

## Literature, &amp;c.

The British Magazines  
FOR SEPTEMBER AND AUGUST.

From Chamber's Edinburgh Journal.

## THE DANCING-GIRL OF INDIA.

The rajah of Hussunpoor gave a splendid *nauch* or dance, and supper, to the officers of a detachment of East India Company's troops, then on their way to the seat of war in the Ghorka mountains. The festivity was conducted on a scale of profuse magnificence, such as the Princess of Hindoostan are fond of displaying on state occasions, and which forms a remarkable contrast to their ordinary simple and even frugal style of living. The spot selected for the occasion was outside the town, at no great distance from the British camp. The enormous tent of the rajah was composed entirely of blue and white velvet, in alternate stripes, with a deep border of cloth of gold, with tassels of the same precious metal. The gilded tent-poles had spear-heads of solid gold. The canvas floor-cloth on which the tent was pitched was covered with a carpet of crimson velvet with a deep fringe of gold bullion. On this, in the centre, was spread a snow-white cloth for the dancers. Attendants, in surcoats and trousers of blue velvet, with crimson shawls about the waist, and turbans of brocade, stood round the sides of the tent, some with silver maces, others bearing large fans, which they waved over the heads of the guests, and others with torches composed of strips of muslin steeped in oil and wrapped around iron spindles. These cast a wild and flaring light over the scene of truly Oriental splendour, in which the Cashmere shawls, jeweled turbans, and loose graceful garments of the native nobles were contrasted with the scarlet uniforms and glittering side-arms of the European officers. The latter were mostly 'old hands,' who had been long enough in India to be perfectly versed in the customs of the people. The guests reclined at their ease on cushions and couches, eating sweets, or drinking the wines which were served in profusion by the attendants.

At length, at a signal given by the rajah, the *nauchness* or dancers made their appearance. There were two of them, young Hindoostan girls, with fine regular features, and dusky bronzo-like skins. Their large dark eyes appeared yet larger and more languishing from the circle of black pigment, called *soorma* (a preparation of antimony), which was drawn around the inner edges of the eyelids. The tips of their fingers and the soles of their bare feet were stained of a rosy hue with the juice of the henu plant. They wore full trousers, and shirts of gay-coloured muslin embroidered with gold, with a muslin shudder or scarf over the neck, and a figured shawl about the waist—the dress of these opera dancers. Silver anklets, hung with little bells, jingled to the slow movements of their feet. The large hanging sleeves of their vests showed the bracelets of gold and gems on their slender rounded arms. In their ears they had rings, of which the golden setting was hardly visible for the brilliancy of the jewels which flashed and glittered in the torchlight. These were presents from their admirers; for the dancers of the semi-barbarous East are almost as much puffed, and as widely celebrated, as those of the civilised West—which is saying a great deal.

The musicians now struck up their monotonous scraping and thumping, and the *nauchness* commenced their song and dance. The Oriental style of dancing, it is well known, differs greatly from that to which we are accustomed. It consists principally in movements of the body and arms; the feet, though in constant motion, remaining nearly in the same place. Our dances are addressed wholly to the eye, and are intended chiefly to gratify that taste for regular and graceful motion which seems as natural as the love of music. The eastern dance is decidedly of a more intellectual character. It is accompanied by a song, or rather the singing is considered the principal part of the entertainment, to which the dance is subsidiary. Its motions are intended to illustrate the sentiments conveyed in the words. To this end every movement, attitude, and look is made to contribute with wonderful skill. Most of the songs express the passion of love, with all its vicissitudes of gaiety, sadness, hope, suspicion, transport, jealousy, fury, despair. In these cases the acting is sometimes exquisite, and such as would excite admiration in any theatre. Sometimes a martial air is introduced, or a pastoral eulog, or a song descriptive of the chase, or other incidents of daily life in the East. Many of these compositions are as famous as the favourite operas and ballets of our boards, and particular dances are called for by the guests of the *nauch* at their pleasure. The exertions of the dancers are so great, that their excitement soon exhausts them, and several sets are usually ready, who succeed one another, and vary the performances.

The rajah of Hussunpoor had been at some expense and trouble to procure the most celebrated dancers of the country; and many of them were greatly applauded, especially by the foreigners, who strange as it may appear, almost invariably learn, after a while to prefer this kind of exhibition to the graces of the ballet by which Taglioni, and Elssler have acquired their fame. One of the *nauchness* in particular attracted their attention, from her youth and modest appearance. She came forward at first with great diffidence, almost trembling, and sang a pastoral song somewhat similar to the *Ranz des Vaches*, with a voice

so plaintively sweet, and a manner so graceful and winning, that the call for its repetition was universal. She excited so much curiosity as an actress making her first appearance on the stage. Her complexion was fairer than that of the other *nauchness*, and it appeared still more so from the contrast which the chuddur or mantilla which she wore, falling from her head over her shoulders, and which was of black stuff, after the fashion of those worn by the mountaineers of the north. The rajah, a fat old Mussulman, who prided himself on being a connoisseur in the art, was much taken with the new performer. He called to him the sirdar or director of the entertainment, and enquired her name and origin.

'Light of the world,' answered the sirdar, 'the girl's name is Lonce; and she comes from the province of Keemoon, in the neighbourhood of Almora.'

'She is not a Ghorka,' said the rajah. 'The maharajah is right. She is a Vaisya, and was taken captive by the Ghorkas, who sold her to some merchants, of whom your slave purchased her at the fair of Hurdwar. She has been but two months in training, and promises to make an excellent *nauchness*, but for her excessive desire to return to her native land.'

'I think,' observed the rajah with an air of great wisdom, 'that all these mountaineers are mad on that head.'

'True, Khodawand, servant of God,' replied the sirdar. 'They fall sick with the longing for their barren hills and rocks, where the goats starve to death, in winter as I tell Lonce. I have been compelled, in order to keep up the girl's spirits, to promise her that, when she shall have earned a certain sum to repay me for what I have expended on her, she shall be free to return to Keemoon. Perhaps the maharajah would like to hear the girl relate her own history, in a song, which Balim Singh, the bard has composed for her.'

'By all means,' said the rajah, and the rest of the company eagerly joined in the call. Lonce who had been standing with folded hands and downcast eyes during this conversation, now came forward, and sang with expressive action some verses, of which the following is a free translation:—

## LONCE'S SONG.

Where shines the god-mountains  
Sublime o'er the earth;  
Where flows the god-river  
From ice into birth;  
Where great Nundidevi  
Soar white to the moon—  
There, there is my country,  
Beloved Keemoon!

The bright stars of midnight  
The dew's o'er their wept;  
In the valley of Deenah  
All peaceful we slept;  
And fearless the nightingale  
Warbled his song—  
He heard but the streamlet  
Soft rippling along.

What voices of terror  
Ring wild through the night?  
Up,—up,—'tis the Ghorka!  
Arm, arm, for the fight!  
Bring buckler and broadsword!  
Bring matchlock and bow!  
From the hill sides all round us  
Down thunders the foe!

Too late was the warning,  
The struggle was vain;  
Beside their own threshold  
My brethren were slain;  
Afar from her kindred  
Poor Lonce was torn;  
A slave to the stranger,  
She wanders forlorn.

Oh, noble Bahadurs,  
No more let me roam—  
Redeem a poor maiden  
Who sighs for her home.  
Think, gentle Feringhees,  
What fond hearts and true,  
Beyond the Black Water,  
Are pining for you!

This appeal chanted in earnest, moving tones, was answered not only by general applause, but by the more satisfactory response of a shower of jewels and gold pieces—the former coming from the native nobles, and the latter from the British officers. Lonce, with a smile on her lips and a tear in her eye, hastened to gather up these contributions to her ransom, and was about to withdraw, when the rajah, who had been charmed by the novel and peculiar style of beauty of the young *nauchness*, as well as by her character, so different from that of the class to which she belonged, bade her remain, and announced his intention of rewarding her deserts by promoting her to his zenannah. It was plainly his expectation that the *nauchness* would receive this intelligence with transport, as indeed it was an unexampled honour for one of her profession. Poor Lonce, however, seemed to be otherwise affected. She stood for a moment as if thunder-struck, and then sinking at the rajah's feet with joined hands, in the attitude of supplication, she exclaimed 'Mighty rajah, asylum of the earth your slave is unworthy to enter your zenannah!'

'Tush!' returned the old Mussulman 'if I say you are worthy, that is enough. Only conduct yourself well, and you shall be favoured.'

'Light of the universe,' replied the *nauchness* trembling and wringing her hands 'what shall your slave say? She has bargained with

the sirdar to pay him a thousand rupees, and then she will be free to return to her home and her kindred.'

'Well, well,' answered the rajah, impatiently. 'I will pay the money. Have I not said it? You shall remain with me, to entertain me and my zenannah. You shall dress in brocade and shawls of Cashmere, and shall feast on pilaus and sugar plums. What more would you have? Bus, (enough,) you can go.'

But in spite of this permission, intended for a command, poor Lonce remained kneeling, with every sign of confusion and dismay. Oh, maharajah,' she said, 'pardon your wretched slave, but her heart is in her native land, among the hills of my dear Keemoon.'

'Wallah,' exclaimed the fat old chieftain, puffing and fuming with anger at this unexpected opposition. 'What fool's nonsense is this? Native hills! Dear Keemoon! Stuff! What is it to me where her heart is? Take her away!'

The attendants, in great haste, were about to obey this imperious order, when they were interrupted by the interposition of a third party. The English officers had listened to this conversation with attention, exchanging remarks now and then among themselves, and evidently sympathising with the dancing girl. At this moment one of the youngest of them, whose uniform showed him to be a lieutenant, spoke hastily.

'This proceeding,' he said, 'appears to me unjust. If the girl has made a contract with her master, it is right that she should have an opportunity of fulfilling it.'

'Well, what then?' inquired the rajah angrily. 'Have I not twice said that I would pay the money?'

'But,' returned the lieutenant, 'it was a part of the agreement that Lonce should have permission to return to her native land.'

'Bah,' retorted the Mussulman, his round eyes gleaming with anger; 'what do I care for the agreement? What fuss is this about a *nauchness*? Is she not a slave? Is this not my land? Can I not do what I please?'

'No,' replied the young Englishman quickly, 'not if you were the padshah himself. You shall not perpetrate this injustice in the presence of British officers.'

The rajah turned almost white with rage, and some very unpleasant scenes would have ensued, but for the interference of Colonel G—, a tall, thin, grey-headed officer with a yellow complexion, and an air of invincible coolness. 'Mr. R—,' he said in English 'you are too hasty; you forget yourself.' Then turning to the rajah, he continued in Hindoostanee—'It would be truly unworthy of our wisdom if we should allow a dispute about a dancing girl to create ill blood between us and our esteemed ally, the rajah of Hussunpoor. All this business may be easily settled. The noble rajah, with that generosity for which he is famous throughout the world (here the old chief stroked his beard), has condescended to notice a poor *nauchness*, who is a slave, and to offer to pay her ransome, and to provide for her most liberally. Assuredly such munificence is not to be surpassed. But it seems that the girl is anxious to return to the country in which she was born; certainly a natural feeling, and one in which we all partake who are in like manner condemned to spend our lives at a distance from our native land. But she must understand that it is very doubtful whether she would find the home of her childhood, if she should be allowed to seek it. The ravages of the Ghorkas have been dreadfully destructive throughout that unhappy land. Many villages have been swept away and their inhabitants exterminated.'

Here poor Lonce, sobbing bitterly, covered her face with her hands, vainly attempting to hide her tears. The colonel continued, apparently unmoved. 'It is my opinion, therefore, that she cannot do better than accept the liberal and condescending kindness of our esteemed friend the rajah. But if she should obstinately persist in her resolution to return to the Keemoon, we must endeavour, among us to make up the sum necessary to satisfy her master, to which I will willingly contribute; and I doubt not that the generosity of the rajah, and of these other princes, will be displayed with its customary magnificence.'

There is no virtue on which Oriental magnates so much pride themselves as on their liberality. The colonel was thoroughly acquainted with the character of those with whom he had to deal, and his speech was received with exclamations of '*Uchal bhote khoob!*' (Good! well-said!)—in which the old rajah joined, though rather sulkily.

But he was well aware that his 'esteemed allies' were, in fact, his masters, and he had an especial dread of the shrewd imperious old colonel.

'Well, Lonce,' said the latter, 'tell us your final determination. Will you remain in the zenannah of his highness, or will you take the risk of wandering homeless and homeless over the hills of Keemoon?'

'Protector of the poor,' replied the *nauchness* without hesitation, 'how can your slave answer? She is a poor foolish girl, but her heart is in her native land, and if she does not see it again she will die.'

'Well, gentlemen,' said the colonel, 'I think we can make a purse among us to ransom the poor girl.' Here he was interrupted by his khitmitgar, or personal attendant—a Mussulman, clad in a showy surcoat of yellow muslin, with yellow trousers, and a blue shawl-girdle and turban, who came forward with joined hands, in the attitude of one asking a favour. 'Will the Colonel Sahib listen to the petition of his servant?' he said.

'What is it? inquired the colonel, somewhat surprised.

'I have served the Colonial Sahib fifteen years, and he has found no fault with me.'

'True, Sahadak, replied his master, 'and you once saved me from a tiger. Well, what now?'

'Gurreeburwar, protector of the poor,' answered Sahadak, 'I want a wife. My wife died two years ago in Malwa; and I have a little child, and no one to take care of it when I am waiting on your highness. The Colonial Sahib's kindness has made me rich. The Vaisya women have the report of being excellent wives. Let your servant pay the girl's ransom, and marry her.'

'With all my heart,' replied the colonel laughing, 'provided you can get her consent. I am not her father, and cannot give her to you. What do you say, Lonce? Will you be the wife of my khitmitgar? He is a worthy fellow, and will take good care of you.'

The young girl looked earnestly at Sahadak, who was a handsome man of about thirty, with a countenance expressive of courage and good-nature. 'Will he take me to Keemoon?' she asked.

'Certainly,' replied the colonel, 'we are on our way there at this moment.'

Lonce's countenance brightened up. 'And will he never beat me? We Vaisya women do not like to be beaten, like the wives in the lowland country.'

'My servant must answer for himself,' replied the colonel. 'I think I have heard of his beating his former wife; hey, Sahadak?'

'Never but once, Gurreeburwar,' answered the khitmitgar, 'when she neglected our first child, and it died.'

'Ah then she deserved it!' said Lonce. 'I will be your wife, for I think you will treat me well; and I shall see Keemoon again.'

'Well, off with you both,' said the colonel; 'get married at once, for we start to-morrow morning for Almora.'

The couple, so unexpectedly mated, retired; and the party, whose good-humour had been restored by this little scene, applied themselves heartily to the supper which was now brought in. The rajah washed away the remains of his sulkiness in a bowl of brandy punch, which Lieutenant R— concocted by way of peace-offering, and which the sinful old Mussulman drank without regard to the interdiction of his religion. The entertainment was not long protracted, as the officers were compelled to withdraw early, having to set off before the dawn of the following morning.

In ten days, colonel G—, with the troops under his command, had passed the Terrai, or belt of forest land and marsh, noted for its deadly climate, which separates the plain of Hindoostan from the hill country at the base of the Himalayas. The province of Keemoon is composed entirely of rocky mountain ridges, intersected by narrow valleys or glens, like the most rugged districts in the Scottish Highlands. Though nearly under the tropic the vegetation bears the character proper to the northern limits of the temperate zone. Oaks, pines, firs, the pear, the raspberry, the blackberry, and other trees and fruits to which they had long been accustomed, reminded the British invaders of their native land. The original inhabitants and proper owners of the country were the Vaisyas, a fine race of mountaineers, who, in their manner of life, and their simple honest, industrious character, have many points of resemblance to the Swiss. They build good houses of limestone and slate, and cultivate not only their valleys, but even the terraced sides of their rugged hills, wherever this is possible. They have herds of small cattle, which they keep for their milk, but never kill that being forbidden by their religion. Although a brave and high-spirited people, they had the ill luck to be conquered by the Goorkas, or natives of Nepal, to the east of Keemoon, who took advantage of some civil dissensions among the Vaisyas to assail them when disunited, and unprepared for a contest. The Goorkas, who are a race partaking of the Tartar physiognomy and character, treated the conquered Vaisyas with great cruelty, ravaging their villages, murdering all who resisted, and selling their wives and children into slavery. Fortunately, in the course of their maraudings they came in collision with the British Authorities; and the result was the war of 1815, in which the Goorkas were expelled from the conquered territory. In this contest our troops were greatly indebted to the assistance of the Vaisyas, who, regarding them as deliverers, did all in their power to aid them, acting as guides and messengers, dragging their cannon up the declivities, and fighting bravely when they came to close quarters with the enemy.

Colonel G—, with the forces under his command, had been ordered to make a detour in the mountains near Almora, for the purpose of dislodging the enemy from a strong position which they held in front of the British main body. Unfortunately, the guides who had been furnished him were not well acquainted with the country; and after wandering about for three or four days in the wildest recesses of the hills, the colonel found himself one evening in a rugged defile between two precipices, with no outlet in front but a narrow and perilous ascent. Determined not to bivouac in this dangerous position, he pushed forward until he was checked by the alarming intelligence that the passage was barricaded, and occupied by a strong body of Goorkas. It would have been madness to attack them in the steep path where three men could not advance abreast, and Colonel G— at once gave order to retreat from the defile by the way in which they had entered. But at