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Afridi Fiddle

D. J. Blakley

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FEBRUARY 14, 1899.

A. H. D. PRENDERGAST, Esq.,
IN THE CHAIR.

AFRIDI FIDDLE.

BY D. J. BLAICKLEY.

THIS instrument was captured in the Tirah country, at a place called Bagh, during the recent campaign on the North-Western frontier of India. It came into the hands of Mr. S. Liddell, the Bandmaster of the 2nd Battalion Yorkshire Regiment, and by him was presented to Messrs. Boosey and Co., in June, 1898. It was described by him as an Afridi fiddle, but beyond this I have no clue as to its proper designation or classification, and bring it before you rather with a view to gaining information than because I have any remarks of importance to offer concerning it.

The body of the instrument is hollow, comparatively narrow, and very deep; it is skilfully carved out of a single block of wood, and in place of the wooden "belly" of the violin there is a tightly strained skin; such an arrangement of stretched skin is not uncommon in Eastern stringed instruments. The neck is ornamented with inlaid work of mother-of-pearl, and is fitted with six tuning pegs, with six corresponding notches. The bridge, however, which is straight on the top and not curved, is notched for seven

strings, apparently for three pairs (unisons?) and for a single thick string which remains; of the other six strings which cross the bridge and extend the full length of the finger-board there are only broken pieces. Below these seven strings, which are of gut, ten fine brass wires of different lengths pass through the bridge and are attached to tuning pegs in a row on one side of the neck, in such a way that their upper ends stand clear of the gut strings. The whole arrangement and construction suggest an analogy with the lute.

No bow was received with the instrument.

The only instrument I have seen which can be said to be like the one before you is in the Asiatic Gallery of the British Museum. This instrument is from Lahore, in the North-West Provinces of India, and was presented by Miss North, 1889. The body, however, is not cut from the solid, but is built up in the usual style of violin work, and is fitted with six gut(?) and eight brass strings only. The Museum authorities state that, according to their information, the instrument is played either with the fingers or a bow at the option of the performer.

DR. TREUTLER.—That instrument I know, but not quite in that form. It is not infrequent on the Thibetan frontier right up to Persia; but this is a rather larger and more ornamental form. The instrument that I have seen is very similar to this. The native sits cross-legged and holds it with one arm and plays it with a bow. He occasionally plucks it with his fingers and, when he gets very excited, will throw his foot up and pluck a string with his toe. They are not usually dug out, but built up. Similar instruments are also formed of one piece; in the more degenerate parts of the South of India they use a single cocoanut. The bridges in most of these are horizontal, for your native loves to hear a good volume of sound, and to hear all the strings going together if possible. They have no idea of melody on the instrument; if they want a solo they use a bamboo flute, and sometimes they accompany it with this instrument.