

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—*Moriturus 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 conjurers. 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 is 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 amicably together. Then they retired, to meet again with an awful clash that shook the whole arena. The crowd shouted; the rival keepers urged their Behomeths on with spears and shrieks and rockets, and refreshed them, from time to time, by dashing bucketsful of water over their dusty parchment-coloured hides. When we were satisfied, or supposed to be satisfied, the rhinoceroses were captured with spike-lined clamps or 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 trumpetings 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 pet performance of all—a contest between a mounted spearman and an elephant, maddened with *bhag*. The man rode wonderfully. You forgot the danger of the combat in its beauty. With a touch of his sharp stirrup,

would the... and heron and large horsemen, not... hares and pretty... towards them. All... amusement, but, the... thousand beaters are... fair, for the odds are... Ocheetah-hunting,

peculiar to Baroda... cheetahs, all hissing... tabbies, were driven... with three or four at... guests in two divergi... ed and silver-colore... drawn by swift whi... in the hackeries, but... to accommodate the... they could, packe... the square yard of... the bottom of each... carriages was furnis... course, no springs... as our nimble bulle... dale, upland and low... cactus-hedge. My... yard-square bit of gra... the very vivacious you... I had lately seen a goo... the jolting of our sprin... wonder at her for this... ly until I should be ab... the sport. After rat... for two or three miles... hundred and fifty yard... browsing placidly. Th... decorations on our list... make them rather un... all turned their heads... were too late. Three... stealthily unhooded an... enormous bounds thro... and maize and *dhal*, t... each of them pulling... throat. Ocheetahs, by... down if a buck is with... they fail to strike in th... yards, they always retu... Here, however, their... tear them off their... as they permitted, the... and only to be p... bowl of black-buck ble... with a knife across the... Then the double line... carriages went on. Bu... too stiff and too shak... my arm before we had... plored me to stop. I b... and laid her gently on... clump of trees; and th... over her, as my horse... tank, half-a-dozen time... fore it collapsed; but... part of an hour that sh... steps on foot. She wa... She never once threw... way of trying to keep... along arm-in-arm and t... our mockery of a fin... naturally tried to be as... possible. But my sun... water, the sun was bla... handed the American... the verandah of one o... boxes in which breakfa... I collapsed.

Thornton was smoki... side me in my tent as I... "Hicks!" he said, "n... no worse. You have be... and raving like a lunat... "Well," I answered... my pulse; and do pleas... mind. Where's that A... Thornton told my... thermometer under my... slapped me. "You are... cried. "But you mean... meant it. You did too... We all thought you wa... and now you ask after... beauty! What does... her?"

"I don't know," I s... "Where she should... "with someone else?"

an elephant and hande... ly: I must say that for... to lawn-tennis, and I... since, and have heard n... Your ravings, and I co... as I watched you, old... woman, a Mrs. Fontla...

I turned round un... stronger than I thoug... hold my own again.

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

"Why not?" asked... again on my pulse; "w... when you have talk... eyes for the last week... brain-fever instead of... and, even then, you... deserts. Judging from... blanche is a woman a... had been as frank in... lately, I don't think... trouble to bring you u... for her friendship. She... she could not possibly... were bound in hono... and, in spite of the ru... other, kissed her. W... man? The lady has a...

"Stop, Thornton,"... too! I should never... thoughts like this if I... when a man is on his... not speak to him like...

"It will do you no ha... "and it is a relief... science, old man. Judg... ever since I have kn... more or less—the lady... all through; and wha... with her by-gone se... Friendship is one thing...

I winced. Thornton... under my arm, and, aft... on a paper covered... dragged me out of l... chair.

Dear old Tom! energetic, and never us... was not absolutely nec... my long chair, after h... up with wraps.

I knew, from the... dragged out of bed... that I was physically a...