

## INDIA'S CONVICT BRIDES

## QUEER MARRIAGES IN THE PENAL SETTLEMENT AT ANDAMAN.

Punishments inflicted on the women in the prison—Receptions where the brides are chosen—The Courtship—Their married life on a prison island.

'I have known of some queer marriages in the twenty years I have knocked about the world, said a sea Captain the other day to a New York Sun man, 'but I think the pairing off of the jailbirds at Andaman was the strangest thing of them all. For a couple of years I commanded the steamer that runs down monthly from Calcutta to the penal colony for British India on the Andaman and Nicobar islands. I was a youngster then and interested in all sorts of things and it didn't take me long to strike up an acquaintance with the Chief Commissioner or President of the colony, who used to let me go all over the place. The female prison was an object of special interest to me, and I must have been an object of special interest to the prisoners, for, except the gray-haired superintendent, they didn't see a man from one year's end to the other. I had a smattering of the language, and enjoyed several harmless flirtations with dusky beauties whose eccentricities even India had been unable to put up with.

'The prison is as inaccessible as any sultan's harem. It is built on a promontory and protected on the side toward the sea by a sheer cliff 200 feet high, while on the land side the grounds are surrounded by a fifteen foot wall. There are several guards stationed at the entrance, and in order to get by the first of these a man has to give a certain password. In return this guard gives him another password, which takes him past the second, and so on, past half a dozen, maybe. These passwords, as they are called, are the oldest and the most hideous women in the jail. To be eligible a woman must have gray hair and a face that would stop a clock, besides a record for sobriety and obedience.

'All the convicts went down from Calcutta in my boat, and when I saw them afterward in the prison they always remembered me, and some of them would have fallen on my neck if they hadn't been afraid of the Superintendent, who was generally along side of me. All the prisoners have to work, and in the female prison they weave all the cloth for the men's clothes and their own, and make them up, too, I believe. If any of the women refuse to do their stint of work they are punished. The first punishment is to cut off their hair. This they don't like very much, and the threat of it will generally bring them to terms, for they are just as vain as other women, and don't want their long hair cut off. If this doesn't convince them that it's better to work in the shop, they are made to wear men's clothes and work in the grounds, which are beautifully kept, entirely by the women prisoners. The trousers and jackets given to those who are punished in this way are of the coarsest material and are very unbecoming, and the women have to trundle wheelbarrows and dig in the dirt, just like men. If even this fails, they are further punished by being put to sleep in a cell with the floor covered by branches laid in rows, and then in cross rows, grill fashion. The branches are full of sharp thorns, which makes it impossible to stand sit or lie down in comfort. Generally one night of this is enough to make the worst case ready for the workroom, but there was one girl who stood the extreme penalty of three nights in this room, and still refused to do a lick of work.

'When they have maybe a dozen ticket-of-leave men and woman, they have a sort of matrimonial reception. If any matches are made, the couples are allowed to go up to the Nicobar group some distance away and settle on the Government land. There they get a certain number of acres, a hut and some commissary stores, and are left to themselves. The tickets-of-leave don't take them anywhere except to the Nicobars, for they nearly all have life sentences. These matrimonial receptions are the funniest things I ever saw. The men are brought one by one into a sort of reception room, where the women are standing in a long row. There are generally several breaks in the line, to separate those of different castes and religions, for they are particular about that in India. Some of these men haven't seen a woman for ten years, maybe, and they look very curiously at them. When a man is brought into this room a statement is made of his name, his history, his religion, his age, the crime he is there for, and so on. There are maybe, half a dozen women of his religion on the eligible list, and he is taken to the first one in one row. If, after talking with her a few minutes, he doesn't think he would like her, he goes on to the next one. He is always covertly casting his eye along the line to see if there are any further down that he likes better than those near the top. Sometimes he sees one near the end of the line that takes his fancy, and he will walk straight by all the others and go

to her. If she likes him, too, they go up to the table and her history is read to him. He may possibly object to the crime she is declared off; but usually there is no trouble about that, for if a man likes the looks of a woman he doesn't care how she came to be there. It would generally be a case of the pot calling the kettle black, anyway.

## A LETTER FROM MANILA.

It Disposes of a Popular Idea of the Discomforts of a Trip to That Place

The following, which is an abstract of a letter received by the wife of an army officer from the wife of a flag officer connected with Rear-Admiral Dewey's fleet, is so interesting as to be worthy of reproduction:

MANILA, Nov. 5, 1898.

'My Dear Emelie—Well, I have arrived in glorious health and delightful humor. The trip was the greatest surprise of my life. You know how I hate to travel, how dreadfully unhappy I was when I had to follow—'s ship up the Mediterranean and around to Lisbon and Gravesend several years ago. When I left New York I told every body that I knew the trip would kill me. I had read so much of the fearful heat of the Pacific, and the articles were so profuse in detail that I really believed them. 'It will be the death of me, I said as I reluctantly got aboard the train. I didn't tell you this, dear, because you were away on one of your jaunts at the time. I'm telling you now instead. Several times on the trip up to Montreal I felt like turning back, but I thought of my poor hubby out here and finally determined to make what I supposed would be a human sacrifice of myself. Judge of my surprise then. It was the loveliest trip in my whole experience, and the newspaper yarns are dreadfully untrue.

'At Montreal I made a connection with the Canadian Pacific Railroad, and right here I went to say this: You doubtless will have to come out here in a few months when your husband is ordered to Manila, and for goodness' sake do not let anybody persuade you to travel over any line but the Canadian Pacific. It beat the others all hollow. I was as comfortable and happy in the run between Montreal and Vancouver as a well fed child at Christmas time. The conductors and porters simply conspired to make me enjoy the trip, though they hadn't the remotest idea who I was. I recall my trip on the—across the continent last fall, and my, what a difference between that and the Canadian Pacific!

But it did not end there, either. I found the scenery even finer than in Switzerland. I said to one of the conductors on the train; 'I suppose one must travel on a nasty, tiny ship on the Pacific to get to Hong Kong?' He laughed at my fears, and said; Madame, you will be surprised when you see the Empress of India or the Empress of China. Surprised, why I should say I was! With the exception of a few boats on the Atlantic, there is nothing to compare with them. The most exquisite furnishings, staterooms nearly twice as large as those on the transatlantic boats, and a table that has no equal at the best hotel in New York or Paris.

'The Empress of India, a great big giant took me from Vancouver to Hong Kong. We left Vancouver October 10, so you see we came through from New York via Montreal in less than six days. We reached Hong Kong November 1, and Manila November 4—less than a month the whole thing. Get out your atlas, look over the course and wonder, as I did and have ever since. We were only twenty two days in traveling from Vancouver to Hong Kong, and in

Mrs. Ellen Butler, of Conahie St., Toronto, suffered from indigestion in a severe form for several years, was unable to eat meat or vegetables, was threatened with nervous prostration as a result of chronic dyspepsia. After many remedies had been tried and failed, she began using the South American Nervine. When she had taken three bottles, to use her own words, "I can eat anything set before me, and enjoy it without any bad after effects. I think it a wonderful remedy for dyspepsia and nervous prostration."

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## So Suitable.

'I've decided to give my husband a nice book for a Christmas present this year,' remarked Mrs. Darley to her friend Mrs. McBride.

'Has he expressed a wish for any particular book?'

'No; but I saw a lovely one with binding that just matches my new centre-table cover.'

## Question for Question.

'What are your intentions regarding my daughter?'

'What are yours?'

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