

**EAST IS EAST.  
STORIES OF  
INDIAN LIFE**

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East is East. Stories of Indian life by T. D. Pilcher

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**T. D. PILCHER**

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STORIES OF INDIAN LIFE BY  
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LETTERS TO HIS SON"

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*A MATTER OF DEGREE*

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## CHAPTER I

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“ Trust a snake before a harlot,  
Trust a harlot before a Pathan,  
Trust a Pathan before a Brahman.”

**S**O says the old Indian proverb.

Now, in the No Man's Land where this story opens, all the men are Pathans excepting, of course, a Hindu or so per village who comes into this wild territory to carry on his trade as a money-lender ; but although not mentioned in the above proverb these Hindus are no more worthy to be trusted out of sight than are even the Pathans, who, it is to be noted, come third down the list in order of trustworthiness.

This “ No Man's Land,” which is neither Afghanistan nor British India, is the country through which the Bara Mastura and Khanki Rivers run. In the dry season these are only rivulets careering between the bottoms of different sets of mountains. At times they are raging torrents, and again at others they trickle unperceived under the snow bridges which cover

them. The peaks of the mountains from which they come are as high as the Alps, the country they traverse is as wild and savage as are the men who inhabit it, and, to carry on the simile, the climate is as fickle and changeable as are the hearts of the women on whose account the men slay each other, for the cold wind on the hilltops, even on a hot day, peels the skin off the face, whilst the heat in the narrow valleys is as oppressive as the sides of the hills are high.

The slopes of these hills are bare, and even a mountain goat finds it hard to fill his stomach on what he finds there, for it is seldom that the valley broadens out sufficiently to allow of much cultivation by the sides of the rivers which are so variable in their moods. There is no place in the world that the lines :

" Let him take who has the might and  
Let him keep who can "

are more religiously observed than in this land, where might is right, and where blood-feuds, which end in the extermination of whole families, are still the order of the day.

Sometimes the feud originates in a murder committed over a dispute for a piece of ground, sometimes on account of a quarrel over the right

to draw water for irrigation purposes, sometimes merely about a woman. But whatever the original cause, in most cases the feud "snow-balls" to such an extent that, in order to satisfy it, half a dozen male relations of the interested person would have to be accounted for.

Such was the case with Mir Wali, a Pathan of the tribe of Jowaki Afridis.

The building in which he lived was half-cottage and half-stronghold, for though it only contained two small rooms, the walls were of stone and bullet-proof and it was surrounded by a stone wall. It was built in the centre of his little patch of ground, but this season his wife had had to do all the tilling, for if he had gone on to the ground himself by day he would assuredly have fallen to the rifle of one or other of his enemies who could have found suitable cover in the rocks which abound on the adjacent hills.

Mir Wali had been married some four years, and his wife was tall, well-developed and powerful, with a magnificent carriage. Her complexion was comparatively fair, her hair was brown, whilst her face had a Semitic cast. Taken all in all she was a splendid animal, and a handsome woman, though the hard manual labour