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Title: Indian and Other Tales

Author: M. L. Hope

Release date: July 31, 2011 [EBook #36925]  
Most recently updated: January 7, 2021

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Al Haines

\*\*\* START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK INDIAN AND OTHER TALES \*\*\*

# INDIAN AND OTHER TALES

By M. L. HOPE

Toronto  
William Briggs  
1911

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## **INDIAN AND OTHER TALES**

O beautiful wind of the West,  
In your wand'rings o'er land and sea,  
What have you seen in your quest?  
Come, tell your story to me.

In the isles of the southern seas,  
Where the crystal-clear ocean a melody sang  
To the beautiful kauri trees,  
I wandered the summer day through,  
In the forest's dappled shade,  
Where the graceful fern-tree bowed its head  
To woo the Maori maid.  
A nymph of the woods was she  
In her kiwi mantle brown;  
And the fern-tree wooed her with tender grace  
From dawn till the sun went down;  
But a Maori chieftain came  
In the glory of life's young morn,  
And the maiden forsook her mystic love,  
Leaving it sad and forlorn.  
But the tui-bird saw its grief,  
And in loving sympathy  
Built her beautiful, woven nest  
In the heart of the lonely tree.

{6} And when its liquid notes echoed the woodland through,  
The fern-tree lifted its drooping head  
And was fresh as the morning dew;  
So I left them in their joy—the youth and his fairy bride,  
The tree with its nest of callow birds—  
And I crossed the ocean tide.

In the early morn I came to a land where the orchards were white  
With their wealth of apple blossoms, and bathed in the spring sunlight;  
There I found a winding road with banks where the wild-flowers grew,  
And through a vista of blossoming trees the sea came into view,  
As it sparkled in the sun and kissed the golden shore,  
Then laughed aloud in its mirth and ran back to the sea once more.

And again I wandered on, until in the twilight dim  
I came where the scent of the wattle seemed the incense to Nature's hymn,  
For a brooding peace lay o'er land and sea  
As I sank to rest in a blue gum-tree,  
And when I awoke in the dawn, the dew lay on vineyards green,

{7} Where they nestled in valleys of red-hued loam;  
And a river whose fount was a cascade clear,  
Which burst from the brow of a mountain near,  
Wended its way through the verdant land,  
Till it reached at last the ocean strand,  
Where it lost itself in the waters deep,  
And only the mermaids saw it leap  
With joy, as it reached the Garden of Sleep.

And still I wandered on until I came to tropical seas,  
Where the odors of spices were wafted afar by every passing breeze;  
And in the pearly light of the coming day  
I saw the feathery bamboo groves, where the elephant loves to stray;  
I heard his mighty trump, as he waked from his dream,  
And the sound of women's voices as they wended their way to the stream;  
A laughing, chattering throng, they passed me on their way  
To bathe in the limpid waters, ere the sun held his sovereign sway.  
I followed a Purple Emperor to the cinnamon gardens near,  
Then chased a laughing rickshaw boy, and whispered in his ear;  
What the secret was I may not tell,  
But the rickshaw boy seemed to know it well.

{8} Then I left behind me this island fair,  
With its wondrous charm and fragrant air,  
And ere night had fallen had crossed the sea,  
And come to the land of the banyan tree,  
Where nature is wrapped in mystery deep,  
And the gods in the cups of the Lotus-flower sleep;  
And even my spirit felt its spell,  
For I scarcely breathed as the twilight fell;  
And when o'er the palm-trees and temples fair  
The crescent moon hung in the evening air,  
And from shadowy doorways and wayside shrines near  
The chant of the Koran fell on my ear;  
Still more did its mystery my spirit fill,  
For I felt that I only could breathe and be still.

And so on to the Isles of the West I roam,  
Which the hearts of the exiles ever call home;  
And I think that the primrose and hare-bells blue  
Are emblems of hearts that are ever true,  
And the shamrock doth also with elfin grace  
Claim for itself in my heart a place;  
So I whisper them each that no fairer land  
Have I found in my wanderings from strand to strand;  
They each have their charm and magic spell,  
And loving hearts in each one doth dwell.

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{9}

It was night and the tired villagers were wrapped in sleep;  
Only within her lonely hut did a mother her vigil keep.  
All day she had toiled and labored, carrying bricks and stone,  
While her child lay sick with fever, and uttered his weary moan.  
Oft she had paused in her work, and in soft, caressing tone  
Had soothed his plaintive crying, then gone back to her work alone,  
And now, though tired and weary, and heavy her eyes with sleep,  
She sat and nursed her baby with a mother love true and deep;  
And when with a last little cry he turned in her arms and was still,  
She knew that no more would his baby love the place in her hard life fill.  
She was only a coolie mother, but her heart was heavy with pain,  
For she knew that she never would clasp her child in her lonely arms again.  
What had mattered the daily toil in the heat of the burning sun,  
When she knew that she had her little one to caress when the day was done?  
To you he was only a coolie child with his baby limbs dimpled and bare,  
But now he is one of those favored ones who are safe in their Saviour's care.

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{10}

The highway was hot and dusty, oppressive the air;  
The sun on the tired bullocks beat down with pitiless glare.  
Mere living skeletons were they, their worn-out hides scarce covering their aching  
bones;  
Hunger and thirst were their daily lot, while many a cruel blow  
Forced them to drag their heavy load, though weary their gait and slow;  
The look in their eyes was pitiful, so full of helpless pain,  
While ever the cruel driver showered his blows like rain.

Have ye no heart, ye men of the East, that ye treat dumb creatures so?  
Does it help you to bear your own weary lot to add to their tale of woe?  
Bruised and maim, half-blind, and halt, you drive them until they drop!  
Oh, had I the power I would wield it, such cruelty to stop;  
When I see you prod them with pointed stick, my soul cries in answering pain;  
Oh, why will you treat your oxen so, and give to your land this stain?

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{11}

Tired out with the heat and the burden of day,  
And the miles I have walked 'neath the sun's fierce ray,  
I think with delight of the bungalow dim,  
And how I shall fill my long glass to the brim;  
But when I arrive all is empty and bare,  
The khansamah has gone to his evening prayer.

I think I will rest on the charpoi awhile,  
But the mosquitoes turn out in most welcoming style;  
I then in despair do betake me outside,  
Still to find I am helpless to stem their fierce tide.  
But wait, there's still balm for my weary soul—  
I take out my pipe and fill up the bowl,  
And for a few moments I have a respite,  
But, oh, I'd be glad of my supper to-night.

But presently cometh mine host of the inn,  
And soon from the murgghi's there issues a din,  
The heartless khansamah he cares not a jot,  
The dechie is here, but the murgghi is not.  
And though it is tough, and not cooked with great care,  
I am not in a mood to complain of my fare.

You may think that travelling hath its delights,  
But wait till you've spent a few weary nights

In a dak-bungalow, empty and bare,  
With no punka coolie to answer your prayer,  
Then I'm sure you'll agree that a pleasanter lot  
Is to live in a place where dak-bungalows are not.

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{12}

Again a dak-bungalow is the theme of my lay,  
But now it is cool, and the close of the day  
Finds me seated outside in my long-armed chair,  
My report to the Burra Sahib now to prepare,  
But, oh, ye great gods, what a discordant din  
Doth break on the peace and contentment within!  
A horde of wild monkeys the compound invade,  
Of every color and age and grade.

A venerable sage cometh close to my chair  
As though he intended my labors to share.  
But his better-half thinks she has by far the best right  
To my paper and pens, should I guard them less tight;  
So she sends him off flying with a howl of pain,  
Then comes back and watches my efforts again;  
Meanwhile, the rest of the tribe chatter and grin,  
Until I think I am being turned outside in.

Oh, where are my dreams of peace and delight—  
A peg and a smoke in the cool of the night?  
Their noise and their chatter drive all peace away,  
And make we feel minded those monkeys to slay;  
But when I start up and with a stone take a shot,  
The compound is bare, and the monkeys have got;  
They have vanished away like the mist in the sun;  
And, well, after all, they were only in fun.

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{13}

It was May in the dear old homeland,  
And the woods and valleys green  
Were a vision of radiant beauty,  
For summer now reigned as queen.  
The lark sang high in the heavens,  
Filling the air with song,  
And the thrush with its liquid melody  
Was glad as the day was long.  
The brooks through the meadows rippled,  
Reflecting the sun's bright ray;  
And the whole earth joined in singing  
To the summer a welcoming lay.

May, in an Eastern city, under burning skies,  
Where many a weary exile for the dear old homeland cries;  
Only those know the longing and pain  
Who have spent long years on the sun-dried plain,  
Whom days of toil under a pitiless sun  
Have robbed of hope ere the race was won.  
Those who each year are free to go  
To the hills where the cooling breezes blow;  
Where they see afar off the snow-clad peaks,  
And nature in all her beauty speaks,  
Of the weary striving know but the least,  
For they see but the bright side of life in the East.

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{14}

I.

'Twas the hush of the early dawn,  
Ere nature had wakened from sleep;  
The stars still shone in the opal sky,  
And deep called unto deep,  
"Where is the monarch of day—  
Why tarrieth he so long?  
Knoweth he not that his bride, the Morn,  
Waiteth to greet him with song?"

II.

And e'en as the clarion cry  
Rang out from shore to shore,  
The waves from their deep caves leapt  
With a mighty roar.  
The sea-birds wakened from sleep  
And circled the air;  
The wild beasts ceased hunting their prey,  
And sought their lair.

III.

The mountains caught up the cry  
And echoed it afar,  
While dim in the East became  
The morning star.

{15}

The hills and the valleys awoke,  
And with joyous strain  
The birds of the woodlands broke  
Into song again.

IV.

And now the full glory of day  
Reigned over earth and sea,  
And morn in her mantle fair  
Was glad as a bride could be;  
For night had faded away;  
And the glorious light of the sun  
Had filled all her being with joy  
And made her and the Sun-king one.

-----  
I.

O land of sunshine and shadows,  
Fair land of the glowing East,  
Where many a hope lies buried  
In graves we expect the least;  
And yet with what power hath thy magic enthralled,  
For we long to return when the East hath called.

{16}

II.

What witchery lies in thy moonlight,  
With its shadows cut clear and fine,  
By the moon which is hung in the heavens  
Like a silver lamp in a shrine;  
By the stars which shine out in their radiance with a  
lustre, undimmed and bright,  
The day hath its wealth of beauty, but what can excel the night!

III.

Is there aught can exceed the splendor  
Of the lake in the moonlight clear,  
When mirrored therein are the stately palms  
And the pagoda's fantastic tier.  
No sound breaks the exquisite silence but the call of  
the white-faced owl,  
Or the cry of the distant jackal as he goes on his nightly prowl.

IV.

There flits past a shadowy form,  
But no sound is heard on the midnight air;  
'Tis a recluse going to pay his vows in the white-domed temple near,

{17} And when the first blush of dawn doth color the Eastern sky  
The watchman calleth the faithful to prayer,  
With his solemn mysterious cry.

V.

And now hath the night departed,  
With its silence and shadows deep,  
And the weary, toiling worker hath waked from his dreamless sleep,  
For the sun now reigns in the heavens, filling the world with light,  
And with its first beams we say farewell,  
Farewell to the dreams of night.

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I.

"What meaneth this black magic?" the gharri-wallah cried,  
When he saw the horseless car go forth with only a man inside,  
And he sat and planned what rupees he would reap  
When the magic failed or went to sleep.  
Double fare, at least, he thought,  
He'd demand from those whom his services sought;  
But, alas, for his dreams of wealth that day,  
The magical car had come to stay.

{18}

II.

But what of the poor old bhisti's, whose work had been so far  
To water with their musick the track of the horseless car?  
When they saw the huge water-tank go on its way,  
And with showers of water the dust fiend lay;  
"This can never last," they wisely cried,  
As they sat in a line on the car track side;  
"And when it fails it will be our day,  
We'll ask for our musicks quite double pay;  
Instead of a pice our charge shall be,  
An anna at least," and they chuckled with glee;  
But they in their turn were doomed to dismay,  
For the tank had likewise come to stay.

So to the Red Road away they hied,  
And to water it well is now their pride;  
When the sahibs drive there in the cool of the day.  
They see them at work in the old-time way.

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{19}

A little hill-boy was Buncee, a chokra trusty and true;  
In the days when I was new to the East  
He taught me more than he knew;  
"Ghusl munta, sahib," said he; I doubtfully shook my head;  
"Ghusl na munta," in scandalized tones, but I knew not what he said.  
Then he straightened himself against the wall, and went through a pantomime show  
Of bathing. I smiled and nodded assent;  
It was cute of the boy, you know.

He was eager to save all the pice he could, that when the season was o'er,  
And the sahibs all left and went down to the plains  
He would have of rupees a store.  
So I became his banker, and locked them away in my case,  
And told him he now must be doubly sure to take every care of the place.  
I returned one day in the midst of the rains, the inner door was locked,  
And when I tried the outer one, I found that it was blocked;  
So I forced my way into the room, and there the youngster lay,  
Stretched out before the outer door, with never a word to say.

{20}

He had lighted the charcoal-burner to air the chill, damp room,  
Then lain down to guard the treasure, unheeding the deadly fume.  
We carried him out and brought him to, and I tell you I was glad,  
For I'd grown attached to the chokra, the true little Indian lad.

A peon brought me a chit one day;

I said in pretended dismay,  
"I have no money to pay this bill, the man can go away;"  
"But, sahib," said Buncee quickly, "there are my rupees, you know."  
Do you wonder I liked the youngster, or that I valued him so?  
And oft in the gloaming I sit and think, and memory backward flies;  
For many there be with hearts as true in that land under Eastern skies.

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## GLOSSARY

No. 1. New Zealand, Tasmania, Australia, Ceylon, India.

Page 1. British Isles.

Page 7. Khansamah—Head table man.  
Charpoi—Native-made bedstead.  
Murgghi—A chicken.  
Dechie—Cooking-pot.  
Dak-bungalow—Post-house.

Page 8. Burra Sahib—Head of a firm.  
Compound—Grounds attached to a house or building.  
Peg—A whiskey and soda.

Page 14. Gharri Wallah—Cab driver.  
Bhisti—Water-carrier.  
Musick—Goatskin of water.  
Pice—Equal to a farthing.  
Anna—Equal to a penny.

Page 16. Chokra—Boy.  
Ghusl munta—Bath want.  
Ghusl na munta—Bath not want.  
Peon—Messenger.  
Chit—Anything contained in an envelope, usually meaning a letter.

[Transcriber's note: the above page numbers appear to be incorrect, e.g., the book's first numbered page is 5. Best guess as to correct numbers, based on the actual page on which the above words appear: 1, 5 (printed number, actual number); 7, 11; 8, 12; 14, 18; 16, 19.]

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