly draws, with busy hands,
 The snowy yarn from distaff tall,
 For turban fine, or gorgeous shawl.
 The weaver plies his useful trade,
 In humid cell beneath the shade,
 Through the strain'd warp his shuttle throws,
 And as his web more lengthy grows,
 Thinks of the golden price that will be paid
 When in the throng'd bazaars its beauty is display'd.
 In flow'ry nooks the children play,
 Or through the shady copses stray
 In quest of fruit ; while from the bough
 Offended monkeys grin and mowe.
 The gentle Lady, all bedight,
 In gilded palanquin so bright,
 Goes forth secure, on visit kind
 Or ceremonious, to some distant friend ;
 Nor fears that on her lengthen'd way
 She may become some lurking bandit's prey.
 But wherefore needless word encrease ?
 With wise and equal rule the land was bless'd — and
 peace.

But who through life's uncertain day hath run
 With still, o'er head, a clear unclouded sun ?
 When noon is past he hears the tempest roar,
 And on his shoulders pelting torrents pour.
 The weary pilgrim rests him void of fear,
 Unwitting of the lurking tiger near.

The loaded raft floats smoothly on the tide,
 Though fatal rocks beneath the waters hide ;
 And when the steersman thinks he nears the shore,
 A stroke is felt, — they sink, and rise no more.

Our Ranie, as this legend soothly said ⁸,
 Had, for her solace sweet, a little Maid.
 Her after-lot was bright ; one happy scene
 Of married love her easy life had been.
 But now, alas ! her happiness is flown ;
 Death has o'er all his sable mantle thrown.
 Whom see we now within that spacious room,
 Where rests an ominous and dismal gloom ?
 She, seated by yon deck'd and rose-strew'd bier,
 Who neither heaves a sigh nor sheds a tear ;
 She stooping over her and gently speaking,
 To stem her wayward sorrow vainly seeking ?
 The one is Ahalya's widow'd child ;
 The other is herself, compos'd and mild,
 Trying the fatal purpose to avert —
 Compos'd, indeed, but with a bleeding heart.
 Aye, all in vain her gentle words ; for hear
 What words of woe her tardy answers bear.

“ O Mother, do not grieve me so,
 My lot is cast, and I must go.
 Shall Jeswunt Row, my noble mate,
 On pyre be laid in lonely state,
 While I, who was the only flow'r
 He watch'd and cherish'd in his bow'r,
 A craven wife, shall from the brink
 Of love's last trial meanly shrink ?
 Forbid it, Brahma, Lord above !
 Forbid it, faithfulness and love ! ” —

“ And dost thou think that Brahma’s will
 I did not righteously fulfil,
 When I, bereft and sad, did strive
 Thy noble Father to survive ?
 And was not his high blessing pour’d
 On one so sever’d from her Lord ?
 And characters, distinct and fair,
 Did his approval well declare,
 When flourishing beneath my sway
 My people and my kingdom lay.
 Yes ; though a widow, so bereft,
 My heart had other blessings left.
 But still, as cell’d within my breast,
 Thou wert my dearest and my best ;
 Thou wert as my own youngling still,
 Who didst my first affections fill.
 And wilt thou leave me sad and lone ?
 How shall I live when thou art gone ?
 Whom shall I fondly love and trust ?
 O, do not bow me to the dust ! ” —
 “ O no ! committed to thy care,
 Thou hast thy children every where,
 Their daily benefits will be
 The comfort Brahma sends to thee.
 And, dearest Mother ! thou art old —
 Thy grains of life will soon be told ;
 And what to me will then remain ?
 My Lost will ne’er return again !

I through these lonely rooms shall roam
 A living thing, whose heart hath with the dead its home.
 Then, best and dearest, to my passion bend,
 And let my sorrows have an honour’d end.” —

“ An honour'd end will close her life,
 Who was a good and faithful wife ;
 Die when she will, the funeral flame
 Gives but a fruitless fleeting fame.” —
 “ I seek not fame, O say not so !
 O, add not agony to woe !
 Life would be death to me, and worse :
 The inward working of remorse
 Would make my day as darkness seem,
 My haunted night a fearful dream.
 For then he would be ever near,
 And his upbraiding eyes appear
 To glare upon a wife, whose love
 Could not one moment rise above
 Base fears, but from her last sad duty started
 And left his lonely bier unhonour'd and deserted.”

All interchange of words were vain —
 The Ranie answer'd not again ;
 But long fix'd looks of anguish fell
 Upon her Daughter's face, and well
 Spoke that which language could not tell ;
 While actions too did piteously entreat,
 The Mother kneeling at her Daughter's feet : —
 But all in vain ; nought may arrest
 The purpose of her wounded breast.

The parent bent her to the cruel blow,
 And left the dismal chamber sad and slow,
 And, closely shut within her secret bow'r,
 With humble penitence and pray'r
 Did her afflicted soul prepare
 For the approaching, dreadful hour :

Her pray'rs were heard, and mercy gave
A stinted strength the dreadful hour to brave.

That hour is come; and from the palace gate
There issues forth, in melancholy state,
A gorgeous pageant. — Standards borne on high,
Mov'd by the fanning air, arrest the eye,
On which devices, trac'd in colours gay,
Emblems of ranks and races make display.
First portly Brahmins, sombre and profound,
Walk, loosely rob'd, with eyes cast on the ground.
Next turban'd chiefs, with fierce and warlike mien,
Cinctur'd with shawls and flashing arms, are seen;
Then high authorities, the letter'd scribe,
And mission'd men from many a different tribe,
Move slowly on, all rang'd in sad array,
Proceeding on their mournful, destin'd way,
 With heavy steps, that from the ground
 Send up a muff'd, sullen sound.
Then doth from portal-arch appear,
Circl'd by friends, the stately bier,
On which the princely corse is laid,
In rich and splendid robes array'd,
Whose features, like to chisel'd stone,
Do still an awful beauty own.
The crowd on him intently gaze
And deeply murmur words of praise.
Anon they drop their eyes to find
The youthful Widow, close behind.
She mov'd, with brow and step sedate,
As one who of her lifeless mate

Alone had conscious thoughts, and she
 Worthy appear'd his mate to be.
 But when by priestly Brahmins stern and strong,
 They saw their own lov'd Ranie led along,
 On her at once all eager eyes were turn'd,
 And grateful sympathy within each bosom burn'd :
 Their inward sorrow broke through all restraint,
 And all around a loud and mingl'd wailing sent.

Now onward as the long procession goes,
 A diff'rent mournful harmony arose
 From many instruments, whose mingl'd sound
 Is floating on the air, and rising from the ground.
 But when it reach'd the fatal spot,
 All soft excitement was forgot :
 A deep and solemn pause ensu'd,
 Silence with strange mysterious awe embu'd.

Alas! what measur'd words can tell
 The anguish of their last farewell?
 When that young Widow with that Mother parted?
 From the intense embrace the younger started,
 As if afraid. Her failing steps sustain'd,
 The bier of death she has already gain'd,
 Hath on her lap with gentle kindness plac'd
 The lifeless head, and its cold form embrac'd.
 To the heap'd pile the torch hath been applied,
 And from between the faggots are discried
 Pale curving streams of smoke, that wind and sweep,
 Coil and uncoil, like serpents wak'd from sleep,
 Then broad'ning and ascending hang on high,
 A dusky, fearful canopy ;

While pointed tongues of flame below
 Burst forth ; and soon one gen'ral glow
 Involves in fierce consuming fire,
 Roaring and red, the funeral pyre.
 Then drum and trumpet, cymbal, gong
 And stringed viols, harsh and strong,
 Discordant minstrelsy, begin
 To raise a loud and deaf'ning din ;
 While faintly comes to fancy's ear
 Shrieks from the burning bier.
 Aye, there are dismal shrieks, I wot,
 But from the flames proceeding not.
 'Tis Ahalya in despair,
 Who, though by friendly force restrain'd,
 Convulsively hath freedom gain'd,
 And beats her breast and tears her hair.
 Her gnashing teeth and bleeding hand
 Too plainly show that self-command
 Is from her princely spirit taken,
 Of all its wonted power forsaken.
 And pause we here ! That noble mind
 To dull unconsciousness was for a while consign'd.

But heaven's all-merciful and potent Lord
 To health of mind the Ranie soon restor'd.
 He rais'd again her drooping head ;
 From him receiv'd, as from the dead,
 The people saw their noble Dame,
 And bade her hail with loud and long acclaim.

Still wasteful war, though raging round,
 Within her precincts was not found.

The husbandman scarce turn'd his ear
 Some far-off tale of blood to hear,
 How bandits, on the distant border,
 With bandits strove in wild disorder ;
 Where sordid chiefs to robbers turn'd,
 Made might their right, and justice spurn'd :
 What cares he for their ceaseless coil ?
 She lives and reigns who will protect his toil.

In sooth, o'er all the watch she kept⁹,
 And wak'd, and thought, when others slept.
 When early dawn appear'd, she rose,
 Nor longer would indulge repose,
 But to herself (for she could read)
 Grave books perus'd. Then would succeed
 Hours of reflection and of pray'r,
 That clear'd her mind and sooth'd her care ;
 And oft her day, so well begun,
 An easy, prosp'rous course would run.
 Herself sagacious, firm, and just,
 She put in others gen'rous trust ;
 And when their merit well was prov'd,
 Her ministers she ne'er remov'd.
 With all the Rajah pow'rs of ev'ry nation,
 From time to time, she held communication :
 Could points of policy with art contest,
 But ever lov'd the simple method best.
 And in good sooth, to reason cool,
 The simplest was the wisest rule.
 For who would venture to gainsay
 Or doubt the faith of Ahalya Baeë ?

To Death at last the mission'd power was giv'n
 To call her hence ; her earthly ties were riv'n.
 Through all the land a woeful wailing went,
 From cot to cot, from town to village sent :
 A tender woe, like which there is no other, —
 Bereaved children weeping for a mother.
 Her life and reign were clos'd in glory,
 And thus concludes my Legend's faithful story.

For thirty years — her reign of peace —
 The land in blessings did encrease ;
 And she was bless'd by every tongue,
 By stern and gentle, old and young.
 And where her works of love remain,
 On mountain pass, on hill or plain,
 There stops the traveller a while,
 And eyes it with a mournful smile,
 With mutt'ring lips, that seem to say,
 " This was the work of Ahalya Bae."

The learned Sage, who loves to muse,
 And many a linked thought pursues,
 Says to himself, and heaves a sigh
 For things to come and things gone by.
 " O that our restless chiefs, by misr'y school'd,
 Would rule their states as that brave woman rul'd !"
 Yea, even children at their mothers' feet,
 Are taught such homely rhyming to repeat : —
 " In better days, from Brahma came,
 To rule our land, a noble Dame ;
 Kind was her heart, and bright her fame,
 And Ahalya was her honour'd name."

NOTES.

NOTE 1. page 10.

*“Close in her own his burning hands she prest,
And to some pow’r unseen were words like these addrest.”*

See in the first volume of Sir John Malcom’s Central India, p. 159.—

“He (the son of Ahalya Bae) had had slain in a jealous fury an embroiderer, who, he believed, had formed an intimacy with a female servant of his family. The innocence of the man was established, and remorse for the crime brought on so severe a paroxysm of madness in Mallee Row, as to alarm all for his life. It is a confirmed belief with many of the natives of India, that departed spirits have, on some occasions, the power of seizing upon and destroying the living. It was rumoured that the embroiderer was a man with supernatural power; that he warned Mallee Row not to slay him, or he would take horrible vengeance; and the ravings of the latter were imputed to the person he had murdered, and who, according to their preposterous belief, now haunted him in the form of a Jin or Demon. Ahalya Bae, satisfied of this fact, used to sit days and nights by the bed of her afflicted son, holding communion, as she thought, with the spirit that possessed him, and who spoke to her through his organs. She shed tears in abundance, and passed whole hours in prayer. In the hope of soothing the Demon, she offered to build a temple to the deceased, and to settle an estate upon his family if he would only leave her son. But all was in vain; a voice still seemed to answer, “He slew me innocent, and I will have his life.” Such is the popular

tale of the death of Mallee Row; an event that only merits notice as connected with the history of Ahalya Bae, whom it compelled to come forward to save the ruin of the interests of the family she represented, and to exhibit, in the person of a female, that combined talent, virtue, and energy, which made her, while she lived, a blessing to the country over which she ruled, and has associated her memory with every plan of improvement and just government in the province of Malwa.

NOTE 2. page 12.

“ Offers of large possessions to resign.”

See Sir J. Malcom's Central India, p. 160.—

“ The daughter of Ahalya Bae had been married into another family, and could therefore, according to Hindoo usage, have no claim to participate in the administration of Holkar sovereignty. Under these circumstances, Gunghadur Jeswunt, the Brahmin Minister of the late Mulhar Row, strongly recommended that some child (distantly related to the family) should be adopted to succeed Mallee Row; a plan which would have secured his authority as minister. This proposition was combined with the offer of a large separate provision for Ahalya Bae, whose abilities were admitted, but her sex objected to as a disqualification for the conducting of public affairs. Gunghadur, at the same time, proposed to give a considerable sum to Ragobah Duda, in the event of his agreeing to the arrangement and promoting its execution. This venal chief gave a ready assent to the measure; and his concurrence was considered by the minister so conclusive, that he waited upon Ahalya Bae; completely assured that, if other motives failed, a despair of successful resistance would compel her to acquiesce: but he soon discovered his error. He was told at once, by this high-minded woman, that his plan was disgraceful to the house of Holkar, and should never have her consent.” * * * “ The heirs of Mulhar Row, she said, were extinct on the death of her son, and she had, as wife and mother of the two last representatives of the family, the exclusive privilege of selecting the successor; and that just claim

she was resolved at all hazards to maintain. It is probable that Ahalya Bacc had not only also consulted with her own principal adherents, but with the Mahratta military chiefs who were in Malwa when these events occurred. Her whole conduct, however, at this crisis of her fortune and of the Holkar government, showed that her resolution had been seriously taken, and would be firmly maintained. On hearing that Ragobah was making preparations to compel her, she sent him a message not to make war on a woman, from which he might incur disgrace, but could never derive honour. She added, to give effect to this remonstrance, every preparation for hostilities. The troops of Holkar evinced enthusiasm in her cause, and she made a politic display of her determination to lead them to combat in person, by directing four bows, with quivers full of arrows, to be fitted to the corners of the howdah, or seat, of her favourite elephant."

NOTE 3. page 13.

*"O no! her noble nature spurn'd
Such narrow thoughts; her choice she turn'd
Upon a soldier tried and brave," &c.*

See Sir J. Malcom's Central India, p. 163.—

"She selected for the commander of her army, and to fulfil those duties which as a female she could not perform, Tuckajee Holkar, a chief of the same tribe, but no way related to Mulhar Row. Tuckajee was highly esteemed as a soldier by that chief, and commanded the Pagah or household troops; and, before he had reached his present power, had established a character, which he maintained through life, of a plain unaffected Mahratta soldier." * * * * "The divided authority established in the Holkar state from the day of Tuckajee's elevation had a character which, judging from common rules, was not likely to admit of its subsisting a week; but it remained for above thirty years, undisturbed by jealousy or ambition. This is to be ascribed to the virtue and moderation of the parties, to their respect for each other, and to their having distinct, and, generally speaking, distant spheres of action." * * * * "He was more than

obedient: he was dutiful, and all his actions were directed to please and conciliate the princess, to whom he was solely indebted for his high station. He constantly called her mother; but, as she was much younger than him, this relation was not engraved upon his seal. On that he was styled, by her command, 'Tuckajee, the son of Mulhar Row Holkar.' After various details of the regulation of their united government, Sir John proceeds thus:—"It appears, from what has been related, that Ahalya Bae was the actual head of the government; and Tuckajee, gratified by his high station and her complete confidence, continued, during her life, to exercise no duties beyond those of commander-in-chief of the army and the collector of the revenues that his vicinity enabled him to realise with more convenience than any other agent of her administration. The servants of the Holkar government, who filled offices at the period, speak all the same language; and, with every disposition to praise Tuckajee, strengthened by his grandson being on the throne, they never go higher in their eulogium than to say, that he fulfilled all the expectations of Ahalya Bae, and was to the last hour of his existence attentive, faithful, and obedient."

NOTE 4. page 14.

*"It was, I trow, a joyous sight to see
Their noble Bae her seat of judgment fill."*

See Sir J. Malcom's Central India, p. 175.—

"It is not common with the Hindus (unless in those provinces where they have learnt the degrading usage from their Mahomedan conquerors) to confine females, or to compel them to wear veils. The Mahrattas of rank (even the Brahmins) have, with few exceptions, rejected the custom, which is not prescribed by any of their religious institutions. Ahalya Bae, therefore, offended no prejudice when she took upon herself the direct management of affairs; and sat every day, for a considerable period, in open Durbar, transacting business. Her first principle of government appears to have been moderate assessment, and an almost sacred respect for the native rights

of village officers and proprietors of land. She heard every complaint in person; and, although she continually referred causes to courts of equity and arbitration, and to her ministers for settlement, she was always accessible; and so strong was her sense of duty on all points connected with the distribution of justice, that she is represented as not only patient but unwearied in the investigation of the most insignificant causes, when appeals were made to her decision."

NOTE 5. page 15.

*"Woe, want, and suffering to assuage,
Would still her daily thoughts engage."*

See Sir J. Malcom's Central India, p. 186.—

"The correspondence of Ahalya Bae extended to the most remote parts of India. It was generally carried on through Brahmins, who were the agents of her pious munificence, which was as unexampled as it was unbounded. When the treasures of Holkar came into her possession, she is stated to have appropriated them, by the performance of a religious ceremony (common with Hindus), to the purposes of charity and good works. She built several forts; and at that of Jauns constructed a road, with great labour and cost, over the Vindhya-ranga, where it is almost perpendicular. She expended considerable sums in religious edifices at Mhysir, and built many temples, Dhurmsullas (or places of rest for travellers), and wells throughout the Holkar possessions in Malwa. But her munificence was not limited to her own territories; at all the principal places of Hindu pilgrimage, including as far east and west as Juggernath in Cuttack, &c., and as far north as Redumath, among the snowy mountains of Himalaya, and south as Rumeserm, she built holy edifices, maintained establishments, and sent annual sums to be distributed in charity."

* * * * "In addition to this charity, she occasionally bestowed presents; and nothing added more to her fame in the southern regions of the peninsula, than the constant supply of Ganges' water which she was in the habit of sending to wash the sacred images of the different temples. Extensive and

pious donations probably proceeded from a sincere belief in her religion, and a desire to promote her own and her country's welfare by propitiating the favour of the deities she worshipped; but we find in many of her observances and institutions a spirit of charity which had the truest character of wisdom and benevolence. She daily fed the poor; and on particular festivals gave entertainments to the lowest classes. During the hot months of the year, persons were stationed on the roads to supply travellers with water; and at the commencement of the cold season she gave clothes to great numbers of her dependants and infirm people. Her feelings of general humanity were often carried to an extraordinary excess. The beasts of the field, the fowls of the air, and the fish of the river shared in her compassion; portions of food were allotted to them; and the peasant near Mhysir used in hot days to see his yoke of oxen stopped during their labour to be refreshed with water, brought by the servants of Ahalya Bae; while fields she had purchased were covered with flocks of birds that had been justly, as Ahalya Bae used to observe, driven by cultivators from destroying the grain on which the latter depended for their own sustenance."—"We may smile at such universal sympathy, * * * * and wasted the treasures of the state in the erection and maintenance of edifices in distant lands; but it was well asked by an intelligent Brahmin, to whom this remark was addressed, 'Whether Ahalya Bae, by spending double the sum on an army that she did in charity and good works, could have preserved her country for above thirty years in a state of profound peace, while she rendered her subjects happy and herself adored? No person (he added) doubts the sincerity of her piety; but, if she had merely possessed worldly wisdom, she could have devised no means so admirably calculated to effect the object.'

NOTE 6. page 18.

"How quickly did her alter'd brow

Her inward indignation show!"

See Sir J. Malcom's Central India, p. 192.—

"She was very cheerful, and seldom in anger; but, when

provoked by wickedness or crime, the most esteemed of her attendants trembled to approach her." Sir John adds, in a note to the above passage: "Baramut Dada, the venerable manager of Mhysir, who was for many years one of her favourite servants, assured me that when really in anger, which was of rare occurrence, her countenance struck terror into the minds of the boldest."

NOTE 7. page 19.

*"Erewhile, her blessed reign before,
It was a country to deplore."*

See the account given by Sir John Malcom of the many feuds and petty wars of rapine and pillage, so unceasingly carried on with one another, previous to his details regarding the house of Holkar and Ahalya Bae.

NOTE 8. page 22.

*"Our Ranie, as this legend soothly said,
Had, for her solace sweet, a little Maid."*

See Sir J. Malcom's Central India, p. 190.—

"An event occurred in the latter years of Ahalya Bae of too interesting and afflicting a nature to be passed over in silence. The melancholy death of her only son, Malee Row, has been noticed. She had besides one daughter, Muchta Bae, who was married, and had one son, who, after reaching manhood, died at Mhysir. Twelve months afterwards his father died, and Muchta Bae declared, immediately, her intention to burn with the corpse of her husband. No efforts (short of coercion) that a mother and a sovereign could use were untried by the virtuous Ahalya Bae to dissuade her daughter from the fatal resolution. She humbled herself to the dust before her, and entreated her, as she revered her God, not to leave her desolate and alone upon the earth. Muchta Bae, although affectionate, was calm and resolved. 'You are old, mother,' (she said) 'and a few years will end your pious life. My only child and husband are gone, and when you follow, life, I feel, will be insupportable, but the opportunity of

terminating it with honour will then have passed.' Ahalya Bae, when she found all dissuasion unavailing, determined to witness the last dreadful scene. She walked in the procession, and stood near the pile, where she was supported by two Brahmins, who held her arms. Although obviously suffering great agony of mind, she remained tolerably firm till the first blaze of the flame made her lose all self-command; and while her shrieks increased the noise made by the exulting shouts of the immense multitude that stood around, she was seen to gnaw in anguish those hands she could not liberate from the persons by whom she was held. After some convulsive efforts, she so far recovered as to join in the ceremony of bathing in the Nerbudda, when the bodies were consumed. She then retired to her palace, where, for three days, having taken hardly any sustenance, she remained so absorbed in grief that she never uttered a word. When recovered from this state, she seemed to find consolation in building a beautiful monument to the memory of those she lamented."

NOTE 9. page 28.

*" In sooth, o'er all the watch she kept,
And wak'd, and thought, when others slept."*

See Sir J. Malcom's Central India, p. 192.—

" Ahalya Bae died at the age of sixty, worn out with care and fatigue; and, according to some, she hastened her death by a too strict observance of the numerous fasts prescribed by her religion. She was of a middle stature, and very thin. Though at no period of her life handsome, her complexion, which was dark olive, was clear; and her countenance is described as having been, to the last hour of her existence, agreeable, and expressive of that goodness which marked every action of her life." * * * * "The mind of this extraordinary woman had been more cultivated than is usual with Hindus: she could read and understand the Puranas, or sacred books, which were her favourite study. She is represented as having been singularly quick and clear in the transaction of public business. Her husband was killed before she was twenty

years of age, and to that misfortune were added the vice and insanity of her son. These afflictions made a strong impression on her mind. After her husband's death, she never wore coloured clothes nor any jewels except a small necklace; and, indeed, remained amid every temptation unchanged in her habits and character. Flattery even appears to have been lost on Ahalya Bae. A Brahmin wrote a book in her praise, which she heard read with patience; but, after observing 'she was a weak sinful woman, and not deserving such fine encomiums,' she directed it to be thrown into the Nerbudda, and took no further notice of the author. The facts that have been stated of Ahalya Bae rest on grounds that admit of no scepticism. It is, however, an extraordinary picture:—a female without vanity; a bigot without intolerance; a mind, imbued with the deepest superstition, yet receiving no impressions except what promoted the happiness of those under its influence; a being exercising, in the most active and able manner, despotic power, not merely with sincere humility, but under the severest moral restraint that a strict conscience could impose on human action. And all this, combined with the greatest indulgence for the weakness and faults of others. Such, at least, is the account which the natives of Mulwa give of Ahalya Bae: with them her name is sainted, and she is styled an Avatar, or incarnation of the Divinity. In the most sober view that can be taken of her character, she certainly appears, within her limited sphere, to have been one of the purest and most exemplary rulers that ever existed; and she affords a striking example of the practical benefit a mind may receive from performing worldly duties under a deep sense of responsibility to its Creator."

THE 'END.

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