

II. *A Letter from the East Indies, of Mr John Marshal to Dr Coga, giving an account of the Religion, Rites, Notions, Customs, Manners of the Heathen Priests commonly called Bramines. Communicated by the Reverend Mr Abraham de la Pryme.*

Worthy Sir,

THe last time that I had the happiness to be in your good Company, and to partake of those favours and blessings that your Goodness was pleased liberally to bestow upon me and our Companions, at our departure, and as it were exile from our native Land, does so loudly call out for some recompence or other at our hands, that I cannot without the greatest Ingratitude imaginable, let slip this (tho sudden) opportunity of writing unto you, and presenting of you at this time with what I understand you more value than all the Riches of the East ; to wit, a few Specimens of the Knowledge of those people whom we stile Barbarians, Heathens and Idolaters, which I have read in their own Books, and gather'd from the mouths of those that have been the greatest Speakers and Preachers amongst them. I have always had a profound Veneration for the Dictates of Nature, and the universal Traditions of Nations, for hereby are Infinite things to be learned, for the establishing of our Glorious Religion against Atheists, and the more easie propagation of the same amongst Infidels and Heathens.

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Upon what account or grounds it is that some Travellers have stil'd these people Polytheists, or Atheists, I cannot tell ; or whether there be any such people at all in the World, except some of the base common sort in all Nations, I much question. It is very observable here, that their Priests, or *Bramines*, and Holy men, whom they call *Jagees*, when they have occasion to write any thing they always put a figure of one in the first place, to shew, as they say, that they acknowledge but one God, whom they say is *Burme*, that is, Immaterial. When they preach to the people, and instruct them, which is commonly every Feast-day, full Moon, or the time of an Eclipse of either Luminary, they tell the common people much of God, Heaven and Hell, but very Imperfectly, Obscurely and Mystically. They say that when God thought of making the World, he made it in a minute.

They account this World the Body of God, for all that they say he's Immaterial ; and say that the Highest Heavens are his Head, the Fire his Mouth, the Air his Breath and Breast, the Water his Seed, and the Earth and the foundations thereof his Legs and Feet. But assert in general that God is the life of every thing, yet is the thing neither greater nor less for him.

They hold that God dwelt in a Vacuity before that he created the World, and that as he dwelt in that Vacuity he created several Beings out of himself, the first were Angels, the second Souls, the third Spirits, all differing in degrees of Purity, the first being more pure than the second, and the second than the third. The Angels, they say, neither act Good nor Evil, the Souls either Good or Evil, but the Spirits, or *Dewta's*, as they call them, act scarce any thing but Evil.

They have a good Opinion of the Angels, and think their state mighty happy, hoping that when they dye they shall be made partakers of the same bliss and pleasure.

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They believe that every thing that hath Life hath a Soul, but especially Man ; and they accordingly affirm, that as these Souls behaved themselves in their pre-existent state, so are their Actions in this World either good or bad, by a sort of fatal Necessity, which is very hard to conquer, or to overcome. Hence it is, say they, that there are so many different Humours and Dispositions of men, for their Souls, before their entrance into their Bodies, being tainted with different Affections, causes the like Differences in the parties, whose Bodies are their Vehicles. So that if a man happen to have a sudden or unfortunate Death, they immediately ascribe the same to the party's own wickedness, or the bad life that his Soul led before that it enter'd into his Body. For, say they, the afore-acted Evil that his Soul did in its other Life, brought these accidents upon him, by getting the upper hand of him, and by being too powerful and strong. And those that dye thus, they believe that their Souls turn immediately into Devils. They maintain *Pythagoras's* Transmigration, or *Metempsychosis*, but in a grosser sense than he did. For they believe that mens Souls, that have not lived so well as they ought, go as soon as the Body dyes not only into Birds and Beasts, but even into the basest Reptiles, Insects and Plants, where they suffer a strong sort of purgation, to expiate their former Crimes : But as for the Souls of the *Jogees*, or *Fuche's*, that is, of Religious Men and Saints, they fancy that they go and inhabit with the good *Demta's*, or Angels, amongst the Stars.

As for the Spirits, or Inferiour Angels, they believe that they are very evil, and have a hand in all Wickednesses, Murders, Wars, Storms, and Tempests ; so that when they solemnize the Funerals of those that are dead, they always present Dishes of Meat, as Offerings unto those Spirits, and sometimes Sacrifice unto

them, that they may not hurt the Souls of the Dead.

As they acknowledge the Being of a mighty God, so they hold that he created the World, and every thing therein. They believe that there are almost infinite number of Worlds, and that God has oftentimes Annihilated and Re-Created the same. But how he came first to Create the World and Mankind, they relate to have been thus—Once on a time (say they) as he was set in Eternity, it came into his mind to make something, and immediately no sooner had he thought the same, but that the same minute was a perfect beautiful Woman present immediately before him, which he called *Adea Suktee*, that is, the first Woman: Then this figure put into his mind the figure of a Man; which he had no sooner conceived in his mind, but that he also started up, and represented himself before him; this he called *Manapuisé*, that is, the first Man; then upon a reflection of these things, he resolv'd further to create several places for them to abide in, and accordingly assuming a subtil body, he breathed in a minute the whole Universe, and every thing therein, from the least to the greatest.

They constantly believe that the Universe cannot possibly last longer than 71 *Joog's*, which is a measure of time with them, and is years. Which when it is come, God does not only annihilate the whole Universe, but even every thing else, as well Angels, Souls, and Spirits, as Inferiour Creatures; and then he remains in the same state that he was in before the Creation; But say, that after he has a while respired thus, he breathes again, and every thing is Created afresh, as well Angels and Souls, as all other things; but as for the Spirits, they are no more thought of. Yet for all this, after 71 *Joogs* more all is Annihilated again. How many *Joogs* are past since the World was last Created they cannot certainly tell; only 'tis observable

fervable that in an Almanack of theirs, written in the *Sanscript* Language in 1670, they make the World then 3892771 years old from its last Creation.

The *Bramines* of *Persia* tell certain long stories of a great Gyant that was led into a most delicate Garden, which upon certain conditions should be his own for ever. But one evening in a cool shade, one of the Wicked *Demta's*, or Spirits, came to him, and tempted him with vast summs of Gold, and all the most precious Jewels that can be imagined; but he courageously withstood that temptation, as not knowing what value or use they were of: But at length this wicked *Demta* brought to him a fair Woman, who so charm'd him, that for her sake he most willingly broke all his Conditions, and thereupon was turned out.

They tell a great many stories, absurd and ridiculous enough, of the first ages of this present World, which would be too tedious here to take notice of; only I shall here give you out of one of their own Books what they tell us of a great Flood that formerly happened. They say, that about 21000 years ago the Sea overwhelmed and drowned the whole Earth, except one great Hill, far to the Northwards, called *Bindd*, and that there fled thither only one woman and seven men, the names of whom were, *Deboolab*, *Sunnuk*, *Sunmand*, *Trilleek*, *Sannotab*, *Cuppyloshaw*, *Surascab* and *Burroopung*; these, understanding out of their Books that such a Flood would come, and was then actually coming, prepar'd against the same, and repaired thither; to which place also went two of all sort of Creatures, Herbs, Trees, and Grasses, and of every thing that had life, to the number in all of 1800000 living Souls. This Flood (say they) lasted 120 years, 5 months and 5 days: After which time all those Creatures that were thus preserved, descended down again and replenished the Earth: But as for the 7 men and woman, only one
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of them came down with her, and dwelt at the foot of the Mountain, the other six turned *Fuchee's*, or Holy Men, and spent there the remainder of their days.

They hold in general the *Ptolemaic* System of the Universe, and say that there are 8 or 9 Heavens, counting the Air and Earth, every one exceeding another in Beauty and Glory.

Their Religion consists of nothing that I could ever see or learn, but the leading of a Pure Life, the Washing away of their Sins in the River *Ganges*, their muttering over of diverse Prayets, and their doing of strange and incredible Penances.

They say, that God is such a one, that whosoever seeks him, let it be after what manner he pleases, whether by thinking that the Sun is he, or the Moon, or the like, if they do it but sincerely and honestly, with a right affected heart, they shall be received of him.

They report, that on a time a *Mussulman* seeing a *Hindoo*, or Pagan Priest, in Heaven, he ask'd God how that Infidel came to have admittance thither; whom *Mahomet* so often calls by the name of Bitter Roots? To whom God answer'd, What if a Bitter Root bring forth sweeter Fruit than any of you, why should I not receive it? Upon which the *Mussulman* had no more to say.

They hold, that such as suffer not their minds to wander after the lusts of the world are perfect *Jogees*, or Saints, and hold that God is always present with them in all their actions.

It is to be found in many of their Books, that there was a time, a good while ago, in which God took upon him the shape of a Man, and spent many years in reforming the world, and giving better rules to walk by than had been before: but at length having left them, they soon forgot him and his Rules, and return'd to their former courses; upon which he told them that
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he would leave them to their ways, and never undertake any such thing again.

The Religious at some certain seasons of the year come unto the River *Ganges* (which they call the Holy River) in vast multitudes, even from many parts of *Tartary*, to wash away their sins, and make expiation for their faults.

This *Ganges* is a delicate fine River, chiefly for the sake of its most sweet, pure and clear Waters, which have got it the greatest esteem of any River in the East. I have oftentimes sail'd many miles up it, and have found it in some places not to be above a mile broad, in others not half so much, and in one or two places not above one eighth of a mile. In *April*, when the Water is at the lowest, it is almost dry in many places; but when it is at the highest, which is commonly about the middle of *September*, it is very deep, and many miles broad.

When the people are here gather'd together, they have a great many strange Customs and Ceremonies, and pay a kind of Divine Honour and Worship to the River, too long and tedious here to mention. The *Hindoo's* and *Bramines* preach then every day to the people, teaching them their Duties, and ordering them to say such and such Prayers; but above all things to be Charitable to the poor and needy.

It is reported, that upon the Hills by *Casmere* there are men that live some hundreds of years, and can hold their breaths, and lye in Trances for several years together, if they be but kept warm; and that every year some of them come down unto the people at *Ganges*, and do many great Cures; for whom they have such a veneration, that they frequently drink the Water they wash their sweaty Feet in.

The Penances and Austerities that they undergo are almost incredible; most of them through their continual

nual Fastings, and lying upon the parching hot Sand in the heat of the Sun, are so lean, dry'd and wither'd, that they look like Skeletons or Shadows, and one can scarce perceive them to breathe, or feel their Pulse beat.

When any great man dves amongst them, but especially any of their *Jogee's*, or *Saints*, they make great preparations for their Funeral; the Corpse is laid on its belly, and Salt and Rice laid round about it at every corner on the ground. Then the nearest Relations to the party deceased carry a pot of Water on their shoulders several times about the Funeral Pile, when they burn them, then breaking it in pieces, spills the Water. Which Ceremony being ended, the Pile is fired, and then all the Relations begin to howl, and embrace one another, then washing themselves in some neighbouring River, they depart every one to his home; and as for the remaining Ashes, if he be rich they gather them up, and cast them into the *Ganges* or the Sea.

Sometimes it happens that the Wife of the deceased party, if she have no Children, and be old, or ill to live in the world, will burn herself with the dead body; but this happens very seldom. It is said, that in such cases the *Bramines* give the woman a stupifying Liquor, which by the time that they are in the fire makes them senseless of any pain.

To know into what Body the Soul of the Deceased is transmigrated they do thus; they strew the Ashes of the dead upon the place where he was first laid after his death, and handfuls of odoriferous Flowers about the same, and returning again in 44 hours, they judge by some pretended impression or other in the Ashes, into what body it is gone: if the foot of an Horse, or Dog, or Ox, or such like appear, then they certainly give out that it is gone into such like Creatures; but if nothing appear, then they think it is certainly gone to the Starry Regions.

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As for their Learning and Knowledge it is but little; they have indeed several Books writ in diverse Languages, but they contain nothing but a great deal of stuff and cant about their Worship, Rites and Ceremonies.

They are ignorant of all parts of the World but their own; they wonder much at us, that will take so much care and pains, and run thro' so many dangers both by Sea and Land, only, as they say, to uphold and nourish Pride and Luxury. For, say they, every Country in the whole world is sufficiently endow'd by Nature with every thing that is necessary for the life of Man, and that therefore it is madness to seek for, or desire, that which is needless and unnecessary.

The last time that I was at *Modufferpore* in *Indostan*, I had a great deal of talk with a *Bramine* somewhat more learned than any of the rest, his name was *Ram-naunt*; he told me a great many Secrets in Physick, and told me many Traditions and Stories. He says, that if you bury a piece of Money for some considerable time in the mouth of a live Frog, and then dig it up again at midnight, that this piece of Money, to whomsoever you give or pay it, will always return to you again.

He says, that if the little Worm in the Wood *Lukerakeræ* be cut in two, and the one part stirs and the other not, if the stirring part be bruised, and given with half a Beetle to a Man, the other half to a Woman, this Charm will keep them from ever lying absent one from the other.

They have Books full of the like absurdities, and Cabalistical Complication of Figures; as for example, if you write these following Numbers, 28, 35, 2, 7.—6, 3, 32, 31—34, 29, 8, 1,—4, 5, 30, 33. in the squares of a square figure, and your Enemies name under it, and wear it always about you, your Enemy shall never be able to hurt you.

So if you write the following figures in the like manner upon the Left hand, 2, 9, 2, 7—6, 3, 6, 5,—8, 3, 8, 1—4, 5, 4, 7—with Turmeric, and wash the same off with fair Water of *Ganges*, and drink it, it will cure all manner of Venemous Bitings.

Multitudes of such like ridiculous fancies they have; all which they seem to have borrowed from the *Cabala* of the *Saracens*, which is full of such like.

I lately heard a *Bramine* say, that if some of the Pieces or knots of the Cloath (in which a Woman hath been burned with her Husband) be saved, and made up in the form of a Wick, and fitted for a Lamp, and lighted, and set in a dead Womans Skull, that it would make the dead party appear. This he said he had done, but I did not believe him.

When they have any mad men amongst them, they take them and put them into a close Room, just big enough to hold them, and almost smother them to death with Musk and cold Smells, which soon brings their brains into their right temperature, and so recovers them, &c.

There happened two things in our Voyage hither which I thought very observable, tho perhaps they may not be unknown to you—The first was, that all our Tornadoes brought much Rain with a stink; and if the Sea-men did but lay their Cloaths by for 24 hours, they became all full of little Maggots. The second is, When we came out of *Europe* we took in some Water at *St Jago's*, and when we were almost at our Journeys end, our Cooper going with a Candle to open one of the Casks, he had no sooner done it, but the Water immediately took fire, and burnt his Face, Hands and Fingers; but he suddenly turning about quench'd the same, by setting his Britch on it. It stunk pretty much also at the same time, but afterwards came to its native sweetness, &c. *I am yours, &c.*

Jo. Marshall.