

Literature, &c.

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INDIAN EXPERTNESS.

THE natives of India have for ages been noted for their extraordinary personal activity and ingenuity—qualities which fit them for being the most expert thieves and jugglers in the world. The performances of London or Parisian freebooters sink to nothing in comparison with the daring feats of the Dacoits of Hindostan, from whom in all probability the wandering Gipsies of Europe drew their origin. The stories told of Dacoits are almost too marvellous to be credited. When sleeping in your tent the experienced Dacoit will not scruple to burrow in the earth, in order to obtain an entrance, unseen by the sentinel at the door, or swimming down the river in the night, his head covered with an earthen vessel, he will glide unnoticed under the windows of your budgerow, and noiselessly creeping in at the window, make off with everything you have, while you and your family are indulging in a pleasant nap, and finally, when caught and condemned to death, he will walk straight up to a piece of artillery, and pressing his chest against its muzzle, allow himself, without a struggle, or even a look of regret, to be blown into atoms—a death inflicted in the field on Dacoits and other marauders.

One would think that the Hindoo must have a constitutional aptitude for theft, his body is so slim, yet so muscular, his motions so snake-like, his agility so astonishing. In fact, after a little practice, he is like a man made of India-rubber, and seems to proceed without the slightest reference to the fragility of any part of his frame. Mr Fane tells us that, at Delhi, he saw several fellows jumping sheer down into a well ninety feet deep, in pursuit of a rupee thrown in to tempt them. There was a slanting passage on the opposite side, by which they got out again; but the perpendicular plunge was the feat expected, and this they performed again and again with the utmost readiness, men and boys rushing in emulation, each anxious to be the first to spring into the abyss after the prize.

Mr Tennant supposes that the superiority of the Hindoos in feats of agility and legerdemain arises from their perusing these arts as a distinct and constant (and he might have added hereditary) profession. However this may be, he tells us that their doings surpass all credibility. In balancing, for instance, which is an effort of skill without the possibility of deception, a man frequently places five of the common earthenware waterpots, one over the other, upon his head, and a girl climbing to the uppermost, he dances with this extraordinary coiffure round the field. On another occasion, the same person balances a pole sixteen feet long, the bottom of which is fixed into a thick cotton sash or girdle; another man gets upon his back, and from thence runs up the pole, his hands aiding his feet, with the nimbleness of a squirrel. He then proceeds first to extend himself on the pole upon his belly, and then upon his back, his legs and arms both times spread out. He next throws himself horizontally from the pole, which is all the while balanced on the girdle, holding only by his arms. This attitude among the tumblers is called the flag. Thirdly, he stands upon his head on the top of the pole, holding below the summit with his hands. Finally, he throws himself from this last position backwards down the pole, holding by his hands, then turns over again, holding by his feet, and this is repeated over and over till he reaches the ground. These, and a thousand other feats, constitute the amusements of the idle and the subsistence of a numerous class of strollers.

The most beautiful of all the feats performed by Indian jugglers, is the well known tossing of six balls, which are sustained in the air, or made to revolve round the head, by a dexterous and gentle touch of the hand. This is anything but an unintellectual exhibition. There is in it no pretension to legerdemain, no deception of the eyes. It is a feat of honest skill, and to the thoughtful is philosophically curious. It demonstrates an extraordinary calculation as to keeping time, and shows perhaps more than anything else the power of concentrating the mind on a single subject of thought. We feel assured that the mountebank who can perform the clever manoeuvre of making half a dozen balls spin round his person, possesses a capacity which, well-directed, might lead to much higher things.

It is unfortunate, from the state of society in India, that personal expertness should so much take a furtive direction. Dacoitism may be said to be carried the length of a science, for in its higher professors it disdains theft on a mean or bungling scale of operation. Colonel Davidson mentions the case of a Dacoit who had stolen a man's garments from under his head, severing with a knife a part of the article which was either entangled or purposely fastened to the pillow. 'This,' says he, 'was a mere bungler, and, I am persuaded, an apprentice without experience or talent. This scientific mode is well known: when it is necessary to make a sleeping man turn on his other side, you tickle his opposite ear with a straw till he obeys, and then a dexterous pull secures the booty. It is in this way that many excellent English gentlemen awake in the morning without mattress, blanket, sheet either above or below them; having at the

same time a favourite terrier asleep under their beds, and a pair of detonating pistols under their heads.

Broughton describes a less 'clumsy' theft committed in the Mahratta camp, of which he gives a lifelike picture. A tent was entered into which fourteen men were sleeping, two of them at the door with drawn swords by their sides. The thieves, nothing daunted by the crowd, made use of the swords to cut their way into the tent, and picking their steps among the sleepers, possessed themselves of the property they coveted. On another occasion, one of the maha-rajah's finest horses was carried off by a fellow, who, observing the rider dismount, and give the bridle into the hands of the attendant, darted forward, severed the reins with his sword, and galloped off in an instant.

The following instance of Dacoitism, illustrative of our subject, was related to us by a gentleman long resident in India:—

General S——, who considered himself able to outmanœuvre any Dacoit in Bengal, had given orders to pursue and bring before him a thief whose misdemeanours had warranted the severest punishment. The poor Dacoit was caught and brought up for examination. He was a fine specimen of the East Indian race. Of a clear brown, every feature of the most perfect mould, and with a form of exquisite symmetry and proportion; he now stood, nothing daunted, before the chief whose breath was to decide his fate.

'You are a Dacoit?'
'I am.'

'You are aware that the crimes you have been guilty of are punishable by death?'

'If such be my *russeed* (destiny), I am prepared to meet it.'

'Would you avoid it?'

'Decidedly.'

'Well, then, listen. Scarcely a night passes that several of our cavalry horses are not stolen. In spite of our constant vigilance, in spite of sentinels, and every other precaution, they are carried off. Do you know how this is effected?'

'I do.'

'Well, then, on one condition your life shall be spared: show us the mode in which these extraordinary robberies are committed, and I will not only set you free, but give you one hundred rupees.'

The Dacoit almost sneered at the offer of the bribe; but after a moment's pause, he replied, 'I am ready.'

'Bravo!' cried S——, well pleased. 'Now we'll get at the secret. Let the captains and officers commanding troops be ordered instantly to attend at my stable tent to see the trick, and be able to guard against it. Desire two cavalry soldiers and two grooms also to be there; and let them make haste, for I am all impatience to see the feat performed.'

'In a quarter of an hour all was prepared. A very spirited and valuable horse of the general's was selected for the trial, one that allowed none save his master or his feeder to approach him. But the robber rather exulted in this, as he declared it would the better display his dexterity.

In the first place the horse was tethered, as all cavalry horses in the field in India are, beneath an open tent, his fore legs being each made fast by a rope to a staple in the ground. The hind legs were similarly secured. A groom lay on one side of him, a grass-cutter on the other. The soldier to whom he was supposed to belong was stretched immediately behind him, and another very near, with orders that if they could in any way detect, by noise or touch, the tread of the robber, they were instantly to start up and seize him. Till then, they were to close their eyes and affect to sleep.

The Dacoit, on the other hand, threw himself on the grass, and, like a snake, crawled up to the first guard, and lay quietly beside him for a moment, to ascertain if he were asleep; then gently rising over him, he crept between the groom and the horse, till he actually lay beneath the spirited animal, which, extraordinary to say, never attempted to stir. With the greatest nicety he undid one of the hind tethers, or spansils, then one of the fore: then he paused awhile, and the horse stirred not. He then undid, with great care and nicety, the other two, and creeping out between his fore-legs, managed to substitute a native bridle for the head-stall. The spectators were lost in admiration, particularly the old general, whose praise was unbounded. But still the most difficult part of the task remained to be done—namely, to get the horse away. This was effected by turning him round. The Dacoit now quickly raised himself up by his arms, and the next moment was on the animal's back. Then walking him up to his supposed guard, the horse stepped over his legs, which were close together, and in the next instant he stood clear of all impediment, when the ingenious rider struck both his heels into him, and set off down the lines in a hand gallop.

General S—— was pleased beyond expression with the man's address; and though he hardly knew how to guard against such expert thieves, yet he now saw the modes employed by the robbers, and it might be possible to invent some means to thwart them.

In the meantime the adroit native had arrived at the extreme outskirts of the camp, when the general, who began to think that he had shown him enough of his skill, called on him to come back. 'None are so deaf as those who will not hear.' From that moment

to the hour of his death, the worthy commander never saw his favourite charger, and what was still worse, he was ever afterwards bound to blush at his own simplicity whenever the word 'Dacoit' was mentioned in his presence.

Numerous villages in Central India are entirely peopled by Dacoits, who carry their depredations westward to the banks of the Indus, and southward to Bombay and Madras. In our own territories, Colonel Sleeman says there are likewise whole colonies of them, a thousand such families being located in the Upper Doab alone. The land owners and police officers frequently make large fortunes by their share of the spoil; and thus robbery is a very safe business when carried on at some distance from home. But independent of the venality of functionaries, it is extremely difficult—in some cases impossible—to get witnesses to appear; and this state of things must continue till the meshes of justice are drawn closer, and men are not ruined by the loss of time attending a prosecution. Till then, the wonderful ingenuity of a considerable portion of the Hindoos must continue to be turned towards the arts of knavery, instead of enriching their country by such masterpieces of industry as the famous muslins of Dacca, which have not yet been surpassed even by the science of Europe.

From Chambers's Edinburgh Journal.

AKKATOOK THE ESQUIMAUX
BOY.

THE whalers of the port of Kirkcaldy, which make an annual visit to the stormy, ice-bound shores of Davis' Straits, have often gratified us with live specimens of bears, wolves, foxes, and such-like members of an inferior creation; but last autumn they presented us with an importation of a different kind, being nothing less than a fine Esquimaux boy, named Akkatook. His father is, or rather was, chief of one of the small tribes who contrive to pick up a miserable subsistence on the western shores of these straits; and hold occasional intercourse with the vessels when they happen to approach the land. Yielding to the boy's curiosity and influence no doubt, by their notions of the wonderful country from which the large ships and fine things come, his parents delivered him over to Captain Kinnear of the 'Caledonia,' with strict injunctions to take care of him, and under a solemn promise to bring him back next season. When received on board, the boy was covered with grease and filth inseparable from the native habits; but under the hands of the sailors, he soon underwent a thorough renovation, and became a great and general favourite. At first, the new dietary was far from palatable, and he might be seen making slyly free with such pieces of blubber and drops of oil as came in his way, but he soon became perfectly reconciled to the change, and relished the delicacies of civilised cookery as much as any on board. His dress consisted of trowsers, coat, hood, and boots, all of seal-skin, neatly sewed, and tastefully figured with threads and braids of sinew, the smooth glossy hair, giving it a variegated and very beautiful appearance. The skirt of the coat was of one piece, and descended almost to his heels, making him look like a large monkey.

What were Akkatook's feelings when he arrived in this country it is difficult to conceive. A greater change than from the barren, treeless, houseless, snow-clad shores of Davis' Straits, to the towns, gardens, and fields of Scotland, cannot be imagined. It was literally a 'new earth' to him; everything wonderful, incomprehensible; yet he departed himself with marvelous propriety, and was scarcely less a wonder to us than the country must have been to him. Akkatook was thirteen years of age, and of low stature, with a broad round chest, short neck, and long, lank glossy hair, black as the raven's wing; skin soft as velvet, of a hue between the negro and red Indian; the eye dark and lively; and his general expression highly agreeable. The forehead was rather low; but he was of quick apprehension, and his general abilities were good. I should say he was deficient in bone and muscle, and proportionally in strength, compared with our boys of his size and mould.

The best school for Akkatook was free and frequent intercourse with other boys. He wanted many of those elementary ideas which are acquired in childhood, and form the groundwork of all education. But it was deemed expedient to make some direct efforts for his improvement, and two gentlemen were selected for this purpose, of whom the writer was one. I confess I had previously no idea of the difficulties that had to be encountered. As my pupil's term was to be very short, I was anxious to teach him all I could; but his total ignorance of our language precluded all access except by signs. I resolved to reach his understanding in every possible way, and the expedients were sometimes amusing enough. After teaching him the letters, and exercising him in the more difficult sounds, I selected a spelling-book which abounds with the names of familiar objects, in order to accustom him to connect the sign with the thing signified. With a multitude of nouns I found no difficulty; he soon knew the names of all the articles in the room, and of a great number of animals. The latter I explained by imitating the sound of the animal: thus the word *ox*, *moo, moo*; sheep, *may-ay*; dog, *bow-wow*; cock, *cock-akoo-koo*, &c. an exercise in which he delighted and excelled. The meaning of verbs I endeavoured to explain by going through the action they express; but as may be supposed, words

expressing quality and manner, adjectives, adverbs, caused the difficulty. Akkatook a shrewd observer, and displayed remarkable proficiency in the habits of native life. He knew the number of dogs belonging to each individual in his tribe, and most of their names. Nothing pleased him more than pictures of animals with which he had been acquainted in the far north. On showing him day specimens of the ptarmigan in its spring, and summer plumage, he recognised instantly, and lighting a bit of paper, pointed out the different altitudes of the sun, the season of each dress. A representation of the capture of a whale threw him into raptures, and he acted the part of the harpooner life. He was admirable at finding and following the trail of an animal; and with spear and arrow, would pursue small birds whole day, along hedges, and through brakes, with wonderful success. As a instance of his quick sightedness: I had a small key in the dusk of the evening, and my own boys to find it; but in vain. We had given up the search, Akkatook saw my appearance. Taking another key from my pocket to show him what I wanted, he set out with the speed and keenness of a terrier; and beginning with a large circle, penetrated it at each round, and in an incredible short time he placed the lost key in my hand. His natural disposition was singularly amiable and his filial affection was strong. One night as he sat musing and making a looking into the fire, his kind hostess manifested a truly maternal interest in his welfare. He asked what was the matter; when she laid her hand on his breast, and with tears on her face, he said, 'Apukia—Apukia!' which was his mother's name. His father had two wives, and it was remarked that he never loved either the other. Thus in some traits at least, his nature is the same amid the polar snows of the more congenial regions of the south.

The favour which Akkatook obtained especially among the young, was as great as the interest he excited. We to the boy, an urchin who would have dared maltreat At the tables of the wealthy, far and near, he was feasted and caressed. A kind friend reached him from the Duke of Buccleuch, it is almost needless to say he returned substantial proof of his Grace's kindness. He displayed in conforming to our traditional rules of good breeding was truly astonishing. The only habit he found it to overcome, was that of going to the mess as soon as he was satisfied with the attractions of the window, or rather the moving world in the street, he would resist. On a fine day in early spring, a famous regatta was got up, in which our hero played a principal part. Troops of curious lined the shore for upwards of a mile. Among a number of boats, all gaily out, might be seen his frail bark, with himself seated in the centre, in his native having a single oar, double-bladed, and used before him, with which he struck water on each side alternately, and impelled along with amazing speed, to the amusement of the crowd.

As the time for his departure drew presents poured in in great abundance variety; some of which, by the way, sufficiently remarkable, considering the country in which he was to live. It is worth notice, as a general rule, that the high station of the donors, the more appropriate were the gifts, thus evincing proper judgment and taste in the selection. He embarked in his old ship the 'Caledonia' whose officers tell us that his progress on board during the voyage was matter of remark and surprise; and indeed it was so, before his departure from Kirkcaldy his mind was full and just on the eve of being forth, like a bud in spring. But his age proved unfortunate: the good old 'donia,' crushed between two floes of ice, became a total wreck, the sailors having sufficient time to save their lives and a few articles of clothing. In this disaster nearly all the valuable presents were lost. After being transferred to the 'Chieftain,' and finally delivered to his kindred; with one or two fowling-pieces saved from the wreck, an ample supply of ammunition from the stores. His father, Makkarook, had been long absent.

Thus ended the visit of Akkatook, and different opinions will be entertained. It will doubt the propriety of bringing him to this country at all, especially when his stay is to be so short and unproductive; and that prudent benevolence will be against it, as preparing him for disappointments and dissatisfactions which otherwise never known; but there can be little doubt that the partial training in civilised which he enjoyed amongst us, and the picking up of our language which he was to do, will prove advantageous as well to his own people and their intercourse with whalers. His safe return will alone be an instance of the integrity of the Esquimaux in keeping their promise. What is effected for Akkatook's education may be taken to demonstrate the improbability of the Esquimaux, and how much could be done by a repetition of such visits as that described. The only subject for regret is Akkatook's stay in Scotland was so short. Had he remained for a few years, he would have been rendered available as a missionary of arts and religion to his tribe, one of the best band who, in different parts of the world, are toiling in the cause of humanity and of the