

# A RETIRED KING.

## THE EX-KING OF OUDE AT CALCUTTA. A ROYAL PENSIONER OF THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT—HIS MIMIC COURT AND STATE.

The Calcutta correspondent of the *Times* gives the following sketch of the life led by the Ex-King of Oude, at his little court on the banks of the Hooghly:

It occurred to me that your readers might be interested in knowing something of the life of an ex-King, an exile of long standing, and that I might profitably give an account of how he passes his time under the pomp and circumstance of a mimic court. With this view I sought out the Political Resident of the Ex-King of Oude, whose kingdom now lies on the banks of the Hooghly, at Garden Reach, about three miles from Calcutta, down the river. The permission to visit the grounds was at once accorded, and I was accompanied by the Political Resident, Lieut. Col. Mowbray Thomson, whose heroic conduct and hair-breadth escapes at Cawnpore many an Anglo-English child knows by heart, and whose story will be told while English history endures. Lieut. Col. Thomson is engaged in administering political duties and magisterial justice within the four walls of the Ex-King of Oude's mimic kingdom, in which, however, save where the law of India is in question, there can be no interference on the part of the Indian Government. Within those walls the King is supreme. His kingdom, though small, is compact. His subjects are in all about 6,000, and devoted to him. His court is perfect in form. His officers of state, several of the chief of whom accompanied us over the grounds, have their titles and gradations as they or those who went before them had in Oude. The King has three principal houses in his little kingdom, and has named them respectively "Sultan Khanah," "Azud Munzil," and "Zurd Kootee." Round the second of these is the Royal Menagerie, unquestionably one of the finest in the world. It contains about 20,000 birds, beasts, and snakes, ranged in the pretty order of zig-zag disorder on the four sides of a magnificent tank about 300 feet long by 240 feet wide, almost alive with every conceivable variety of fresh-water fish that can live in a hot climate, and covered with broods or specimens of every known water-bird which "love or money" has been potent enough to secure. The pigeons seem to be the King's favorites. They number 18,000, arranged in thousands here and there in different parts of the inclosure, and are of every variety and color—I should say the finest existing collection of pigeons. Along the banks of the lake roam at will the ostrich and the pelican, mingling with swans, geese, and a host of birds known to ordinary individuals, with a host more known only to the naturalist or bird fancier. Around or amid all these (for the freedom of all but the wild animals is unbounded) are goats and sheep representing many climates and species, camels, dromedaries, ibis, and I know not what. The snakes have for their home a "mountain," in shape like the dome of St. Paul's, only not more than about 30 feet high, and with, perhaps, an equal diameter at the base. This dome is covered with holes of different sizes, the homes for snakes of all ages and dimensions. Here the reptiles rule supreme; they are fed, housed, and allowed their own will and pleasure as freely as the King has his—within treaty obligations. Elsewhere in the grounds we find many of the beautiful grass-snakes, and others of a like kind, in no case poisonous, but difficult to distinguish from snakes that are poisonous. Finally, we had a fine collection of cobras brought out, and then all the native attendants (I am sure we must have had fifty) crowded round to see the work of a short, thick-set, muscular and rather grim-looking man, who has the snakes in charge. The little man (described also as a wrestler) was "under a cloud" in consequence of some offense, and he spoke perhaps more defiantly than even his wont to his superiors; but I should say he would at no time be very bland. When his assistants hesitated, he dashed his hand into the jars and pulled out huge cobras whose touch is death. There was no charming or jugglery, but merely a dangerous exhibition of the King's pets. One could scarcely, as one looked on the coolness of the operation, remove from one's mind the impression that the reptiles had been robbed of their deadly poison; but they had not. The King would have no such shams about him. The charm is in the power to kill. All that the little man affected was downright hardihood, induced by long practice, and, of course, by a knowledge of the habits of cobras.

Around the menageries are those solid picturesque little buildings with marble floors and stuccoed walls so much in request in the East. They are so constructed that the Ex-King or his friends are able to rest almost at any point while walking among the pets of the menagerie. At night every part of these buildings, as indeed also of the entire grounds, is lighted up with innumerable small lamps, of different colors, whose light (in the case of the buildings) is also reflected from the ceiling by similarly colored balls—ordinary balls, which I suppose might be bought in the Lowther Arcade, but very dear from their gorgeousness to the heart of an Eastern potentate as they are pleasing to the imagination of his people. The only other noticeable fact is that (as in all Eastern houses I have seen, especially where European habits are imitated) the gilt and display cover dirty walls, and are further set off by articles of furniture entirely misplaced. An English traveler would hardly be surprised to find in one of the best rooms, hanging over some splendid couch and facing the most gorgeous mirrors, some wretched print which St. Giles' would condemn for wretchedness of taste. It will be remembered that I am not referring to the King's dwelling houses. The Ex-King, on some ground of etiquette, never attends at Government House, but he is visited by every Viceroy on selected occasions, and is met out to him with properly adjusted Eastern scales of etiquette. He has an income from Government of £10,000 a month, and a small additional sum from the rent of a native bazaar outside his territory. Inside those four walls he spends his entire income and more. At all events, he saves nothing, and seldom seems free from a royal craving for money. This will not be wondered at when I say that he has, in addition to two married wives, thirty-nine Mahals, (that is, persons who bear children,) and 100 Begums—who, I presume, do not. Fancy the amount required in London for 141 ladies, royal in position at least! He has also living a family of thirty-one sons and twenty-five daughters, and he lost a son some days ago. He spends his days in his menagerie and in drawing, painting, and writing poetry. His songs are said to be excellent, according to native taste, and some which are called after his name—Huzur-Ki-Thoungree—are sung I am told, by dancing girls all over Calcutta, Benares, and many other of the principal towns of India. His Ex-Majesty's evenings are spent among musicians and dancing girls. One of his four principal houses (all of which are furnished "in great style") is selected for the day, and there he passes the night—Calcutta meanwhile as ignorant of his pleasures and his as if he were still in Oude. Every avenue to the palaces is guarded grimly, and woe to the person who attempts to break the guard. All this cannot be maintained without lavish expenditure; in fact, the King maintains a little town, providing the elite of it with choice amusement, and the whole town with amusement of some sort, in addition to providing them with the means of living. The little camp is, in its way, royal—as Eastern peoples understand royalty. The menagerie costs, in feeding, £500 a month. The grounds are beautifully kept, and employ 300 gardeners, who, of course, must be paid. The people employed are more than feudal retainers; they belong to the Ex-King, body and soul; and if an order had been given for the Snake Chief, with his grim surly face and his well-knit limbs, to spring upon Col. Thomson and throttle him on the spot, the man would at least have tried to obey. Such is the life of one of our Ex-Kings.

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