XXXI. *An Account of some artificial Caverns in the Neighbourhood of Bombay: By Mr. William Hunter, Surgeon in the East Indies.*

Read July 1, 1784.

IN different parts of the island of Salfette, and in the neighbourhood of that of Bombay, we meet with some most stupendous monuments of human labour and ingenuity; which would be matter of admiration in any part of the world, but must astonish us still more, when we find them in a country remarkable for the indolence of its present inhabitants. These are a set of enormous excavations, all of which are made in solid rocks, and decorated with a variety of figures, most curiously cut from the same substance with the caverns themselves. That which has principally attracted the attention of travellers is on the small island of *Elephanta*, situated in the east side of the harbour of Bombay. This island runs to a considerable height in the middle, and has a slope to the north and south, in which direction is its greatest length. Near the south end is the figure of an elephant, rudely cut in stone, from which the island has its name. The length of the body is twelve feet, the height about eight. The trunk is rolled up in a spiral form, and pretty well cut; the legs are shapeless masses of matter, out of all proportion too large, and seem intended merely as pillars to support the fabric. We must look in the same light on the tail, which
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is massy, and reaches to the ground; and on a pillar, which is placed under the posterior part of the belly. On the back are the remains of something that is said to have formerly represented a young elephant, though no traces of such a resemblance are now to be found. The whole has been formed from one piece of stone; but the body is now split in two, and there are visible marks of its having been done by gun-powder. About half a mile to the northward, you are conducted by a pretty, steep ascent up the side of a rock, to the door of the cave, which enters from the North. By it you are led first of all into a *feerandah*, or piazza, which extends from east to west sixty feet; its breadth from north to south is sixteen feet. In the west end is a human figure with eight arms, four on each side, united at the shoulder, one behind another. On the right the foremost arm passes across the body, and is applied to the opposite side, at that part where the inhabitants of the country usually wear their *crees* or dagger, as if about to draw it. The second is thrown cut from the body, and the fore-arm has been bent, so as to come before the breast, but is broken off a very little way beyond the elbow. The humerus of the third is parallel to the former, but the fore-arm entirely broken off. The fore-arm of the fourth is bent upwards, but broken off near the wrist. The two first arms on the left side are gently bent, and hang downwards: the third supports a small female figure, and the fourth is extended above the head, to support an irregular body something like the folds of a hanging collected together. The right thigh is bent outwards, almost at right angles to the body, but broken off near the knee. The left is broken off close to the hip. This figure is surrounded by a number of smaller ones in various attitudes. In the east end is another human figure, which is now nothing more than a bust, as it only extends to the waist, and the arms are wanting. This last circumstance however is the effect of violence, for the
arms

arms bear evident marks of mutilation. Both these figures, and most of those which are to be described, wear on their heads a kind of helmet, the body of which seems to be composed of a soft substance applied very closely to the head, something in form of a turban, but of a more pyramidal shape than those worn by the inhabitants at present, and marked with inequalities which give it the appearance of a quilted stuff. In the front is a plate much like that of a grenadier's cap; and on each side appears part of another plate, which is placed on the back part of the head, and projects from behind the ears. It is ribbed like a scallop shell, and a good deal resembles (in figure though not in situation) the ruff formerly worn in England. Some of the figures in the south end of the cave have the back of their heads turned towards the spectator, so as to ascertain the form of this plate exactly, which is not the case with those which present their faces. For though all these statues are as round and prominent as the life, yet none of them are entirely detached from the sides of the rock. The two figures just now described have large massy ear-rings, and below these appear a few ringlets of hair which spread upon the shoulder. The under lip of these, as well as of the other figures, is remarkably thick.

THE body of the cave is surrounded on every side by feerandahs similar to the former. The dimensions of the cave and feerandahs are as follows:

Length of the cave from north to south	90 feet
Breadth of the south feerandah, including the niches which contain certain figures to be after described	24
Breadth of the North feerandah	16
West	16
East	16
Breadth of the cave from East to West	78

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whence the whole length, including the feerandais is 130 feet, and the entire breadth 110.

THE roof is supported by four rows of pillars placed at the distance of fifteen feet from each other. The base of each pillar is a square paralleliped, three feet three inches thick, and five feet nine inches in height: on this stands a round column, five feet high, which tapers pretty fast towards the top. It is terminated by a ring, one foot and an half in thickness, which projects exactly like the cordon in a piece of fortification, and has been compared, not improperly, to a round cushion pressed flat by the weight of the superincumbent rock. Above this is another square paralleliped, one foot high, and on the top of it a plate, nine inches thick, which projects to east and west two feet and an half beyond the top of the pillar, having its ends sloped, and cut into a moulding. Its breadth from north to south is the same with that of the pillar. Above all, there runs from east to west, over the top of the pillars, a ridge cut out from the rock, resembling a beam, about one foot in thickness. From these data, we find the whole height of the cave to be fifteen feet. The column, cordon, and upper paralleliped (which two last form the capital) are finely fluted, and on each corner of the base, where it projects beyond the column, is placed a small figure in a sitting posture.

IN the west end of this cave is a chamber, twenty feet square, with four doors, and within it is something like a small mausoleum. This has probably been the place peculiarly consecrated to religious worship, the *sanctum sanctorum* of the cave. On each side of every door is a gigantic figure, in all eight. Their heads are decorated in much the same manner as before described; they have chains round their necks, and ear-rings of an enormous size. The most entire is on the east side of the south door. Its whole height is about thirteen feet and an half. He

rests on the right leg, and the knee of the left is a little bent. The right humerus hangs downwards, parallel to the body, and the fore-arm is bent in such a manner that the hand is opposite to the navel: the palm is turned upwards, and sustains a globe; and the fingers are bent a little backwards at their joining with the metacarpus, in a manner that admirably represents, or, to speak more properly, makes the spectator almost feel, the weight of the body which they support. A belt is passed round the body at the navel, and from the left side of this hangs a strap joining with, and supporting a garment, which first appears at the right hip, passes over the thighs, under the genitals, which it leaves uncovered, and is tied in a large knot on the outside of the left thigh. From this knot, it is reverted over that thigh and crosses the other part of the same garment, from whence the end hangs loose between the legs. The left hand rests on the larger knot of this garment. The left thigh and knee are in particular well executed. The patella is distinctly formed, and you can clearly perceive the swelling of the vasti muscles, especially the vastus internus. The legs are not handsome, as they taper from the knee and have little or no calf; however, they much resemble those generally met with among the inhabitants of this country.

IN the north end of the west feerandah is a very extraordinary figure, with eight arms, his body inclined very much to the left, his legs folded under him, but too much mutilated to distinguish their real position. Two of the arms support a curtain or canopy over his head. On this canopy sit a number of figures in the attitude of devotion. One of the right hands holds a sword of justice, and in one of the left is a pedestal, on which stands a small figure with his back turned to the large one, and inclined so much backwards that the head, when entire, must have hung very low; but that is now broke off, and
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the other parts of the figure are greatly mutilated. From these two circumstances many travellers have supposed the large statue to represent Solomon in the act of dividing the child; an idea so repugnant to all probability, that I should not have thought it worth mentioning had I not heard and seen it asserted with a great degree of confidence. Another of the left hands holds a bell, which is known to be an instrument constantly used in the religious ceremonies of the Gentoos. The arms and hands of the large figure, which are entire, and six in number, are exceedingly well executed; the other two are broken off.

WE have already seen that the people, whoever they were, who carved these statues have accurately observed and expressed successfully the form of the limbs, and the alterations that undergoes from muscular action or external impulse. But in the opposite end of this *feerandah* is a group of figures which shews them to have possessed a much more difficult part of the statuary's art, I mean that which represents the effects of mental sensations on the human countenance. The three principal figures which compose this group are two men, and a woman placed between them, all at full length and in a standing posture. One of the men rests his hand on the shoulder of the woman, who seems studiously to turn away from him; the other man, from his air, has the appearance of superior rank, and, if we may judge from the resemblance of his dress to that worn by the Bramins at present, belongs to that sacred order. An air of dejection is visible in every one of these figures; their heads are declined a little from the perpendicular attitude, and every feature is expressive of grief, not indeed of any violent agitation, but of a settled, deep rooted concern.

BUT the most remarkable figure of all is in the south *feerandah*, directly facing the main entrance of the cave. It is an

enormous bust, with four heads joined behind the ears; one of which faces presents itself directly in front, two more are seen in profile, and the fourth does not appear, being hid behind the first. The first face measures four feet from the top of the brow (where the usual ornament of the head begins) to the bottom of the under lip: the nose is about one foot and an half in length; the whole length of the face is four feet and an half; the breadth from the ear to the middle of the nose, three feet four inches. The breadth of the whole figure between the shoulders is about twenty feet. This face has a drowsy but placid appearance. That on the left (of the spectator who faces it) has the eyebrows contracted, the skin of the nose drawn upwards and the alce nasi distended, expressing contempt mixed with indignation. The mouth is furnished with whiskers; the tongue is thrust out between the teeth, and the whole features are in some degree monstrous. There are four hands, one on each side, and two others half way between the former and the middle of the figure. The outermost right hand (that most to the left of the spectator) supports a large hooded snake; the middle finger is not quite entire, but must have been about three feet and an half in length. The thickness of the snake is about a foot. The inner hand on this side is entirely broken off, but appears to have held a snake of the same kind with the former. The inner left hands supports a body of an oblate spheroidal form with a conical excrescence at the upper part and scaly like the squill or filly root, of such a size as to fill the palm of the hand compleatly. The remaining face has a more pleasing aspect than the last; the under lips of both are remarkably thick. The outer left hand is rested on the shoulder, with the palm turned inwards, and holds an irregular body like a bunch of flowers. May we not ascribe the difference which is so remarkable in the aspect of the two last mentioned faces to the nature of the objects which are held

in the two hands, directly in view of those faces? All the heads have very large ear-rings, and much the same ornaments with those before described.

ON the east end of the same wall is an Amazon; the left breast, which is the only one, is very large and globular; and it plainly appears that there has never been any other. The right arm rests on the head of a bull; the left hangs down, and takes hold of something which is so much mutilated that we cannot discover what it has been meant to represent. Behind these are two other arms; the right supports a snake of the kind before-mentioned, and in the left she holds a small shield, grasping it by that part which is meant for the insertion of the arm. The shield is round, and regularly convex on the outside, which the statue turns towards herself, holding it nearly on a level with the shoulder. She has double bracelets on her two left hands, and a ring on each finger; on the right are single bracelets, and a ring only on the little finger. She leans, as beforementioned, to the right side, which ought to make the left hip project a little; but that projection is greatly exaggerated in the representation, which makes it appear distorted. The figure is surrounded with many smaller ones, both human and animal, in various postures.

ON the left side of the great figure with three faces is a male statue at full length; his left hand leaning, or rather pressing on the head of a dwarf; who, by the position of his body, and expression of his countenance, seems to experience great torture. These dwarfs are figures of a monstrous form that frequently occur in this and in some of the other caves. They have heads of an enormous size, with very short necks. Their breast is contracted, but the belly large, prominent, and much longer than it ought to be in proportion to the other parts. The legs and
thighs

thighs are very small, bearing no proportion, either in length or thickness, to the rest of the figure. They are commonly placed, as in the instance before us, close to a large statue who leans on them, and sometimes appears to give them very great pain. The dwarf we have been now speaking of holds in his right hand a snake, twisted in a variety of folds. The large figure, from the knotted string over his left shoulder and breast, appears to be of the order of Bramins. A number of figures round him are presenting offerings, one of which is plainly a fish. One figure is kneeling at the foot of the large one, with his eyes turned upwards. A small figure on the right of the Bramin has a knife by his side, very distinctly made. The ribbed plate on the back of the head in this figure is of a circular form. On the left, in the same niche, is a representation common enough in this cave, that is, one figure sitting with his legs over the shoulders of another.

FROM the east side of the great cave, you enter into an area, in which are several smaller apartments. On the south wall of this area is a gigantic figure, who rests his left arm on the head of a dwarf, his right supports a hooded snake. He has a broad sword hung at his left side, by that belt, or garment, which in most of the other figures passes over the thighs in the manner before described, only in this figure it descends towards the right thigh instead of the left. He has four hands, the backmost left one supports a small human figure; one of the right hands is broken off entirely. The ornament on the head of the dwarf resembles a cushion, and above that is placed a solid body like the round ring of one of the pillars with part of the column, and on this the giant rests his hand. Round the body of the dwarf is twisted a snake, the head of which hangs down below the left hand of the dwarf. The length of this area is fifty-eight feet, and at each end is a small apartment, the floors of which

which are covered with water. That on the west is decorated with many figures, two of which resemble some of those monstrous Deities that are adored by the Gentoos at this day. That in the east end is entirely without ornament. Opposite to the middle of the area is a chamber with a small mausoleum in it.

FROM the west side of the great cave you enter into another square area, open above, by means of a cut made upwards through the whole thickness of the rock, about forty or fifty feet. In this are two small apartments, which have nothing remarkable in them; and an irregular cavern, full of water, which reaches inwards, below the bottom of the cave, so far, that the eye cannot discover where it terminates.

THE whole cave and the apartments adjoining to it are cut out of a solid rock of a very hard consistence. The figures have suffered nothing from time, for the surfaces of them all are smooth and well defined; but all the mutilations which they have sustained proceed from the brutal violence of barbarians who delight in mischief and are enemies to taste and science.

THE most remarkable, next to that last described, is

THE cave at Ambola, a village about seven miles distant from Tannah, in the island of Salsette. The cave lies a mile to the westward of this place. The principal entry is from the west; it is about eight feet wide, and covered at the beginning with an arch, formed by the trunk of a tree fallen across, the head of which has taken root. From the middle of it, some large sprouts have grown up, forming a new tree. From this the passage continues of the same breadth for about thirty feet, when it is extended to three times its former breadth. You advance about twelve feet more, and then come to a flight of seven steps, which leads down into the cave. The passage till you come to these steps is open above. The great gate is about twenty feet high, including the height of the steps, and the cheeks of it appear

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pear to have been fluted columns, but are now entirely defaced. By this gate you enter into an antichamber, which has at each end a small *feerandah*, separated from the rest of the place by a row of three pillars. Directly facing you is the door of the cave, on each side of which is a figure, which we can just distinguish to have been human, so much have they suffered from the ravages of time. The head of that on the left is so defaced that its form and dress are quite indistinguishable; only the stumps of both arms are left, but from the position of these stumps with regard to the body, and still more from the analogy of other figures which are more entire, it appears, that the left arm has been in a depending posture, with the elbow bent. The figure on the right is much in the same posture, and the left arm more entire; the head is covered with something that has the appearance of a helmet. The great cave, into which you enter by this gate, is a square of eighty-eight feet, within which are contained two smaller squares, concentric to the larger; the outer, formed by pillars placed parallel to the sides of the great square at the distance of fifteen feet from the outer wall of the cave. Each row consists of six pillars including the end ones, in all twenty. The pillars are about thirteen or fourteen feet high, and of the same form with those in the cave at Elephanta. In the centre of this square, also at the distance of fifteen feet, is the innermost of all, inclosed by a solid wall, and having a door in the middle of each side. This chamber, as well as all the other parts of the cave, is cut from the solid rock. Within is a cubical mass, which appears to have been the pedestal of some Gentoo Deity, as this place is still consecrated to their worship. On the top of this pedestal, is erected a wooden frame, on which hangs a bell, used by the Gentoos in their religious ceremonies. The doors are formed with regular frames and cornices, and have been highly ornamented. On each side of these doors have been
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been groups of figures, about three feet high, some of them evidently monstrous, but all of them now greatly defaced.

IN the east end of the cave are three doors, by which you enter into another apartment. The middle door leads into the body of this apartment, and the other two enter into two *feerandahs*; separated from the place itself by rows of pillars, such as before described. On each side of the middle door within this apartment is a gigantic figure, attended by smaller ones. That on the left hand of the spectator who faces them is entire in all the parts above the hip; except the two hands, which are both broken off. He is of a robust make, well proportioned, and finished in a masterly manner. The face is broad, with a spacious forehead, the cheeks are full, and the whole countenance has an air of serenity, but nothing lively or expressive of acuteness or penetration. This figure has no beard, nor have any of the others except one, which is in a small group, over the large figures we are now describing. The hair of this gigantic statue is bushy, and formed into curls, which hang down upon the neck; there is a pyramidal ornament upon the crown of the head. The ears are pierced, and have large jewels suspended from them. Over the left shoulder is thrown a chain, which descends across the body, as far as the right hip. Round the waist about the top of the bones which form the pelvis another chain is passed, from the right side of which hang two smaller chains that are soon lost in a garment, which descends in a slanting direction from the right side, covers that thigh, and the lower part of the left, but yet seems to leave the genitals bare. The right arm is bent up towards the top of the shoulder, probably to hold the garment beforementioned. The left arm hangs down, nearly straight, and almost parallel to the body. The legs are miserably defaced, so that we can just discover the right foot to have been advanced before the left. A chain goes round

each arm, about the insertion of the deltoid muscle, and has on the outside the figure of a face, which is probably the place where it is fastened. On the left of this statue are two smaller figures, one of which is higher by the head than the other, and stands behind him. They certainly represent children, from the size of the head, which is very large in proportion to the body. Both these figures have rings in their ears, and their hair has much the appearance of a wig. The larger has the right hand raised as high as the top of his shoulder, and rests it on the head of the other, who appears to stretch out his neck, and look forward with great eagerness at some distant object. The body of this one below the neck is entirely demolished.

THE figure on the other side of the doors is of the same exquisite workmanship with the former. The right arm is in the same posture as that last mentioned, and suspends a garment which is very distinctly represented. It covers both thighs and all the parts from the top of the *os ilium* to within a hand's breadth of the knee. It is tied in a knot on the left hip, from which it hangs down in loose folds. As far as we can judge from what remains of the legs, the left is advanced one step forwards. The left arm rests on the head of one of those dwarfs before described, who holds in his right hand something like a snake, and with the left supports some animal the species of which we cannot determine. Over the top of the door are several groups of small figures, admirably executed.

THIS apartment is about thirty feet long, and has a door in the east end which leads into two small caves, in which there is nothing remarkable. The two doors of this apartment, the east and west ones of the small square in the middle of the great cave, and the two first described which form the principal entrance, are all in one straight line, in length about one hundred and thirty feet.

FROM the south side of the cave you enter into an irregular passage in the rock which ascends by a gentle slope towards a hole that is just sufficient to let a man of a slender make creep through, and leads into a passage between two pretty high rocks. But another branch of the same subterraneous cavern strikes off to the right, and, after making a curvature, which prevents one at first entering it from seeing the end, leads you to the door of a small regular apartment, the floor of which is covered, about three inches deep, with very clear water. This apartment is divided into two, and in the backmost of these is a Gentoo Deity.

THE whole cave is cut out of the rock, in the same manner with that at Elephanta, but the stone is of a much softer quality, so that, although the figures here bear fewer marks of violence than the others, they have suffered much more from the hand of time, insomuch that some of them are more than half mouldered away. The two large figures in the smaller apartment, though evidently a continuation of the same rocky substance, seem to be an exception to this general observation; for, though some of their limbs are broken off, the parts that remain have a smooth surface, and are harder than most other parts of the cave.

BUT the most numerous collection of these caves is at CANARA, a place within about ten miles of Tannah, and more to the northward than Ambola. Here a very large hill is almost totally surrounded with these excavations of various forms and sizes, but none of them are finished in such an elaborate way, or decorated with so numerous figures as those before described. I shall therefore not enter into a tedious description of each particular cave, but only mention some remarkable circumstances in which these differ from the others.

THE pillars we meet with here are rudely hewn, of irregular shapes, and without much uniformity one with another. Many of these caves are more than double the height of those at Elephanta or Ambola; and some of them have square holes at equal heights on opposite sides of the walls, as if intended for beams to support a floor, which idea is confirmed by their having windows at that height. Many of these caves are very small, but others do not yield in extent to those before described, and are furnished with vestibules, from which you enter into the body of the place. One of these vestibules has, at each end, a statue of a much larger size than any of those before described, except the bust with three heads in the cave at Elephanta. They stand in two niches, and by that means are more nearly detached from the rock, out of which they are cut, than any of the others. The statues are at full length, in height about twenty feet, and in every respect well proportioned. The heads are bare, and the hair formed into loose curls. In the caves before described we hardly meet with a capital figure that is not surrounded by a numerous group of smaller ones; but here the case is otherwise. It is also to be observed that we do not find in these caves any of the monstrous figures which occur now and then at Ambola, but much more frequently at Elephanta. On the wall of one of the caves is a pretty long inscription, very entire; from which, it is reasonable to suppose, some curious information might be collected, with regard to the antiquity and original design of these caves. All I could learn concerning it was that it is in the Gentoo language, and contains benedictions on those who shall come to this place to worship. If this is true, which I do not give as a certain fact, it determines at once the design for which these immense works were undertaken, in a manner that is very probable, from the many figures which resemble

resemble the Gentoo Deities, and still more from the cave at Ambola being consecrated to their religious worship even at this time.

THE antiquity of all the caves is undoubtedly very remote. None of the inhabitants have any tradition relating to their origin; and indeed many circumstances would lead us to suppose that they have been constructed by a very different race of men from those who now inhabit this country. In the first place, the present inhabitants are extremely indolent, and very unlikely to execute a work of such enormous labour. Secondly, when they make any attempts at sculpture, their performances are almost all of the monstrous kind, and destitute of grace or proportion; whereas the majority of the figures now described are natural, and even most of those which are monstrous have limbs elegantly proportioned. It is farther natural to suppose that those artists would take the models of their work from among themselves; and the figures are very far from resembling the present race of Indians. The general form of the body is more robust and muscular; but the most remarkable difference lies in the countenance, which is broad and full; the nose flat; the lips, particularly the under one, remarkably thick; and the whole combination of features of a drowsy appearance, very unlike that acute and sprightly look which distinguishes the natives of Hindostan. And the kind of features here described are so universally found in all the figures, that they cannot be ascribed to any fortuitous circumstance. An argument against what has been said may be taken from the inscription mentioned above, which is said to be in the language spoken by the Gentoos at this day; but, allowing this to be true, it is not improbable that the inscription may be of much later origin than the cave itself. From the simplicity which reigns through the whole of the caves at Canara, and the total want of those monstrous figures which we

meet

meet with in the others ; I think it probable that the former are the most ancient of the whole, and that the others have not been constructed till both the taste and the mythology of the people began to be corrupted.

FROM considering the incredible labour that must have been employed in cutting these caves in a hard and solid rock, the idea has been suggested, that it may, at the time the work was performed, have been of a softer consistence, and been afterwards hardened by exposure to the air ; and indeed this conjecture appears, from the many similar instances known to every one, to carry with it a great degree of probability. It would not be difficult to put this to the test of experiment, by digging in some of the adjacent parts ; and, as the enquiry is curious, the attempt would well deserve the attention of any one who should have leisure and opportunity to prosecute the subject.