

1888

TODS' AMENDMENT

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. Tods' Amendment (1888) - From "Plain Tales from the Hills," a collection of stories of life in India. Six-year-old Tods strays into a dinner party where proposed Land Acts are being discussed and asks an eye-opening question.

TOD'S AMENDMENT

The World hath set its heavy yoke Upon the old white-bearded folk Who strive to please the King.

God's mercy is upon the young, God's wisdom in the baby tongue That fears not anything.

The Parable of Chajju Bhagat.

NOW Tods' Mamma was a singularly charming woman, and every one in Simla knew Tods. Most men had saved him from death on occasions. He was beyond his * control altogether, and perilled his life daily to find out what would happen if you pulled a Mountain Battery mule's tail. He was an utterly fearless young Pagan, about six years old, and the only baby who ever broke the holy calm of the Supreme Legislative Council.

Thus it happened: Tods' pet kid got loose, and fled up the hill, off the Boileaugunge Road, Tods after it, until it burst into the Viceregal Lodge lawn, then attached to 'Peterhoff.' The Council were sitting at the time, and the windows were open because it was warm. The Red Lancer in the porch told Tods to go away; but Tods knew the Red Lancer and most of the Members of the Council personally. Moreover, he had firm hold of the kid's collar, and was being dragged all across the flower-beds. 'Give my to the long Councillor , and ask him to help me take back!' gasped Tods. The Council heard the noise through the open windows; and, after an interval, was seen the shocking spectacle of a Legal Member and a Lieutenant-Governor helping, under the direct patronage of a Commander-in-Chief and a Viceroy, one small and very dirty boy in a sailor's suit and a tangle of brown hair, to coerce a lively and rebellious kid. They headed it off down the path to the Mall, and Tods went home in triumph and told his Mamma that the Councillor had been helping him to catch . Whereat his Mamma smacked Tods for interfering with the administration of the Empire; but Tods met the Legal Member the next day, and told him in confidence that if the Legal Member ever wanted to catch a goat, he, Tods, would give him all the help in his power. 'Thank you, Tods,' said the Legal Member.

Tods was the idol of some eighty , and half as many . He saluted them all as 'O Brother.' It never entered his head that any living human being could disobey his orders; and he was the buffer between the servants and his Mamma's wrath.

The working of that household turned on Tods, who was adored by every one from the to the dog-boy. Even Futteh Khan, the

villainous loafer from Mussoorie, shirked risking Tods' displeasure for fear his co-mates should look down on him.

So Tods had honour in the land from Boileaugunge to Chota Simla, and ruled justly according to his lights. Of course, he spoke Urdu, but he had also mastered many queer-side speeches like the of the women, and held grave converse with shopkeepers and Hill-coolies alike. He was precocious for his age, and his mixing with natives had taught him some of the more bitter truths of life: the meanness and the sordidness of it. He used, over his bread and milk, to deliver solemn and serious aphorisms, translated from the vernacular into the English, that made his Mamma jump and vow that Tods go Home next hot weather.

Just when Tods was in the bloom of his power, the Supreme Legislature were hacking out a Bill for the Sub-Montane Tracts, a revision of the then Act, smaller than the Punjab Land Bill but affecting a few hundred thousand people none the less. The Legal Member had built, and bolstered, and embroidered, and amended that Bill, till it looked beautiful on paper. Then the Council began to settle what they called the 'minor details.' As if any Englishman legislating for natives knows enough to know which are the minor and which are the major points, from the native point of view, of any measure! That Bill was a triumph of 'safe-guarding the interests of the tenant.' One clause provided that land should not be leased on longer terms than five years at a stretch; because, if the landlord had a tenant bound down for, say, twenty years, he would squeeze the very life out of him.

The notion was to keep up a stream of independent cultivators in the Sub-Montane Tracts; and ethnologically and politically the notion was correct. The only drawback was that it was altogether wrong. A native's life in India implies the life of his son. Wherefore, you cannot legislate for one generation at a time. You must consider the next from the native point of view. Curiously enough, the native now and then, and in Northern India more particularly, hates being over-protected against himself. There was a Naga village once, where they lived on dead buried Commissariat mules... But that is another story.

For many reasons, to be explained later, the people concerned objected to the Bill. The Native Member in Council knew as much about Punjabis as he knew about Charing Cross. He had said in Calcutta that 'the Bill was entirely in accord with the desires of that large and important class, the cultivators'; and so on, and so on. The Legal Member's knowledge of natives was limited to English-speaking Durbaris, and his own red , the Sub-Montane Tracts

concerned no one in particular, the Deputy Commissioners were a good deal too driven to make representations, and the measure was one which dealt with small landholders only. Nevertheless, the Legal Member prayed that it might be correct, for he was a nervously conscientious man. He did not know that no man can tell what natives think unless he mixes with them with the varnish off. And not always then.

But he did the best he knew. And the measure came up to the Supreme Council for the final touches, while Tods patrolled the Burra Simla Bazar in his morning rides, and played with the monkey belonging to Ditta Mull, the , and listened, as a child listens, to all the stray talk about this new freak of the .

One day there was a dinner-party, at the house of Tods' Mamma, and the Legal Member came. Tods was in bed, but he kept awake till he heard the bursts of laughter from the men over the coffee. Then he paddled out in his little red flannel dressing-gown and his night-suit and took refuge by the side of his father, knowing that he would not be sent back. 'See the miseries of having a family!'

said Tods' father, giving Tods three prunes, some water in a glass that had been used for claret, and telling him to sit still. Tods sucked the prunes slowly, knowing that he would have to go when they were finished, and sipped the pink water like a man of the world, as he listened to the conversation. Presently, the Legal Member, talking 'shop' to the Head of a Department, mentioned his Bill by its full name- 'The Sub-Montane Tracts Revised Enactment.' Tods caught the one native word and lifting up his small voice said 'Oh, I know about that! Has it been yet, Councillor' 'How much?' said the Legal Member.

'- mended.- Put , you know- made nice to please Ditta Mull!' The Legal Member left his place and moved up next to Tods.

'What do you know about , little man?' he said.

'I'm not a little man, I'm Tods, and I know about it. Ditta Mull, and Choga Lall, and Amir Nath, and- oh, of my friends tell me about it in the bazars when I talk to them.' 'Oh, they do- do they? What do they say, Tods?' Tods tucked his feet under his red flannel dressing-gown and said-'I must .' The Legal Member waited patiently. Then Tods with infinite compassion 'You don't speak my talk, do you, Councillor' 'No; I am sorry to say I do not,' said the Legal Member.

'Very well,' said Tods, 'I must in English.' He spent a minute putting his ideas in order, and began very slowly, translating in his mind from the vernacular to English, as many Anglo-Indian

children do. You must remember that the Legal Member helped him on by questions when he halted, for Tods was not equal to the sustained flight of oratory that follows. 'Ditta Mull says, "This thing is the talk of a child, and was made up by fools." But don't think you are a fool, Councillor,' said Tods, hastily. 'You caught my goat. This is what Ditta Mull says- "I am not a fool, and why should the Sirkar say I am a child? I can see if the land is good and if the landlord is good. If I am a fool the sin is upon my own head. For five years I take my ground for which I have saved money, and a wife I take too, and a little son is born." Ditta Mull has one daughter now, but he he will have a son, soon. And he says, "At the end of five years, by this new , I must go. If I do not go, I must get fresh seals and stamps on the papers, perhaps in the middle of the harvest, and to go to the lawcourts once is wisdom, but to go twice is ." That is true,' explained Tods, gravely.

'All my friends say so. And Ditta Mull says; "Always fresh and paying money to and and law-courts every five years, or else the landlord makes me go. Why do I want to go? Am I a fool? If I am a fool and do not know, after forty years, good land when I see it, let me die! But if the new says for years, that it is good and wise. My little son is a man, and I am burnt, and he takes the ground or another ground, paying only once for the -stamps on the papers, and his little son is born and at the end of fifteen years is a man too. But what profit is there in five years and fresh papers! Nothing but trouble, . We are not young men who take these lands, but old ones- not farmers, but tradesmen with a little money- and for fifteen years we shall have peace. Nor are we children that the Sirkar should treat us so.'" Here Tods stopped short, for the whole table were listening. The Legal Member said to Tods, 'Is that all?' 'All I can remember,' said Tods. 'But you should see Ditta Mull's big monkey. It's just like a Councillor .' 'Tods! Go to bed,' said his father.

Tods gathered up his dressing-gown tail and departed.

The Legal Member brought his hand down on the table with a crash- 'By Jove!' said the Legal Member, 'I believe the boy is right. The short tenure the weak point.' He left early, thinking over what Tods had said. Now, it was obviously impossible for the Legal Member to play with a monkey, by way of getting understanding; but he did better. He made inquiries, always bearing in mind the fact that the real native- not the hybrid, University-trained mule- is as timid as a colt, and, little by little, he coaxed some of the men whom the measure concerned most intimately to give in their views, which squared very closely with Tods' evidence.

So the Bill was amended in that clause; and the Legal Member was filled with an uneasy suspicion that Native Members represent very little except the Orders they carry on their bosoms. But he put the thought from him as illiberal. He was a most Liberal man.

After a time, the news spread through the bazars that Tods had got the Bill recast in the tenure-clause, and if Tods' Mamma had not interfered, Tods would have made himself sick on the baskets of fruit and pistachio nuts and Cabuli grapes and almonds that crowded the verandah. Till he went Home, Tods ranked some few degrees before the Viceroy in popular estimation. But for the little life of him Tods could not understand why.

In the Legal Member's private-paper-box still lies the rough draft of the SubMontane Tracts Revised Enactment; and, opposite the twenty-second clause pencilled in blue chalk, and signed by the Legal Member, are the words '.'

THE END