

TOM BRIMS'S INDIAN PRINCES.

(From Chambers Journal.)

Very odd things at times have a momentary vogue in Paris. No matter what the triviality may be, if it can only set a certain amount of talk afloat respecting itself, its fortune is made for a number of hours. During a short stay I was making in the gay city before the siege darkened it—when, indeed, no such darkening was thought of—a tradesman's shop-window in the Rue St.—was having a brief success of this kind. Ladies were everywhere going into raptures over a show of shoes to be seen in it. Men talked of the sight in the cafes as earnestly as if it had been a matter of national interest. For two or three days the police had to make special arrangements for the circulation of people on the pavement in front of the shop. The display consisted of a large assortment of slippers specially made for some Indian princes then in the French capital.

Monsieur must see it, emphatically said a waiter, shrugging his shoulders, presenting the open palms of his hands towards me, and lifting them to a level with his ears, which he brought down to meet them. 'It was not possible for a person of taste like Monsieur to leave Paris before going to look. That would be a mistake; it would be a sin; it would be a crime! Such boots had never been seen before! They did glory to France! The great Indian princes would only wear each pair for a single day, and then kick them aside. It was a pity. Yah! Monsieur had no idea what a show could be made of boots; and it was only two, three, four streets away. The man had shewn wonderful taste. He was entitled to Monsieur's admiration. Monsieur could not be cruel to the maker, cruel to himself, cruel to everybody, by not seeing them.'

I felt that I could not be guilty of cruelty so wholesale. It is true that it turned out, from a question I put, that the waiter had been hard-hearted to that extent: he had not seen the boots! My time was vacant on my hands that evening; I started at once.

When I turned the top corner of the Rue St.—it instantly became apparent that the attractiveness of the show had been only reasonably exaggerated. A little hubbub of voices made itself heard. At the front of moderate-sized premises, about half-way down on the left-hand side, was an excited group, constantly fed by fresh arrivals. All were good-humoured, talkative, noisy. By a slow process, I reached the window. I certainly saw a very pretty display. Behind the polished plate-glass, arranged upon a sloping base of delicate gray tint, rows, crescents, rings, triangles of slippers of oriental shape and decoration shone and glowed in all the variety of colored leathers and spangled brocade. There seemed a sufficient number for an army. The grouping of the hues and the systematic arrangement generally, was doubtless an artistic achievement of its kind.

In a little space in front of the window, was moving about the proud, breathless owner of the establishment, a middle-aged Frenchman of very ordinary type, bare-headed, and with his coat sleeves turned back to an extent which, in the case of an English tradesman in like circumstances, would have meant that he was preparing for a pugilistic conflict with the crowd for coming too near his window. Nothing was farther from the intention of the Frenchman. He was volubly guiding the admiration of the spectators into the right channels. He unhesitatingly pointed out the merits of his own productions, recounting with great pomp of gesticulation, and most wonderful pronunciation, the names and titles of his great customers, the Indian princes. Just as the batch of on-lookers, of which I formed one, was moving away to make room for the next, the voices of three or four gendarmes present were raised in shrill authority. A great sensation ran through the crowd.

The bare-headed master of the shop, flinging his arms aloft frantically, exclaimed sublimely: 'They are here!' He rushed forward in the direction of the bustle. A passage was formed to the shop-door, most of the male bystanders raising their hats, as along the narrow lane came three Hindus, clad in turbans and voluminous eastern robes, short scimitars, with jewelled hilts, flashing at their sides. They were the princes coming to pay their boot-maker a visit; perhaps to order another windowful of incomparable slippers.

Suddenly, as I looked, a feeling of amazement seized me. Behind the Indians, himself languidly acknowledging the salutations, as though he considered they were meant partially for him, advanced a more European person.

'That,' I heard it whispered around me, 'is their interpreter.'

'But, surely, that familiar, tall, lank figure could only belong to one being in the world; those large, sallow features shewing under a gold-braided cap, with its white linen folds of sun-protecting curtain falling on the shoulders, could not be mistaken for any other. The interpreter's gaze met mine. He, too, made a start of recognition. Upon his closing the near blue eye in a rapid wink, there was no longer any possibility of doubt. Unquestionably, it was Tom Brims late of the same shipping-office with myself in London, who was filling the important and dignified post of interpreter to the Indian princes.

Six months before, he had left the Fenchurch Street premises, owing to not being sufficiently appreciated by the heads of the establishment. It was, in fact, at their instance that he departed, to reside with a maiden aunt living somewhere in France. He severed himself from his desk in the best of spirits, making his exit with perfect self-possession, and not without a certain grace; but he had had much experience previously in going through the performance, both at home and abroad. Educated for the

Indian service Tom Brims had gone out to the East; but he re-appeared in London in a period of time which could not be considered long, taking into account the distance. The explanation he gave was; that a Hindu potentate wished to adopt him as his successor; but that the governor-general of India enviously objected. After this, his stay in India, he said, was made so uncomfortable by intrigues, that he left for England. I will confess that we had thought Tom Brims was in part romancing; here, however, he was with these great Hindu chiefs.

He paused, and solemnly lifting his finger, called to me in some gibberish, such as we had used in Fenchurch Street, and which I knew to mean that he would meet me in five minutes in a shop on the opposite side of the way. The crowd, on hearing and seeing me thus addressed, gave way very respectfully around me. Hats were lifted; a way was indicated for me to advance. I had presence of mind to bow to those making a road for me; availing myself of it I crossed the pavement, and, rather diffidently, passed just within the door-way of the shop. There, in less than the five minutes, Tom Brims came to me.

'You unbelieving wretch,' were his first words, 'didn't I always tell you and the other fellows in the office I should make my fortune some day? I did not make one in India when I was there, I know—more fool I was for it; but I shan't be a simpleton this time. Their mahogany Highnesses here are rolling in the rupees I have a lack of—ha! ha! I mean to make more than a lac of it.'

I grasped Tom's hand, congratulating him, although I hardly knew how to address him, he was so changed altogether, looking so grand in his gold-lace and semi-uniform.

The bootmaker, having discovered that as the princes knew not a word of French, he was wasting his volubility in the absence of Tom, here came smiling towards us, and reminded him, in the politest way, that he was needed by their Highnesses.

Tom lightly waved him off with his hand. He said aside to me in English: 'Let them wait. They could not stir a yard without me. I have got them under my thumb completely. They come from Upper India, right away from the known parts, and there is not a man within a thousand miles of us at this moment who could tell a word they say.' He went on to add it was the luckiest thing in the world. He was on the quays at Marseille when they landed. The interpreter they had brought with them was, poor fellow, killed on the spot by falling headlong into a dock, where a vessel crushed him. He himself stepped forward, was of much service to them, and was appointed straightaway.

I told him how delighted I was at his good fortune, but said I must not detain him. The fellows in the office, assured him, would be equally glad of the news. I was taking my leave. His large features relaxed into a grin deepening into a chuckle; then, instantly, he put on a tremendous frown. 'It would never do,' he muttered for them to see him laughing: 'If I keep them waiting any longer he continued, 'when they get back to the hotel, they'll run their swords through two or three of the poor wretches of their suite. Nobody could hurt them for it, as they are travelling under Ambassadors' Law. I'll stop, if you like.

'You must come to me at the hotel,' he added; 'come at six o'clock. There will be time for a little chat. We are going to one of the minor theatres to-night; we shall go to the Grand Opera when we come back to Paris from London. They are in a sort of incognito till they reach England, for fear of offending the Indian Secretary.'

He gave me a card of the hotel; taking it, I hastily made my way out into the street, amazed at the coolness with which Tom Brims sauntered towards those fierce maguates.

At six o'clock that evening, instead of being at Tom Brims's hotel, I was some fifty miles away from Paris, hastening on the railway route to Calais on my way for England. The re-extension of my holiday had run out, and I knew that if I had any dispute with my principals in Fenchurch Street I could not hope to tumble into an interpretership to great Indian nabobs. If there was no other reason, I did not know any eastern languages, which was perhaps sufficient. I did not choose to take up Brims's invaluable time, by explaining this; but, before quitting Paris, I posted a letter to him stating it. It was great news I was taking back to the London office. The clerks were only a little less amazed at it, second-hand, than I was in the first instance. Business in the office, I fear, suffered from our watching the newspapers from day to day for the arrival of the great personages in this country.

The intimation was found in the Times on the morning of the fourth day. It appeared among the parliamentary intelligence. A well-known honourable member, who devotes himself mainly to shewing that whatever relates to India, no matter how it is done, is grossly mismanaged, had indignantly asked the Indian minister in the House of Commons, on the previous evening, whether it was true that the hospitality of the country was to be again disgraced by their Highnesses, the Indian princes, just upon the point of landing on our shores, not being received in some special way befitting their rank and authority?

The minister in reply, said every attention would be paid to the distinguished visitors. But at present, their Highnesses had not officially notified their wishes. In Paris, they had preserved a kind of incognito: it was not known what their desires as to publicity might be. Owing to an accident which it was understood befell their interpreter, an offer of services had been tendered to the princes by the English Embassy in Paris; but it had been repudiated by their Highnesses, that they had the adequate aid of an eminent Englishman in that capacity.

Our office startled the whole premises, from basement to roof, by a round of cheers. The eminent Englishman could be no other than Tom Brims. He had achieved

fame; he had been alluded to in the British parliament. It calmed our excitement a little in the course of the morning to carve an inscription upon the desk which had had the honour in former times of propping his elbows, and on which he had momentarily rested the pewter pots containing his stout. Each one of us, by means of our penknives, contributed a word in turn. The composition stated that 'T. Brims, Esq., the eminent Englishman alluded to in parliament by the Indian minister, on the evening of the sixteenth of July, as the able interpreter of their Highnesses the Indian princes then visiting Europe, once laboured at that obscure desk.'

To be continued.

A VERY SICK NAVY.

The war vessels of the United States, now in the Asiatic squadron, are like the long rows of Englishmen who gaze longingly across the Channel, towards the white cliffs of England, afraid to come home. It is a fact that the executive officer of a craft, which the authorities were pleased to call a flagship, lost ten pounds of flesh in three days from the mental strain of navigating his vessel from Japan to China in a slight gale. The poor ships are doomed to a perpetual exile from their native land; it would be madness to sail them across the Pacific. They literally "repair" from one port to another, being in dry-dock almost all the time they are in port. In a recent voyage of one of these terrible engines of war it came into collision with the royal Japanese yacht, and was so seriously injured that it was taken into port with the greatest difficulty, and is now being putted up so that it will float. The royal yacht was unharmed. Now, as everything which the Japanese make, so far as we know, is composed of papier-mache, if a papier-mache yacht can cut down one of our ships, the bare rumor that even a Chilean man-of-war was bearing down upon a Yankee fleet would cause our vessels to fall to pieces through nervous prostration, and if the Chinese should take it into their heads to land a cargo of laborers, in spite of our new passport system, the presence of a war-junk at the Golden Gate would drive the hoodlums to the mountains. It is said that the Chinese call one of their own man-of-war a "war junk," and one of ours an "old junk."—Boston Advertiser.

CHINAMEN AS MASONS.

The New York Sun announces that the Chinamen of the American Metropolis have instituted a Masonic lodge, and now has a membership of over three hundred. On several occasions members of the Chinese lodge have sought to fraternize with members of other Masonic lodges, but on every occasion have been repulsed. The Chinamen were considered members of a clandestine lodge, and, as such, not worthy of notice. It is claimed that there is a grand Lodge of Masons in the Celestial Empire, and that the Emperor, as well as most of his court are members thereof. As to how and when Masonry was introduced into China, there is a great diversity of opinion. Some authorities incline to the belief that the ritual adopted by the Chinese was one used by Eastern Masons at the beginning of the present century. Another authority says that Free Masonry has become so widespread, and publications of a Masonic character are bandied about so loosely, that it is not difficult for anyone to become familiar with the secrets, and his inference is based on that. The New York lodge is said to hold a charter from the grand lodge in China. In San Francisco and other California towns, where the Chinese are numerous, lodges have flourished for years past. According to the Sun, a Chinese Mason must believe in a God, the same as a Christian. All of the 308 are members of some church. Most of them are Methodists, but there are Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and Baptists among them.

A SUBSTANTIAL INSURANCE COMPANY.—During a recent visit to Toronto a representative of the Spectator called at the head office of the North American Life Insurance Company, the new Canadian Company of which the Hon. Alexander Mackenzie, M.P., ex-Prime Minister of Canada, is President, and William McCabe, Managing-Director. This Company secured last year the largest premium revenue ever obtained in Canada by any Company in its first year, and this was done at a very moderate cost. The business done in the general branch was of a very substantial character, the lapses amounting to a little over three per cent, while in the industrial branch the ratio was much less than is usual in that class of business. The North American Life guarantees its policy-holders against possible loss or annoyance from resisting, contesting, or compromising the payment of claims by making its policies incontestable after the lapse of three years. The policy is printed in large type, in plain and simple language, is easily read and understood, and contains only such few provisions as are necessary to protect and secure both the Company and the policy-holder fairly in all mutual rights, the object evidently being to remove at the outset all causes of misunderstanding, and to make a square contract free from lurking technicalities.—New York Spectator, June 8, 1882.

SLEEP IS THE BEST STIMULANT.—The best possible thing for a man to do, when he feels too weak to carry anything through, is to go to bed and sleep as long as he can. This is the only recuperation of brain power, the only actual recuperation of brain-force; because during sleep the brain is in a state of rest, in a condition to receive and appropriate nutriment from the blood. The supply of new brain-substance can be had only from the blood, which it obtains from the food eaten previously; and the brain can best receive and appropriate to itself nutritive substances during a state of sleep. Mere stimulants supply nothing in themselves; they goad the brain, and force it to a greater consumption of its substance, until it is so exhausted that there may not be power enough left to receive a supply.