

SINDBAD THE TOURIST.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "ZIT AND XOE."

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CHAPTER XXXII.

BARODA.

The fête in the People's Park went on from sunrise to midnight, and when we ventured to visit it in the afternoon, there must have been fifty thousand or sixty thousand people present. The performers had been bribed and tempted to Baroda from all parts of India, and we saw whatever India has to show in the way of legerdemain and sleight-of-hand and magic. In booths or enclosures all about the Park there were wrestlers, actors, swordsmen, contortionists, nautch-girls, tumbling-girls, snake-charmers, bear-leaders, giants and dwarfs, and collections of such repulsive human monstrosities as are only manufactured now in the remoter and less civilized native States.

"They are not bad," said Thornton, "but I expected to see something better. You see these tricks everywhere. But in Baroda, on an occasion like this, I half-expected to see the rope-trick."

"What is that?" asked the American girl, eagerly. "Don't tell me too much. I shall never be believed again if I repeat half of what I have seen already. But what is the rope-trick?"

"I can't do it," said Thornton, "but it seems to be very, very simple. You take a coil of rope in your hands, and throw it up. Then your confederate catches hold of the rope, and runs up it and goes on and on towards the sky until he disappears, as the crowd think, for good. Not a bit of it. They hear a thud, and see a head, an arm, a leg. They turn aside in horror, and when they look round again, your confederate is bowing blandly at you. That is a trick worth knowing. You don't believe me? Well, let us go and have another look at the gentleman spitted on the sword-blade."

Close to a kiosk, where all the roads met, we had seen, as we came into the Public Park, the man spitted on a sword-blade. He lay there horizontally, with the long two-handed sword, as far as we could see, right through his back and coming out a long way in front, while his family of young but most attentive children fed him from time to time with plantains and cocoanut milk. He had a serene smile on his face all through the afternoon, and in our journeyings we came across him half-a-dozen times at least, always resigned, and very pleased apparently at the interest Thornton took in his health.

The fireworks later on were magnificent, and could not have been rivalled by Brock or any modern maker at home.

And so, as through a mist, the ever-changing panorama rolled on. But the most striking pictures, perhaps, of all were seen at what everybody called the "Sports in the Arena." Here wild beasts with wild beasts, and wild beasts with men, engaged in mortal combat in the middle of the *Agga*, a huge oval enclosure, some two hundred yards long and sixty broad, surrounded by a massive wall twenty feet high, with narrow apertures in it, here and there, just big enough to admit a hard-pressed man flying from an infuriated beast. On the top of the wall, well out of reach, on platforms behind it, on the rising ground behind the platforms, and upon the branches of the encircling trees, sat the whole population of Baroda, man, woman, and child. The scene was a curious blending of strong colours, what with the deep blue sky, the rich green trees and uplands, the red turbans of the men, the robes, white or sage-green or purple of the women, as they sat, intent and eager, with swarthy faces and flashing eyes.

The Gaekwar and his guests were accommodated in the gaily-decorated grand-stand, three stories high, the lowest storey, like the top of the wall, being about twenty feet from the ground. The English ladies in their gala dresses, the English officers in their bright uniforms, and the chiefs and Sirdars in their glittering jewels and ancestral finery must have formed a brilliant spectacle to the people on the walls. It was four o'clock when we took our seats, and the arena was still steeped in the fierce white glare of Indian sunshine.

First came the Gaekwar's wrestlers, and acrobats, and swordsmen, stripped to the waist-cloth, their huge bodies and brawny limbs and shaven heads glistening with cocoanut oil. They salaamed reverentially to their young master—*Morituri te salutant!* The whole thing reminded us of Rome, of Rome in Asia Minor in its magnificent decadence. Then, in a long procession, the painted elephants passed through, saluting the Gaekwar and his guests with upraised trunks and shrill trident cries; then the fighting elephants and rhinoceroses, and fighting buffaloes and blue-bulls, and huge-horned rams and tigers heavily manacled, went slowly by. Next came a hundred men or more with spears and flags and chains and ropes and bundles of squibs and fireworks in their hands, whose duty it was to keep the ground; and, finally, the Gaekwar's amazons and nautch-girls and conjurors. These last began the entertainment with a salute of twenty-one tiny brass cannon, fired by skilfully-trained turtle doves and green parrots.

But it was simply impossible to describe all we saw. In one corner a dozen couples of the Gaekwar's wrestlers struggled with strained backs and knotted limbs like so many bronze *Laocoons*. In another two huge *rhinoceroses* were let loose. For a minute or two they rubbed their battered horns unmercifully together. Then they retired, to meet again with an awful clash that shook the whole arena. The crowd shouted; the rival keepers urged their Behemeths on with spears and sticks and rockets, and refreshed them, from time to time, by dashing bucketsful of water over their dusty parchment-coloured hides. When the *rhinoceroses* were satisfied, or supposed to be satisfied, the *rhinoceroses* were captured with spike-lined clamps of hampering irons, attached to heavy chains that were deftly buckled round their legs, and they were led off snorting and struggling like frightened pigs. The elephants, when they were brought up to the fray, looked keenly at one another with their ferocious little eyes, and then with their great ears flapping away like *punkas*, they lashed each other's foreheads with their trunks. Suddenly the smaller beast twined his trunk adroitly round his adversary's, and the battle became a wrestling match. Slowly the larger elephant was pushed backwards towards the wall, and crushed so severely against it that the people on the top began to climb down in alarm. Then with shrill trumpettings he broke loose and fled, the attendants flying before him into their little refuges and up the narrow stairways. One unlucky man stumbled, and had his back ripped open by the victorious animal; and now, when the excitement was at its highest, we had the hot performance of all—a contest between a mounted spearman and an elephant, inadvised with *bhang*. The man rode wonderfully. You forgot the danger of the combat in its beauty. With a touch of his sharp stirrup,

would the spearman and heron and his horsemen, not the hares and pretty birds, towards them. All amusement, but, the thousand beaters are fair, for the odds are.

Cheetah-hunting, peculiar to Baroda, cheetahs, all hating tabbies, were driven with three or four fat guests in two diverging and silver-colored drawn by swift white in the hackeries, but to accommodate the they could, pack the square yard of the bottom of each carriages was furnished, no springs, as our nimble bullock-dale, upland and lowland cactus-hedge. My two yard-square bit of grass the very vivacious you I had lately seen a good the jolting of our spring wonder at her for this long time until I should be able the sport. After rat for two or three miles hundred and fifty yards browsing placidly. The decorations on our list make them rather tame all turned their heads were too late. Three stealthily unhooded and enormous bounds through and maize and *dalat*, each of them pulling throat. Cheetahs, by the way down if a buck is within they fail to strike in the yards, they always jump. Here, however, they tear them off their necks as they permitted, and only to be pacified by a bowl of black-buck blood with a knife across the

Then the double line of carriages went on. But too stiff and too shaky my arm before we had explored me to stop. I had laid her gently on a clump of trees; and then over her, as my body was a tank, half-a-dozen times, before it collapsed; but for part of an hour that she had to step on foot. She was not a bit worse. She never once threw the way of trying to keep me along arm-in-arm and the our mockery of a smile naturally tried to be as

possible. But my arm in water, the sun was blinding the American on the verandah of one of the boxes in which we were I collapsed.

Thornton was smoking a cigarette beside me in my tent as I lay.

"Hicks!" he said, "you are no worse. You have been and raving like a lunatic."

"Well," I answered, "my pulse is still strong, and do please mind. Where's that American?"

Thornton took my thermometer under my arm, and then slapped me. "You are a fool," I cried. "But you must mean it. You did say that we all thought you were dead, and now you ask after beauty! What does it mean?"

"I don't know," I said.

"Where she should be with someone else?"

"An elephant and a handbag?" I must say that for to lawn-tennis, and I have since, and have heard many ravings, and I could as I watched you, old woman, a Mrs. Fontaine."

I turned and found the American stronger than I thought, and hold my own again.

"Don't talk to me," I cried.

"Why not?" asked again on my pulse; when you have talked to me eyes for the last week, brain-fever instead of

and, even then, you deserted. Judging from

bronde is a woman who had been as frank and lively, I don't think she could not possibly

be trouble to bring you back for her friendship. She

she could not possibly be bound in honor and, in spite of the other, kissed her man?" The lady has a

"Stop, Thornton,"

too! I should never have thoughts like this if I

when a man is on his

not speak to him like that.

"I will do you no harm,"

and it is a relief to

science, old man. And ever since I have known

more or less—the lady

all through; and what with her by-gone

Friendship is one thing

I winced. Thornton

under my arm, and, after

on a paper-covered chair.

Dear old Tom! You

energetic, and never

was not absolutely nec-

my long chair, after he

up with wraps.

I knew, from the

dragged out of bed,

that I was physically a