

A RAJAH'S WEDDING.

Bombay, January 7, 1886. —As the astrologers of the Gaikwar of Baroda determined that December 29th would be an auspicious day for his Highness's wedding, those who were fortunate enough to get invitations had a fine opportunity of spending their Christmas holidays amid the festivities of a native State. Baroda is only ten hours from Bombay by railway, and Christmas time in India is the best season for travelling, so I accepted with pleasure the invitation of a friend who is settled in Baroda, and found myself at dawn on Christmas morning in the Gaikwar's capital.

On the following morning a cheetah hunt was arranged for the entertainment of the European visitors. We were directed to meet at six o'clock in the morning at a place called Makarpura, about 5 miles from Baroda. This necessitated a start by moonlight. Just about sunrise we came to a level crossing where the Gaikwar's railway meets the well-built road leading to Makarpura. Here we nearly met with an accident, which would have been a bad one for the approaching marriage, and something worse for ourselves. Just as we were driving through the open gates of the crossing, a locomotive came gliding along swiftly, concealed by some intervening bushes from our coachman's view. At the last moment the danger became manifest, and the horses were pulled up so suddenly that they broke their harness. The engine touched the end of the pole, which was cracked by the shock; but the horses were not touched, and after tying up the broken harness we were able to drive on. At Makarpura we had to get out of our carriages and get on horseback. A large number of horses from the Gaikwar's stables were standing ready saddled to carry us to the meet, while for those who preferred driving, bullock carts were provided. After a lively ride of a mile or two, we arrived at the meet, where the cheetahs were waiting, mounted on carts. For it should be explained that in a cheetah hunt the cheetah is not the game pursued, but plays the part generally filled by hunting dogs. And, indeed, these hunting leopards did not look unlike large specimens of the canine race as they sat blindfolded on their hind legs, ready for the hunting of the deer. Soon after we arrived on the ground, the hunting procession was formed, which consisted of seven bullock carts, including the two that carried the cheetahs. Carriage exercise is generally a misnomer, but not when you are bumped about in a springless bullock cart over rough ground, as we were in our pursuit of black buck. After jolting about for an hour or so, I saw that a halt had been made by the leading carts, and jumping out, hurried to the front, where I found one of the cheetah's with its teeth buried in the throat of a black buck. The native keepers of the cheetah were making an incision in one of the hind legs of the buck, from which they were extracting a draught of blood in a wooden spoon. When they had got enough, they thereby induced the cheetah to leave its prey and moult once more on its cart. Then we started again, and after a time approached once more within striking distance of game. This time I was able to get a clearer view of the proceedings. Directly one of the cheetahs on his cart was near enough, his head was turned in the direction of his prey, and, released at once from the hood that blindfolded his eyes and his other shackles he bounded after the flying fawn. The race for life and death was finished in a hundred yards or so, and a second victim was added to the list of slain. When, after a long interval, another fawn had been killed, the sun was beginning to rise high in the heaven, and we turned backwards to the tent, where we were to breakfast. On our way across a ploughed field a fawn crossed our path at some distance. One of the cheetahs was let loose, but after making a few bounds in pursuit stood still, seeing that the game was beyond his reach, for the cheetah has no chance of beating the deer in a long race. If he does not overtake in the first few furious bounds, he knows it is no use, and stands still till his keepers come up and catch him. After this we went straight back to the tent, where the Gaikwar's hospitality had provided for us a breakfast of turkey, mutton, champagne cup, and many other viands, which we did full justice to, after having spent three or four hours in the open air. Perhaps some of us may have felt some qualms of conscience from consideration of the unsportsmanlike character of the sport in which we had been engaged. However, we could console ourselves with the thought that a cheetah hunt is at any rate more merciful than most kinds of hunting, as the deer dies a quick death, and has no chance of escaping wounded, to die afterwards in protracted agony.

Monday the 29th was the central point of the whole series of festivities, being the day on which the marriage ceremony was to be performed at the Narjarpaga, an ancient pile of buildings in which the Gaikwars of Baroda are always married. Over the gate leading into the quadrangle round which the Narjarpaga is built, seats were provided for the European guests. The marriage procession was to arrive at five o'clock, but long before that time the balcony assigned to us was full of spectators. We had a long time to wait, but the interval was not tedious, as there was plenty to see and talk about. A guard of honour, consisting of soldiers of the 28th Regiment of Native Infantry, with the Suakim medal on their breasts, was drawn up opposite the entrance, to represent the paramount power. Before the procession arrived, three or four regiments of the Gaikwar's cavalry defiled past. They were all splendidly mounted, but the regiment that attracted most attention was a troop of men with hussar stripes, and white cloaks lined with black fur, riding on grey horses. Presently the marriage procession began to make its appearance. It was headed by a full grown and a baby elephant, the former of which bore a banner inscribed with the words, "From Victoria, Empress of India." They came led by a mysterious collection of old spears, symbolically representing Gaikwar's military power; gaudy standards bearing artificial flowers, intended to typify the bower of bliss through which the bride and bridegroom were to pass; and baskets of imitation confectionery to stand for wedding presents. Next came two elephants, on the howdahs of which sat British political officers, who looked extremely uncomfortable at being exhibited to the gaze of the multitude in this exalted position. After them, on an elephant richly compared rode a young native, adorned with plenty of the barbaric pearl and gold which the gorgeous East showers on its kings. From the richness of his apparel and the fans of peacocks' feathers borne by his attendants, many of us were inclined to think that he was the Gaikwar. But he turned out to be the young chief of Sawantwadi, the Gaikwar's brother-in-law, who had come as a willing guest. At last two great elephants came, one of which unmistakably carried the royal bridegroom, while on the other sat General Watson, the Resident, who in all State ceremonials must go side by side with the Prince. The Gaikwar was robed in cloth of gold, and had on his head a cap, the flaps of which, richly ornamented with pearls and rubies, hung so heavily all round his head that he could hardly see to put his feet on the ladder by which he was to descend from the howdah. After he and General Watson had dismounted, they passed through the gate, followed by a struggling crowd of natives, who fought with each other to gain the entrance, in spite of the efforts made by the police to keep them in control. The Gaikwar, on entering the quadrangle, turned to the right, to the part of the building where the marriage ceremony was to be performed; while the chief of Sawantwadi, with the Resident and the other European guests, crossed over to the durbar-room opposite, in which two nautch girls were performing for the amusement of the company. The pillars of the durbar-room were covered from top to bottom with gilding and tinsel paper of all the colours of the rainbow, and thousands of candles hung from the roof in chandeliers with prismatic pendants. The scene was bright and gorgeous to a degree, but on closer inspection was seen to be wanting in solid magnificence. All the ornamentation was temporary and superficial. For half an hour or so we sat gazing at the graceful movements of the two pretty nautch girls, who, sometimes singly, sometimes together, danced to the wild music of the male members of their company. The rough dresses of the musicians formed a strange contrast to the rich robes of the dancers and the pearl ear-rings and bangles that they wore. After a while we were called away from the durbar-room to have a glimpse of the completion of the marriage ceremony. It was only a glimpse. We were ushered into a crowded room, which looked like a gilded cow-shed. In fact, it was intended to look like a cow-shed, for the Gaikwars, as their title implies, being descended originally from a family of cow-herds, keep up the memory of their origin by being married in a gilded imitation of the sheds in which their poor ancestors used to do their daily work. By standing on chairs we could just manage to see a gilded canopy in the centre of the room, before which

the Brahmins were chanting marriage prayers. One or two of us succeeded in catching sight of the Gaikwar and his bride, who was, of course, closely veiled up in her robes of state, so that the profane eyes of strangers should see nothing of her face and figure. At a quarter to six the voice of the organ announced that the marriage ceremony was completed, and that the State of Baroda had a new Queen. After that we returned to the durbar-room where the nautch girls were still dancing on, although, in spite of their training, they must have been very weary with their long exertions in a hot room. Since the Gaikwar was unable to be present his Mahometan Minister, as his representative, paid us the honours usual at the breaking up of a native entertainment. With his own hand he wreathed all the European guests with flowers, and presented each of us with a panupari and a bouquet of roses. This was the signal for departure, upon which, wreathed with flowers, and sprinkled with rose water, we drove away.

On the following night the Gaikwar took his bride to his palace, with a procession of forty or fifty elephants. The route by which he passed was illuminated by the electric light, and by lamps composed of wicks burning in small tumblers full of oil. A small glass tumbler with oil and a burning wick is not a very beautiful object in ordinary circumstances, but, by an accumulation of thousands of them, illuminations can be made far surpassing in beauty the most artistic arrangement of gas burners and electric lights. The skill with which this method of illumination can be used in India was well exemplified in the clock tower in the middle of the city, a high building under which four roads meet and pass under a triple line of arches. This clock tower seen by daylight is a very commonplace looking object, but when the curved lines of the arches and the straight lines of the roof were clearly defined by the flames of innumerable tumbler lamps, the effect was very beautiful. At a little distance the oil and the glass of the tumblers could not be seen, and only the flames were visible, forming lines of light. Thus as we drove up to it we seemed to be approaching a triple arcade, with branching roofs clearly defined in lines of flame, and supporting a pyramid of flashing gold.

On Wednesday the 30th, the programme invited us to the spectacle of combats of wild beasts in the arena. These arena sports are the relics of a barbarous age, and will probably not long be able to continue in the face of advancing civilisation. A short time ago the Earl of Dufferin refused to give the sanction of his presence to such sports when they were offered in his honour at Gwalior, and it is likely that his example in this respect will be followed by other officials. At Baroda combats of wild beasts are a favourite amusement, and vast crowds of people flocked to the arena to see those to be exhibited in honour of the Gaikwar's marriage. The Baroda arena is a large enclosure bounded by high walls, having narrow openings by which it is possible to escape, if necessary, from the infuriated attacks of the larger animals. When we arrived on the scene, we found great multitudes of people clustered on the top of the arena's boundary walls. Others were seated on the roofs of the houses and temples, and even on the very tops of the highest trees to get a view of the sports. The proceedings commenced with the milder exhibitions of tumblers, wrestlers, and performing parrots, that had been trained to shoot arrows and discharge guns. The wrestling bouts were very protracted, as the Indian wrestler acts mostly on the defensive, and shrinks from closing with his adversary. In India, as in Europe, the victory is gained by throwing your opponent on his back. Some of the wrestlers were very powerful men. It would have been a very interesting experiment to have pitted the strongest of them against Donald Dinnie. One great African, who, when thrown on his face remained fixed as if rooted to the sand, and defeated all his opponent's efforts to raise him, would, judging from his bulk and physique, have been a formidable antagonist to the most athletic Highlander that ever tossed a caber. In the middle of these preliminary exhibitions the Gaikwar drove up in his gilded carriage. On his marriage day I could not see him properly, as his rich attire almost entirely concealed his face from view. This time, however, he had on only a small white turban, and everyone present could have a good look at him. He is a handsome young man, whose well-built figure confirmed the accounts given of his fondness for riding, wrestling, and other athletic exercises. Soon after he had taken his seat, the arena was cleared of most of the throngs of spectators that had ventured on its sand, and the combats of wild animals commenced with a fight between two buffaloes. This combat was very quickly decided. At the first encounter one of the buffaloes fell heavily to the ground, and lay there motionless. However, it was not dead, and after copious streams of water had been poured over its head, the stunned animal revived sufficiently to be able to stagger out, supported by its keepers. The next combats were pairs of spirited rams, who butted so vigorously against each other that the crash of their encountering horns could be heard distinctly above the tumult of the arena. After they had enjoyed their fill of fighting, a heavily chained rhinoceros was led through the arena.

This rhinoceros had in former years another rhinoceros to fight with, but his old enemy is now dead, so he has of late years been condemned to be led in solitary state through the length of the arena with no opportunity of showing his metal. After the rhinoceros had disappeared from the scene, two gigantic elephants were brought slowly in, one after the other, and chained up facing each other about a hundred yards apart. When they had been got into position their legs were unshackled, and they found themselves free. But they proved to be unequal in courage. One charged without a moment's hesitation, and the other fled to the most distant portion of the arena. Squibs were let off to frighten them back to the space in front of the Gaikwar, and when they arrived there they consented to join in battle. Again and again the two huge animals charged each other, and their encountering tusks rattled like the branches of trees in a tempest. At last they had had enough of the joys of battle, and retired from the field seemingly not much the worse for the hard blows they had received. After their departure a second pair of elephants were brought in. But the new arrivals would not by any means be induced to turn their tusks against each other. Instead of so doing, they chased their attendant spearmen up and down the arena. Accordingly, the attempt to make them fight was given up as a bad job, and one of them was caught and led away. The other was retained for what turned out to be far the most exciting item in the afternoon's programme. A trooper belonging to one of the Gaikwar's regiments of irregular cavalry rode into the arena. By his superb horsemanship he forced his horse, in spite of its evident terror, to take up a position within ten or twenty yards of the elephant's head. There he kept it dancing on its hind legs, so that it might be able to start away immediately as soon as the elephant, infuriated by its proximity, made a charge. Again and again the elephant, with a trumpet of rage, suddenly rushed upon the horse and the rider. As often the horse and rider galloped away like lightning, and just escaped the furious onslaught. At last, when one of these charges had been successfully escaped, the horseman, thinking himself out of danger, reined up his horse, this time without keeping its legs in motion so that it might be ready for a sudden start. Accordingly, when the elephant unexpectedly charged again, it managed to gore with its tusks the hind-quarters of the horse by which it had so often been eluded. The horse was almost thrown upon the ground, and the horseman with difficulty retained his seat, but even in this perilous moment his fine horsemanship stood him in good stead, and he was out of danger almost before the cry of horror uttered by the spectators had died away. This was the end of the proceedings. After the gallant cavalry soldier had ridden up to show himself, and the mark of the elephant's tusks on his horse's hind-quarters, to the Gaikwar, the crowd dispersed, and we drove away from the arena, having experienced in a modified form something of the feelings that must have excited the ancient Roman spectators in the Coliseum. —Correspondent in Scotland.

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