

INDIAN IDYLLS

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Indian Idylls by Edith E. Cuthell

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EDITH E. CUTHELL

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BY

AN IDLE EXILE.



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THE MAHARAJAH'S GUEST.

PROBABLY as perfect a specimen of what a paternal Indian Government can produce, in the way of an anglicised native nobleman, was to be found in His Highness the Maharajah of Pugreepoor. He had been under the thumb of English tutors ever since his infant steps toddled out of the precincts of the zenana, and had been brought up on British ideas. As a result, at the age of five-and-twenty, he was a dapper little fellow, dark-eyed and Italian-looking, able to hold his own at cricket and polo against an Englishman, and as yet a stranger to the snares of the brandy bottle and the *nautch* girl, which had ruined, first the figures and then the brains, of so many of his ancestors, long before they had reached his age.

Pugreepoor was the husband of one wife, a dusky little nonentity, whose form, as yet "unfettered by stays," and whose feet, as yet "unspoilt by a shoe," he was having squeezed into the fashions of Paris, as reproduced on the banks of the Hooghly. Moreover, the impecunious widow of a general officer had been specially retained to teach the Maharanee deportment and manners, and to pioneer her through the intricacies of Anglo-Indian social etiquette.

For the Maharajah was gradually becoming one of the ornaments of society in Calcutta and Simla. He owned large tracts of land somewhere or other in the

Peninsula, and his income rivalled that of the richest of English dukes. He could command vast battues of tiger and big game in wide stretches of jungle, and equip with an army of coolies and elephants, globe-trotters of high degree, who were anxious to see something of sport during their scamper through India. But all the same Pugreepoor was not a reigning prince, and was only entitled to a very meagre salute of big guns at a durbar compared with many a bloated native potentate who could not write his own name, or read it either.

But Pugreepoor recked little of these things. He aspired to be English among Englishmen, and was already planning a visit to England during the Jubilee festivities. As London society takes very kindly to anything dusky, be it Red Indian or Hindoo, when once out of its own habitat, Pugreepoor hoped to spread his pinions and widen his horizons in the very highest spheres.

In spite of the rather negative attractions of his dusky bride, to whom he had been married at the tender age of ten, there was one lesson, taught by the customs of Anglo-Indian society, which Pugreepoor showed himself only too apt to learn—this was the noble art of flirtation. As a rule, a lovely woman in India has a holy horror of the native, however much her sisters in Belgravia may adulate him; for she knows but too well the point of view from which he regards her and her manners and customs. But gradually for Pugreepoor an exception was made. He was really not a bad-look-

ing little fellow. He waltzed charmingly, and his wealth was so enormous that he was lavish with presents on the very least pretext where he was anxious to please. Slowly, but surely, the giddy gunner, the cavalier cavalry-man, the rising competition-wallah, some day to be worth his weight in pension, indeed even the fascinating A.-D.-C., with the sweet sisterly confidential manner to women, found himself distanced by the little Maharajah.

Little Mrs. Campbell, quite the prettiest woman up at Simla that year, who, in bygone days of happy memory, might even have had a poet-viceroy at her feet, threw over her last new pet A.-D.-C. and the young lordling in the Lancers, for Pugreepoor. Her taste may not have been unimpeachable, but his diamonds were irresistible. Nothing was now wanting to complete the Maharajah's English education. He was taken up as Mrs. Campbell's authorised "bow-wow," was taught to fetch and carry, and to stand patiently against the wall when not dancing with her, and worship from afar. For her was the pick of his stable; she sanctioned his guests to tennis and dinner, allowed him to go nowhere where she was not invited, and took him out calling, and even to church. Really, the Church Missionary Society owed her something for her praiseworthy efforts to reclaim this brand from the burning. Mrs. Campbell trained the Maharajah so well that she was even able to "lend" him occasionally to one or other of her female chums, to dance or ride with. This, be it observed, is the crucial test of a "bow-wow's" devotion.