

RECOLLECTIONS OF INDIA

AND

PEOPLE I HAVE MET THERE.

BY HUKKARU.

Verily those Indian servants are worth their weight in gold, and have not their equals in any other part of the world. I had the same boy for six years, whose whole aim was to serve me faithfully and well, in which he succeeded to perfection. He knew all my habits and tastes, to that degree that I had hardly ever to ask for what I wanted, or occasion to refuse what I did not wish for. He saw that my horses were properly looked after, nursed me when I was sick, with untiring attention, and had no ambition to be other than what he was, wherein I think lies the secret of the success of service in India. One who desires to be something more than a servant generally ends by being no servant at all.

Formerly the railway to Poona was divided, the first portion ending with Campoola at the foot of the Bhore Ghaut, whence you proceeded up by Palanquins—coolies, and bullocks taking your baggage up the said ghaut or mountain to Khandala, where you joined the other train which conveyed you to Poona, but modern engineering has overcome the difficulties of nature, and the railway at the time of which I write pursued its twisting path up the hill side without a break, in the same manner that the C. P. R. climbs the Rockies and the Selkirks. Poona is very enjoyable in the monsoon, the surrounding hills drawing off the bulk of the rain, and only enough falling to render the climate cool and pleasant. There was a capital race course—two indeed, but the old one was only used as an exercise ground by ordinary equestrians—a gymkhana field and the Bund where the band played twice or thrice a week. Besides which, there were not only private croquet parties—lawn tennis was not invented then—but also balls and dinner parties, so that altogether Poona was a gay place in the season. I shared a bungalow for a brief holiday once with my friend Jack Stirling, an army surgeon, and a man I could name with a hole in his skin almost large enough to thrust your fist into, can testify to Jack's proficiency in his profession.

One night, after Jack and I had been dining with our friends, Captain and Mrs Hunter, we were seated in our verandah enjoying a last Trichinopoly cheroot before turning in. The Hunters had a very pretty daughter, named Mabel, aged five years, who was to proceed to England with her mother by the next steamer, the "Benares." This reminds me of the ugly side of Anglo-Indian life, how in a country where the

climate prohibits the rearing of children after the first few years of infancy, married life is made up of separations, the offspring being sent home, as England is always called, never to return for years if ever, while the wife is torn like Desdemona by "a divided duty," between her husband in India, and her children in Europe. That is the reverse side of the picture to the pleasant one, I usually like to think of, and yet it is continually making itself felt, though of late years rapid transit has done much to mitigate it, and fathers can now go home oftener than formerly, so that their children when grown up are not quite the strangers to them they used to be in the old days.

Mabel was bright and intelligent, and had won my heart that evening by her prattle when she made her appearance at desert. Like all Anglo-Indian children, she spoke Hindoostanee, as well or better than English, and was very full of the idea of sailing away in the "Velati augboat" (European steamer). She also told Jack, that she had seen Dave Carson, and oh how she did laugh over his Baboo song, a great deal of which she could repeat. That song was a favorite with old and young, with white and black, but I doubt if Dave Carson ever thought it would be recalled at a deathbed scene, by childish lips and little did Jack or I, suppose how soon Mabel's short life was to be ended. We had become accustomed to hear that Jones, whom we had seen in good health two days before, was dead and buried, without much shock for such things happen in India, but but somehow with a child it is different.

Stirling and I sat long into the night talking of Mabel, and other subjects, when soon after we had retired and I was just falling asleep, I heard someone go to Stirling's room, and call "Sahib Sahib, chitty hai (letter here) Sahib!" Of course a doctor is always liable to be roused up, and as the sounds of Stirling's horse clattering out of the compound died away, I was in the land of dreams. Next morning however, at "chota hazri" (as tea and toast upon rising is termed—literally little breakfast)—I found that Jack had not yet returned, and when he did, as I was about to take my bath, he looked worried as well as tired. He swallowed a cup of tea, and after he had tubbed, and had his breakfast, he again rode off. At length, he fretted and fumed, till at length it seemed as though in spite of both his professional and national caution, he must speak and he blurted out, "People have no business to take chances in this climate, especially with children." "What is the matter? I enquired,

"Little Mabel Hunter—they should have sent for me before—it seems, she had been ailing for a day or two, but they thought it was nothing serious, and now I fear it is too late."

"Merciful Heaven!" I exclaimed "she appeared quite well last night."

"She was not, all the same" replied Stirling, "however I shall know by evening."

Alas a good number knew by sunset that the brief existence was over, and that the little voice and merry laugh which had charmed us all four and twenty hours before, were still forever. It was some time before Jack cared to recount to me the closing scene.

Mabel suddenly regained her consciousness, the pain of the disease subsided, and turning to her mother she said, "I am better now mamma, will you sing to me?"

"Yes darling, what song would you like?"

She did not ask for a hymn; children of her age sometimes do so in novels or on the stage, but not in real life as far as my experience goes. My own daughter in later years at Mabel's age when she was sick and wished to be soothed would ask me to sing J. K. Emmett's song of "Schneider how you vas," so nobody round Mabel's bed was surprised when she said "oh you know Mamma; about the Baboo, and finish with "Jolly good fellow take peg in the morning."

"Den in palki must go home."

Poor little thing, it was not in a palanquin, but in a coffin, she went home and that in a very few hours. They say it is but a step from the ridiculous to the sublime, and although I am perfectly certain Dave Carson never dreamed that his comic song would touch a pathetic chord, Jack assured me it was so as Mabel kept repeating "must go home" lower and lower, until she sank into that sleep from which there is no awakening, on this side of the narrow stream.

Jack left Poona soon after Mabel Hunter's death, and his departure hastened my own. It was one evening after my return to Bombay, that upon driving round to the Byculla club to see Stirling, I was seized by the hand and on ascending the steps, and as I was with a rich Irish brogue cried out: "Me deah boy and how are ye?" It was my old friend Cornelius O'Brady, the great criminal barrister, whose eccentricities and witticisms have helped to lighten many a dull hour during the assizes. But O'Brady must have a chapter to himself.

Ross Coghlan at the Queen's, in Diplomacy, Oct. 10th.