

THE KYAH AND HIS COW.

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HE quiet pertinacity of some of our four-footed friends is often very amusing to a looker-on. The cat of the house will allow herself to be turned off a comfortable chair or couch a dozen—nay, verily, two or even three dozen—times without betraying the slightest sign of temper. Immediately the restraining presence of the disturbers of her rest is removed, she returns and takes up her former position in a perfectly quiet and dignified manner.

A loose-limbed puppy flies from his master's presence with his tail well down, when caught in the act of reducing a dress shoe to fragments; but he departs from one door only to return by another for a fresh assault upon the attractive shoe. He may be caught and punished, boots may be flung at him, bitter reproaches heaped upon him; but as surely as he has a chance he will carry off that shoe.

The persistency with which cows stray into forbidden pastures is truly remarkable. Severe chastisements have no effect; blows fail to impress upon them the advisability of seeking other happy hunting grounds. They return to the same spot, and incur the risk of the same punishment day after day, and week after week.

Even the mild Hindoo is liable to lose his temper under these circumstances, and it is not surprising that the trial proved to be altogether too much for a hot-tempered Chinaman, who was once annoyed by the daily intrusion of a plump little cow into his workshop. Arkiet was by no means a bad-tempered man, but he was passionate and hasty. He was a clever, hard-working carpenter, could build a bungalow, or make a Chinese cabinet.

He was employed in building bungalows at Tura, and the shed where he and his three fellow-countrymen carried on their work was not far from the primitive little bazar where a few traders had started a very profitable business in rice, cotton and various articles in demand amongst the constables, coolies, and Garos who formed their customers.

The workshop was fenced in by a straggling bamboo railing that formed a sufficient barrier to the ordinary Tura cows, but not to a clever little animal who had discovered how to push the bars aside. Day after day Arkiet found his benches thrown down, and his neat piles of recently trimmed window frames knocked over. Day after day he warned the owner about it, and told him to look after the animal. But she belonged to a Kyah, or grain merchant—a well-to-do man who could afford to ignore the complaints of a Chinese carpenter.

Wherever a new station is formed, no matter how remote it may be from civilisation, there will a Kyah be found. It may cost him a large sum to start his business, but he spends his money freely, knowing that he has no rivals, and can bleed the unfortunate people who are forced to depend on him for the necessaries of life, to any extent, when he is once fairly established. A thrifty, clever race of traders are these Kyahs, and our Tura friend was no exception to the rule. His cow was the fattest and best in the place, but that was no reason why he should waste his substance in paying a boy to look after her. She strayed wherever she liked, and she evidently liked the carpenter's shop. She became a thorn in the flesh to poor Arkiet. The easiest way to have kept her out would of course have been to strengthen the railings, but the carpenters were busy men and be-

grudged the time required to do it. From 8 A.M. until 6 P.M. their time belonged to Government, except for one hour allowed for their dinner. Arkiet was very industrious, and occupied his spare time in making various articles of furniture for the residents. He had nearly finished a small cabinet, when one day the cow foolishly walked into the shed while he was there. The cabinet was a very delicate piece of workmanship, and Arkiet, like all good workmen, was very proud of his handiwork. He had been busy at it for some time when the gong sounded 8 o'clock. Carefully placing it on an empty bench he began trimming a large piece of rough timber. His sharp adze made the fragments of wood fly about as he set to work with his usual cheerful vigour.

Now and again he cast an admiring look at his pet production. Perhaps, like the hen-wife of old, he was counting his chickens before they were hatched, and enjoying in anticipation the bottle of fiery rum that he intended to indulge in when the price of the cabinet was paid to him. The hen-wife did not count upon the awkward stile that brought her basket of eggs to grief, and Arkiet did not count upon the cow. Absorbed in his work, and his thoughts, he did not notice that she was gazing placidly over the railing, looking as harmless and meek as it is possible for a mild-eyed cow to look. But appearances are deceptive; she was neither harmless nor meek. She was meditating mischief, and the result of her meditation was the gradual and quiet pushing aside of the bamboo that served as a bar across the entrance. A few quiet shoves with her head and one end of the bamboo fell.

Arkiet was busily hacking away at his heavy piece of timber, making too much noise to notice the fall of the bar, and the cow stepped quietly into the shed and looked round for the softest pile of shavings on which to repose while she chewed the cud of contentment. A shout from his fellow-workmen made Arkiet look up, and a piece of wood thrown unpleasantly near her nose caused the cow to hasten her movements. Alas! Her fate drove her in the wrong direction, and, instead of escaping as quickly as she could from the four Chinamen, who were now in full cry after her, she rushed forward with tail well up and head erect, to the further end of the shed, where the precious cabinet stood. Sudden and uncontrollable rage filled the heart of the passionate Chinaman as he perceived the peril of his masterpiece. With a loud cry he lifted his arm and flung the sharp-edged adze he still held in his hand at the unfortunate animal.

His aim was fatally true; in another moment the adze was buried in her side. Rushing wildly out of the workshop, she made for the shelter of her shed and dropped, apparently in a dying state, on the ground. A crowd quickly collected round her, but no one attempted to bind up her wound or check the bleeding. The Kyah's heart burned within him as he gazed on the prostrate form of his best cow. He felt no pity for her sufferings, and made no effort to relieve her. His pity was all for himself. What a loss! The best cow in the place, worth Rs. 20, 30, 40—her value increased every minute. Burning for revenge, he left the poor beast to die while he hurried to the catchery to lay the case before the Deputy Commissioner. He would make the Chinaman pay for killing his cow. It had been worth a good deal before, but its value had suddenly doubled, and he felt that he could claim nothing less than double.

A Kyah is essentially a money-grubber.

The thought of the profit to be made out of the cow blinded him to all other considerations, and he lost no time in bringing his case against Arkiet. In those happy days there were very few cases in the Deputy Commissioner's Court, and consequently no delay. Within a few hours this case was tried and disposed of. There was no conflicting evidence. Arkiet did not attempt to deny having flung the adze at the cow, and he was fined the value of the animal—estimated according to her actual worth, and not according to the fictitious value placed upon her by her owner. The money was paid at once, and the Kyah returned to his house, not altogether satisfied, with the rupees tied up in his cloth.

He did not care whether the animal was already dead or not; he was sure she would die, and what was the use of troubling himself any more about her? He had her price in his hand, and that was the thing he cared for. Arkiet had wounded the poor beast in a fit of rage, and no doubt was sorry enough afterwards that he had done so; but the Kyah neglected her in a cold-blooded, deliberate manner that deserved punishment almost as much as Arkiet's unpremeditated cruelty. His punishment was likely to be far more severe than Arkiet's. In his haste he had been guilty of a deed that threatened to make him an outcast from his caste-brethren for the rest of his life.

He had taken money for the life of his cow. Being a high-caste Hindoo, this was a mortal offence. The money was accursed; it was blood-money. The excitement amongst the Hindoo community was intense. His caste-brethren looked at him with horror in their eyes.

"Why had he been in such a hurry?" they asked.

"Why had none of them warned him?" he angrily retorted.

He would be an outcast! He, the richest, and, in his own estimation, most important native in the place. He would rather have died than have lost his caste. Could nothing be done? He would return the money, give it away in charity—do anything rather than lose his caste. But it was of no use to return the money, for he had actually accepted it; only one thing could save him from his fate. If the cow's life could be saved, his caste could be saved too. The money in that case would not be blood-money.

Could it be possible that the wretched cause of his trouble was still alive? With trembling steps he entered the shed and knelt down by the cow. To his joy he found that life was not extinct. Eagerly calling his servants to assist him, he bound up her wound and applied every remedy that could be thought of to the exhausted animal. Never was wife or child watched by any of his race with more intense anxiety, or nursed more carefully than the hitherto neglected cow. The native doctor's aid was sought, and nothing spared that the most recklessly extravagant spectators suggested as a cure for a deep and deadly wound.

The cow ought to have died, but she did not. For days her life hung in the balance, and the wretched Kyah hardly dared to leave her for a moment for fear some slight neglect might extinguish the flickering flame of life. But ceaseless attention and a sound constitution won the day, and he was saved from a degradation that, to a high-caste Hindoo, is worse than death.

It is needless to add that his gratitude did not take the form of restitution or charity.