

1888

KIDNAPPED

Rudyard Kipling

Kipling, Rudyard (1865-1936) - An English novelist, short-story writer, and poet who spent most of his youth in India, and is best known for his children's classics. In 1907, Kipling was the first English writer ever to be awarded the Nobel Prize in literature. Kidnapped (1888) - From "Plain Tales from the Hills," a collection of stories of life in India. A man who wishes to marry a woman whom his friends consider unsuitable is kidnapped until after the wedding date.

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There is a tide in the affairs of men, Which, taken any way you please, is bad, And strands them in forsaken guts and creeks No decent soul would think of visiting.

You cannot stop the tide; but, now and then, You may arrest some rash adventurer Who- h'm- will hardly thank you for your pains.

Vibart's Moralities.

WE are a high-caste and enlightened race, and infant-marriage is very shocking and the consequences are sometimes peculiar; but, nevertheless, the Hindu notion- which is the Continental notion, which is the aboriginal notion- of arranging marriages irrespective of the personal inclinations of the married, is sound. Think for a minute, and you will see that it must be so; unless, of course, you believe in 'affinities.' In which case you had better not read this tale. How can a man who has never married; who cannot be trusted to pick up at sight a moderately sound horse; whose head is hot and upset with visions of domestic felicity, go about the choosing of a wife? He cannot see straight or think straight if he tries; and the same disadvantages exist in the case of a girl's fancies. But when mature, married, and discreet people arrange a match between a boy and a girl, they do it sensibly, with a view to the future, and the young couple live happily ever afterwards. As everybody knows.

Properly speaking, Government should establish a Matrimonial Department, efficiently officered, with a Jury of Matrons, a Judge of the Chief Court, a Senior Chaplain, and an Awful Warning, in the shape of a love-match that has gone wrong, chained to the trees in the courtyard. All marriages should be made through the Department, which might be subordinate to the Educational Department, under the same penalty as that attaching to the transfer of land without a stamped document. But Government won't take suggestions. It pretends that it is too busy. However, I will put my notion on record, and explain the example that illustrates the theory.

Once upon a time, there was a good young man- a first-class officer in his own Department- a man with a career before him and, possibly, a K. C. I. E. at the end of it. All his superiors spoke well of him, because he knew how to hold his tongue and his pen at the proper times. There are, to-day, only eleven men in India who possess this secret; and they have all, with one exception, attained great honour and enormous incomes.

This good young man was quiet and self-contained- too old for his years by far. Which always carries its own punishment. Had a Subaltern or a Tea-Planter's Assistant, or anybody who enjoys life and has no care for to-morrow, done what he tried to do, not a soul would have cared. But when Peythroppe- the estimable, virtuous, economical, quiet, hard-working, young Peythroppe- fell, there was a flutter through five Departments.

The manner of his fall was in this way. He met a Miss Castries- d'Castries it was originally, but the family dropped the d' for administrative reasons- and he fell in love with her even more energetically than he worked. Understand clearly that there was not a breath of a word to be said against Miss Castries- not a shadow of a breath. She was good and very lovely- possessed what innocent people at Home call a 'Spanish' complexion, with thick blue-black hair growing low down on the forehead, into a 'widow's peak,' and big violet eyes under eyebrows as black and as straight as the borders of a "Gazette Extraordinary," when a big man dies. But- but- but- Well, she was a very sweet girl and very pious, but for many reasons she was 'impossible.' Quite so. All good Mammams know what 'impossible' means. It was obviously absurd that Peythroppe should marry her. The little opal-tinted onyx at the base of her finger-nails said this as plainly as print.

Further, marriage with Miss Castries meant marriage with several other Castries- Honorary Lieutenant Castries her Papa, Mrs. Eulalie Castries her Mamma, and all the ramifications of the Castries family, on incomes ranging from Rs. 175 to Rs. 470 a month, and their wives and connections again. It would have been cheaper for Peythroppe to have assaulted a Commissioner with a dog-whip, or to have burned the records of a Deputy-Commissioner's Office, than to have contracted an alliance with the Castries. It would have weighted his after-career less- even under a Government which never forgets and never forgives. Everybody saw this but Peythroppe. He was going to marry Miss Castries, he was- being of age and drawing a good income- and woe betide the house that would not afterwards receive Mrs. Virginie Saulez Peythroppe with the deference due to her husband's rank. That was Peythroppe's ultimatum, and any remonstrance drove him frantic.

These sudden madresses most afflict the sanest men. There was a case once but I will tell you of that later on. You cannot account for the mania except under a theory directly contradicting the one about the Place where marriages are made.

Peythroppe was burningly anxious to put a millstone round his neck at the outset of his career; and argument had not the least

effect on him. He was going to marry Miss Castries, and the business was his own business. He would thank you to keep your advice to yourself. With a man in this condition, mere words only fix him in his purpose. Of course he cannot see that marriage in India does not concern the individual but the Government he serves.

Do you remember Mrs. Hauksbee- the most wonderful woman in India? She saved Pluffles from Mrs. Reiver, won Tarrion his appointment in the Foreign Office, and was defeated in open field by Mrs. Cusack-Bremmil. She heard of the lamentable condition of Peythroppe, and her brain struck out the plan that saved him. She had the wisdom of the Serpent, the logical coherence of the Man, the fearlessness of the Child, and the triple intuition of the Woman. Never- no, neveras long as a tonga buckets down the Solon dip, or the couples go a-riding at the back of Summer Hill, will there be such a genius as Mrs. Hauksbee. She attended the consultation of Three Men on Peythroppe's case; and she stood up with the lash of her riding-whip between her lips and spake.

Three weeks later, Peythroppe dined with the Three Men, and the "Gazette of India" came in. Peythroppe found to his surprise that he had been gazetted a month's leave. Don't ask me how this was managed. I believe firmly that, if Mrs. Hauksbee gave the order, the whole Great Indian Administration would stand on its head. The Three Men had also a month's leave each. Peythroppe put the "Gazette" down and said bad words. Then there came from the compound the soft 'pad-pad' of camels- 'thieves' camels,' the Bikaner breed that don't bubble and howl when they sit down and get up.

After that, I don't know what happened. This much is certain. Peythroppe disappeared- vanished like smoke- and the long foot-rest chair in the house of the Three Men was broken to splinters. Also a bedstead departed from one of the bedrooms.

Mrs. Hauksbee said that Mr. Peythroppe was shooting in Rajputana with the Three Men; so we were compelled to believe her.

At the end of the month, Peythroppe was gazetted twenty days' extension of leave; but there was wrath and lamentation in the house of Castries. The married day had been fixed, but the bridegroom never came: and the D'Silvas, Pereiras, and Ducketts lifted their voices and mocked Honorary Lieutenant Castries as one who had been basely imposed upon. Mrs. Hauksbee went to the wedding, and was much astonished when Peythroppe did not

appear. After seven weeks, Peythroppe and the Three Men returned from Rajputana. Peythroppe was in hard tough condition, rather white, and more self-contained than ever.

One of the Three Men had a cut on his nose, caused by the kick of a gun.

Twelve-bores kick rather curiously.

Then came Honorary Lieutenant Castries, seeking for the blood of his perfidious son-in-law to be. He said things- vulgar and 'impossible' things which showed the raw rough 'ranker' below the 'Honorary,' and I fancy Peythroppe's eyes were opened. Anyhow, he held his peace till the end; when he spoke briefly.

Honorary Lieutenant Castries asked for a 'peg' before he went away to die or bring a suit for breach of promise.

Miss Castries was a very good girl. She said that she would have no breach of promise suits. She said that, if she was not a lady, she was refined enough to know that ladies kept their broken hearts to themselves; and, as she ruled her parents, nothing happened. Later on, she married a most respectable and gentlemanly person. He travelled for an enterprising firm in Calcutta, and was all that a good husband should be.

So Peythroppe came to his right mind again, and did much good work, and was honoured by all who knew him. One of these days he will marry; but he will marry a sweet pink-and-white maiden, on the Government House List, with a little money and some influential connections, as every wise man should. And he will never, all his life, tell her what happened during the seven weeks of his shooting-tour in Rajputana.

But just think how much trouble and expense- for camel-hire is not cheap, and those Bikaner brutes had to be fed like humans- might have been saved by a properly conducted Matrimonial Department, under the control of the DirectorGeneral of Education, but corresponding direct with the Viceroy.

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