



## 170 THE ORDINARY MAN'S INDIA

things, or even take the law into their own hands and beat the carters with their own whips. This is quite useless as a general rule, and merely increases the police revenue by the proceeds of two fines instead of one.

The only effective procedure for the newcomer is to ally himself with one of the societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals, of which there are twenty-five scattered throughout India, and by annual subscription and personal interest in the doings of the local society back up the endeavours of its officials.

By far the largest of these societies is to be found in Calcutta. The Calcutta Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was founded in the year 1861 by Mr Colesworthy Grant, an Englishman. It has grown enormously since those far-off days, and in 1924 dealt with nearly 40,000 animals. Over 26,000 cases of cruelty were brought before the Calcutta police courts, and in 25,000 of these cases convictions were obtained. These cases dealt with cruelty to animals in Calcutta alone, and all within a brief twelve months.

This is easily a world record, no less in cruelty than in its punishment.

But the efforts of the societies for the prevention and detection of cruelty to animals in India have a very difficult work to perform. They are hampered and obstructed on all hands by the prejudices and religious beliefs of Indians, which are supported by the law of the land. Let me give just one instance which came under my personal observation; it will be sufficient to show the kind of obstructions which all lovers of animals have to fight against in India.

One evening a horse bolted in Calcutta's main thoroughfare, smashing the vehicle which it was drawing, and bolting with the shafts only into a stone wall, breaking a leg and injuring its spine. In England the horse would of course immediately have been destroyed. Not so in India. Police came and looked at the tortured animal,





## THE ORDINARY MAN'S INDIA 171

and took notes as to the damaged wall. Agents of the C.S.P.C.A. arrived and did all that was possible to relieve the animal's sufferings ; they also brought a humane cattle-killer to put the horse out of his misery. But this could not legally be done unless the owner of the animal was present and gave his consent. At length he came, but point-blank refused to give permission for the injured animal's destruction. He was a wealthy Indian merchant, and refused to listen to the veterinary surgeon's plea that the suffering animal should be put out of its misery. It was against his religion to take life, or allow any animal of his to be killed. If it was fatally injured it must die by inches ; and no amount of argument could shake the man's decision.

Meanwhile a great crowd had gathered, and a number of Europeans present were becoming indignant ; so at length the owner agreed to overcome the difficulty by giving the horse to one of them. An Indian lawyer in the crowd drew up a deed of gift on the spot, and had it legally witnessed and signed. The Indian owner then departed, and the European who was now the legal owner of the horse at once gave orders for its destruction. From first to last this tragedy had lasted over five hours ; such abominable cruelty being possible because the religious beliefs of Indians are more important than the cause of humanity, which is popularly, though erroneously, supposed to be the common attribute of all civilized communities. But it is tragic to think that such needless cruelty can take place with impunity beneath the Union Jack.

When Provincial Governments endeavour to obtain the assent of legislative councils to the passing of laws which will admit of the humane destruction of hopelessly injured or diseased animals without the consent of the owners, if such a course is advised by properly qualified veterinary surgeons, the attitude of the average Indian legislator is summed up in a sentence recently uttered by one of them in opposing such a Bill in the





## 172 THE ORDINARY MAN'S INDIA

Bombay Legislative Council. This is a sample of the only sort of argument used against the Bill :

"I lament that sentiment and interest in the hereafter are so lacking in the hearts of the officials, and beg them to consider the souls of the poor creatures who are to be killed."

And the repugnance on the part of Indians to the taking of life applies equally to domestic animals and vermin ; for although it is now universally recognized that rats destroy stored grain, and are carriers of plague, these pests are most difficult to suppress. Indians, if left to themselves, will take no part in killing vermin, and they hate to be forced into a rat-killing campaign. Why, even fleas and lice are immune from destruction—they, too, are presumed to have souls ! You will hardly credit it, but it is a fact nevertheless, that wealthy Marwaris in Calcutta employ men to occupy their beds during the daytime in order to collect stray fleas and bugs on their bodies, so that when night comes the owner of the bed may rest in peace and not be tempted to kill any lively tormentor that might assail him.

It is difficult to reconcile this sentimental tenderness to vermin with the wholesale cruelty which Indians perpetrate on domestic animals used for draught purposes. Thoughtlessness is at the back of most of this conduct, or at any rate it is rare to find cases of deliberate cruelty for cruelty's sake. I refer to that kind of cruelty which occasionally comes before the Courts at home, when individuals are charged with deliberately and wantonly torturing a dumb animal. The Indian does not go out of his way to find an animal and then torture it ; his defect is that he is quite careless about all his possessions. Take motor-cars for instance. As long as his car runs at all no Indian will worry to oil and grease it. He will fill up with petrol and drive off "hell for leather," caring nothing for the condition of the roads and never thinking of inflating his car's tyres adequately. Thus





it is that when finally a car is put out of action and comes into the repair shop it will be found that in every possible sort of way it has gone wrong, and all because of sheer carelessness and inattention to the well-being of the machine.

Animals and machinery are merely means to an end—a purely commercial end—and the Indian takes the short view every time, failing to realize that a little attention periodically will make his possessions last longer and give better service. With his animals he can never be made to realize that a square deal should be given in return for the faithful, patient service rendered by the beasts day after day. Overloading is a constant expedient resorted to by carters, and the man chiefly responsible for this is the contractor who has tendered successfully for the work of transport. His endeavour is to load as much stuff as is possible on a minimum number of carts.

But the firms who give out the contract and own the goods have a moral responsibility which cannot be avoided. In only a very few cases do they take any real interest in the matter, and even then the job of supervising the loading of carts is delegated to a junior clerk, usually an Indian, or maybe an Anglo-Indian. The firm has, let us suppose, paid for the use of fifty carts for a given load, but the wily contractor brings round only thirty-five carts, which he overloads, and charges for the specified fifty. The supervisor winks at the swindle, after a few rupees have changed hands, and the convoy sets forth, the carters being told to proceed with the overladen vehicles as best they can.

Maybe some of them are caught practising cruelty during the trip in an endeavour to get their carts quickly to the journey's end. "Cruelly beating" will most probably be the charge; or the carts are taken to a weigh-bridge and found to be grossly overloaded, when the drivers will be charged with "overloading a pair of bullocks." The carter pleads "Guilty," and a small





## 174 THE ORDINARY MAN'S INDIA

fine is inflicted by the magistrate. This fine will, in many cases, be paid by the contractor, who finds it pays him to do so because he is well in pocket on the deal. So the merry game goes on : it will continue to do so until the actual owner of the goods carried on overloaded carts is held responsible at law for all cases of this kind.

But even in cases where overloading is not forced on the carter he still cannot be kind to the animals in his charge. His sole idea is to get the cart to its destination in the time which suits him best. He cares nothing for sore withers or lameness, but plies his whip and twists the tails of his wretched animals to urge them on.

It is quite useless to try to educate these men, for many of them have not the intelligence of the dumb beasts in their charge. Many, too, are half-starved themselves, to judge by European standards, and the combination of empty head and empty stomach is not conducive to kindness to animals. But some are deliberately callous. Here is an instance which came under my own observation.

It was a very hot day, when the tarred roads were a soft mass of stickiness. There in the road lay a bullock, badly injured and bleeding, surrounded by a group of Bengalis. The animal had dropped from sheer exhaustion, and the carter had left it to lie there, going on his way, with his remaining bullock dragging the double load. Maybe he intended to return later in the day to see what had become of the fallen animal and to take it away if still alive.

In the meanwhile another bullock-cart had come along, and the driver thereof had driven quite unheedingly over the legs of the fallen animal, the iron tyre of the wheel tearing away completely one hoof of the unfortunate beast. The cart passed on its way, its driver taking not the slightest notice of the damage done. There the bullock lay in a pool of blood, and the group of gaping Indians made not the smallest effort to render assistance, or get help from anyone.





## THE ORDINARY MAN'S INDIA 175

I 'phoned a message to the C.S.P.C.A., and within a few minutes their ambulance came along and took the suffering animal to hospital.

Such scenes as this are common in Calcutta and throughout India, but many unfortunately occur where there is no help available so quickly, or indeed at all.

Societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals in India do not receive the same degree of support as similar institutions enjoy in England, where it is no uncommon thing for fortunes to be left them by benevolent persons. Quite recently the bulk of two large fortunes—one of forty thousand pounds and the other of twelve thousand pounds—have been left to the two principal English societies. How different it is in India, where in the whole of the sixty-five years of the Calcutta Society's existence only three legacies have been received. And they were not for thousands—not even hundreds—of pounds. One was for sixty-seven pounds, another for twenty pounds, and the third a paltry two pounds !

Yet in no country in the world could money be so well expended in the prevention of cruelty to animals. If it is needed in England, it is needed a thousandfold in India; and should any of you be making arrangements to leave your money to charitable societies on your decease, you might do much worse than leave a few thousands to the C.S.P.C.A., 276 Bowbazar Street, Calcutta. The president of this Society is an Englishman, a judge of the Calcutta High Court, and you may be sure that your gift will be well and wisely administered.

As matters stand at present the Society has to depend for its income on annual subscriptions, plus the grant of police court fines, inflicted in animal cruelty cases, which is now given the Society by the Bengal Government. How long this system will continue I know not, for the grant is made only from year to year, and is liable to cease at any time without notice. It is hardly likely to go on much longer, for the eyes of Indian politicians are looking





greedily towards any likely appropriations of money which may be diverted from its present purpose into channels which they more especially favour.

At best the present system can be looked upon only as a regrettable necessity, for it leaves the Society open to the taunt of instituting prosecutions for the sake of the fines which will be imposed, if convictions are obtained. If the general public of Calcutta were to subscribe at all largely towards the prevention of cruelty to animals there would be less need to rely on these Government grants in order to keep the Society going ; but, as matters stand, the sum total of the subscriptions received in a year is barely enough to keep the Society going for a couple of months.

The great majority of these subscriptions, as it is, come from Europeans. Indians give very little indeed ; they are not interested in preventing cruelty, but only in prolonging life in any form, no matter how wretched it may be. Thus it is that Indians support what are known in India as *pinjrapoles*—institutions where diseased and wounded animals may be taken to when unable to work.

If ever you should visit one of these places you will find it a veritable chamber of horrors. You will see cows hobbling about on three legs, their fourth being a partially amputated mass of sores and flies, while lying about in all directions will be animals in the last stages of disease dying miserably by inches. No animals are ever destroyed in these *pinjrapoles* ; they are fed and watered and turned into fields, where they linger on in agony, until at length they die even more miserably than they lived. For such horrors Indians will pay, but from a properly regulated society which really relieves pain and distress, and ends lives which are a burden to tortured bodies, they turn away in righteous horror.

Such is the strange mentality of the "spiritual" East. It can neither be understood nor radically altered by the Westerner, for professional holiness allied to filth, cruelty





and cunning is about all that is left of the much-vaunted civilization of the East.

I have told you of some of the cruelty, you probably have heard of the holiness, and if you wish to see some of the filth I would suggest that you pay a visit to the outskirts of Calcutta to see the conditions under which milk is produced. If you are fond of milk I will not insist on it; you will lose your liking for ever.

You will be able to motor most of the way there, but when you get to the milking grounds proper you must walk. You may leave your boots stuck in the mud if it is the wet season, so I advise a trip in the hot weather. As you walk over the rough ground you will meet coolies carrying milk pails, filthy to look at and covered with grass plucked from the wayside, to keep the milk from splashing out.

A series of mud huts of large size are the milking sheds; you will easily spot them unless there is something radically wrong with your sense of smell. The wretched cows are confined in these huts and tethered tightly together in rows. There they remain day and night for months at a time. They never come out at all until they are milked dry and ready for the butcher.

The state of filth these in places may be better imagined than described, and the sanitary conditions which prevail are a disgrace to the municipality which pretends to inspect and control them.

In nearly all these cowsheds the horrible practice of *phooka* goes on. It is a disgusting and illegal practice peculiar to Bengal, which has for its object the forcing of milk from a cow. Often have I been asked to describe what it actually consists of, but the methods adopted are so disgusting that I refrain from going into exact details.

Briefly, however, *phooka* consists in the insertion of a hollow bamboo, or other tube, into the vulva of the cow. Air is blown by this means into the animal, causing





internal distension and extreme irritation, which results in the cow quickly releasing all her milk.

Six months of this practice generally renders the cow dry and barren, when she is disposed of to the butcher, to appear on your table as "roast beef." No wonder most Europeans in India prefer mutton !

How to cope successfully with all the cruelty to animals which goes on in India is a problem that keeps all the preventive societies in the country busy every day in the year, and even so they can hope to touch only a fringe of the trouble. Only public opinion—Indian public opinion—can ever put a stop to it.

And there is something in the atmosphere which precludes the growth of healthy public opinion in the country. The steamy heat forms a veil over the eyes, or people are too busy with their everyday occupations and pleasures to give thought to other matters. You become very selfish in the East, and I fear the present generation is past praying for. It is in the education of the young that the solution of the cruelty question lies.

With the awakening of the national spirit in India better and more facilities for the education of children are sure to be attempted. And if in the new curriculum is included practical teaching of the proper and humane treatment of dumb animals, a lasting improvement may be anticipated throughout the country in the years to come.

It has been proved in England that such early lessons turn the naturally cruel child into a lover of animals. Almost every little boy is cruel to animals before he learns better. I can remember when some of us boys, for our diversion, used to pull the wings off flies and watch the miserable creatures crawl about in agony. I recollect also the swift punishment which followed when we were caught at the inhuman pastime, and the subsequent lecture on cruelty to animals. The mutilated flies were shown to us under a microscope ; their torn, twitching bodies were a revelation to our boyish minds,





## THE ORDINARY MAN'S INDIA 179

with their lack of thought and knowledge. From that day we were alive to the horror of the thing and were cruel no more.

There is not the slightest reason why Indian children should not be educated in this way also. They could be encouraged to keep animals as pets and treat them decently and take a pride in their condition and well-being. In the higher stages of education, when children are past the kindergarten, essays on kindness to animals might be written by the little ones, and prizes offered for the best efforts. Something of the kind is already being done in the English schools in India, which are attended by European children and Anglo-Indians. And the purely Indian schools could follow suit.

More also could be done in India in connexion with shows of cattle and animals generally. Prizes could be offered for the best-conditioned *ghari* horse, the best pair of bullocks, and so on.

Punishment of cruelty is necessary and unavoidable, but punishment alone will never alter the Indian outlook on animals. A changed outlook on the matter is necessary, and only education along right lines can ever bring this about.

Meanwhile India remains the despair of all lovers of animals.

Since writing the above I am glad to find that the Government of Bengal have entrusted the working of the Cruelty to Animals Act of 1920, the operation of which had been held up so long, to the Calcutta Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. More than that, an amending Act has been passed which greatly strengthens the hands of the Society in dealing with the scandal of the water-buffaloes, who have so far been worked throughout the hot weather under intolerable conditions which were a disgrace to civilization.

By the operation of this amending Act it has been made illegal to use buffaloes for draught purposes between the





## 180 THE ORDINARY MAN'S INDIA

hours of noon and 3 p.m. during the hottest and driest months of the year. Thus in April, May and June these poor creatures will be given a three hours' respite during the worst heat of the day. But I wish with all my heart that their use as draught animals had been prohibited in the streets of Calcutta altogether. That may come in time; and I can imagine the fight that must have been put up against the amending Act by representatives of the callous owners of buffaloes before even this concession to humanity was brought into effect.

Another benefit which accrues to the animals of Bengal under the operation of this Act is that now at long last the "permitter"—the fellow who actually reaps the benefit of an animal's suffering—can be prosecuted and punished for his callousness. This is a great thing, for in the past only too often the wretched carter was made the scapegoat of a person in a much more exalted position in life. This man sweated both animal and driver, and battered on the misery of both. Now the heavy penalties which can be inflicted on the individual chiefly responsible will be bound in the long run to act as a deterrent, and maybe there is hope that eventually the grosser forms of cruelty to animals will be eradicated.

In order properly to work the new Act it has been necessary for a new infirmary, for the treatment and detention of horses and cattle, to be erected. This building involved an expenditure of Rs10,000, and this expense had to be borne by the Authority working the Act. It was very largely owing to the expense and difficulties in carrying out its numerous provisions that this Act, passed some years ago, has not, until recently, been put into operation.

Another departure which will be very welcome is the decision of the Government of Bengal to make an annual grant to the C.S.P.C.A. of a sum of Rs120,000. This means that the Society is now assured of a certain minimum income, and will know more or less how its finances stand. Government will no longer have to be





asked, year by year, by the C.S.P.C.A. to allot them the police court fines collected from those convicted of cruelty to animals. These fines will in future be treated in the same way as fines for other breaches of the criminal law. An annual grant by Government to the C.S.P.C.A. removes once and for all the stigma which was bound to be attached to any institution that was allotted the fines for offences which its agents were the means of detecting and successfully prosecuting.

A fixed grant by Government is an acknowledgment of useful work done, whereas the old system was less equitable. No longer can it be suggested that the Society depends for its income on the number of convictions obtained and must press for heavy fines in order to replenish its own coffers with the proceeds.

This grant, however, will cover only the bare expenses incurred in the normal working of the Society. It allows nothing for emergencies, or expansion of activities in other parts of Bengal. Moreover, politics in India are so much in the melting-pot that it is not to be assumed that the annual grant will for ever be available. There is plenty of evidence to show that the Society is hated by many members of the Swaraj Party; and if by some misfortune these people ever really got into power, and had full control of the revenues, there is little doubt that one of the first things they would do would be the cutting off of the grant for the prevention of cruelty to animals.

Thus it is that for several good and sufficient reasons the Society will always be in need of donations and subscriptions from the public. To do its work to the best possible advantage it must be financially strong, as is the Royal Society in England.

I trust this may some day be the case, although I have very little hope of such a desirable state of things in a country where animals are considered, in the bulk, as of no importance.





## CHAPTER XIII

Things that annoy—*Pan*—Beggars—Noxious Insects—Insanitary Streets—The Megaphone Voice—Tom-toms and other “Music”—Moneylenders—Indian Touchiness—Floods

THE telephone has just been ringing. I rarely answer it myself, for my bearer is quite keen on the telephone, and as the message is likely to be in his own language, and an inquiry for someone who is not even known here, I gladly let him patter away to his heart's content. Sometimes I think that in a previous incarnation my young Hindu must have been a telephone operator; if not, he most certainly will strive hard to attain that office when next his spirit is clothed anew in fleshly form.

Perhaps once, or at most twice, a day it is really I who am wanted on the telephone, and then I am usually out; so these inward calls are quite futile as far as my bungalow is concerned, and all my neighbours tell the same story.

People who grumble about the telephone service in England should really come to India for a spell; they will then discover the very worst and go back contented with the service they get at home. It is by no means altogether the fault of the local operators—not by a long way; the principal trouble is that nowadays so many Indians are subscribers, and hopelessly misuse their instruments.

The 'phone is a new toy to the Indian, and he treats it as such. When he wants a bit of fun he rings up a likely number, possibly one which corresponds with the year of his birth, or the nearest he has been able to reckon the number. No Indian is ever sure of his exact age, and the white-haired old fellow, with one leg in the grave and the other entangled in his flowing grey beard, will unblushingly admit to thirty-five if you press him on





the point. Anyway, the Indian gets some number, and probably it proves to be yours—some folks get all the luck. However that may be, our Indian humorist gets the number asked for, and straightway commences to yell "Korn Hai?" at the top of his voice. The wretched subscriber whose ear is thus assailed may be unaware that "Korn Hai?" is intended to convey "Who is there?" Still, that matters not, for, sooner or later, he tumbles to the meaning of the sweet interrogation, and, when he can get a word in edgeways, replies as good-humouredly as the circumstances permit that he is Mr So-and-so. But as the only reply he ever receives is "Korn-Hai?" many times repeated, the unwilling listener finally gets thoroughly fed up and bangs down his receiver. There is a moment's respite—just sufficiently long to enable the man to get down to work or leisure again—when once more the telephone bell rings out in strident notes that brook no delay.

Sure enough it is Mr "Korn Hai" again. This time the now thoroughly angered listener tells him exactly his opinion of Indian subscribers in general and himself in particular. However, there is no satisfaction to be gained from this sort of thing: it is quite impossible to discover even who the tormentor is, so the distracted listener again replaces his receiver and takes refuge in flight; a run in the car and a cold drink at the club are probably indicated.

Yes, telephones are certainly one of the many things which annoy you in the East.

Then there is *pan* chewing. *Pan* is pronounced something like "parn." I think I mentioned elsewhere that it is a toothsome delicacy manufactured from the betel-nut and chewed assiduously by almost every Indian. Its qualities are many, but they consist chiefly in keeping the teeth clean and whole, and in supplying a certain nutriment which sustains the physical system between meals. But it is the spitting of the blood-red juice which annoys Europeans. On the pavements, on the walls of





## 184 THE ORDINARY MAN'S INDIA

public and private buildings, in shops and offices, anywhere and everywhere, you come across the horrid stain. At first sight you take it for blood. As you see it spurt from the mouth of a passer-by you imagine that some ruffian has knocked out all the fellow's teeth. When you learn better, you most likely wish that he had.

Business houses, in order to keep clean their stair-cases and offices, are obliged, in self-protection, to place capacious buckets, half filled with sand, on each landing and in all public rooms, in order to stop the defilement of floors and walls. But unfortunately some of these marksmen could not hit a haystack. However, this is but one of the minor annoyances; there are plenty greater to which you never become even partially reconciled.

There are, for instance, beggars, especially the leprous ones, who are allowed in the streets and, worst of all, in the market-places, where eatables are exposed for sale. The police constables will not touch them, and these poor wretches lie or crawl about all day begging alms. There are a number of leper colonies, but apparently sufferers cannot be forced into becoming occupants.

Then there are other beggars, those whose parents have deliberately mutilated them in childhood in order that later on these poor creatures may be hawked round as objects of pity and a toll taken of every passer-by. Whole families are kept the year round by money extracted thus from the generous by these miscreants, who batten on the misery wilfully inflicted on their own offspring. Frequently limbs are cut off or twisted into permanent deformity; string is tied tightly round children's heads to make them swell; little ones are blinded. It is almost too horrible for belief, but these facts cannot be disputed. Of course people are punished if they are caught doing these things; but that is a very difficult matter in a country of 300,000,000, and an Indian will seldom give voluntary information to the police of the misdoings of a fellow-countryman, unless he himself is the aggrieved party.





And in addition to these horrors there are the ordinary beggars such as are to be found in all great cities. They annoy and pester visitors and residents alike. When arrested by the police and brought before an Indian magistrate the latter will almost always merely order the beggar's detention until the rising of the Court, which means that by dusk he is free to return to his old pitch again.

In India there is certainly no sincere attempt to put down begging. Beggars will always be there to annoy you, no matter where you may be.

To the European the bargaining habit of Eastern salesmen is at first most annoying. There is hardly such a thing known as a fixed price in any Indian shop or market; neither does the vendor of goods who haunts your bungalow ever ask the price he intends to take for his wares. He usually asks three times as much as he will take; so if you bid him half he is well up on the deal. But this sort of thing goes against the grain of the average European; he likes to know the worst right away and be done with it. And after a time you are thus persuaded into buying something you neither need nor really desire, just because the vendor has been haggling and offering so long you are sick of the very sight of him. The persistence of these itinerant salesmen is most disconcerting, for if your servants are not well trained they will allow the fellows to push right on to the verandah of your bungalow, sometimes even into the very house itself.

The impression is firmly established in Europe that India swarms with snakes, that they are all poisonous, and are met with daily as a matter of course. Certainly there are three hundred and fifteen known species of snake in the country, but the number seen depends on whether you live in the towns or in the jungle. And only a small percentage of Indian snakes are poisonous, but the general rule is to kill all or any at sight.

In actual practice cockroaches will cause the average European resident much more annoyance than snakes,





## 186 THE ORDINARY MAN'S INDIA

for they will invade your bungalow at all times of the year. Some are large and some small, but all are filthy and unhealthy, as they crawl over garbage and then fly in at your windows and settle on any exposed food they can find. The insanitary condition of even the greatest of Indian cities is very largely responsible for the number of noxious insects and vermin; these revel in the heaps of garbage which are to be found at street corners and before almost every residence in the smaller streets.

Conditions prevail in many towns in India (which, according to the views of the municipality concerned, are only second in importance to London, Paris and other great European cities) which were never tolerated in desert camps in Mesopotamia, let alone in the city of Baghdad. These cities of India have corporations with a highly paid chairman and other permanent officials, yet the streets of the cities they govern are an offence to every decent passer-by, who dodges with difficulty the heaps of decaying vegetable and animal matter which lie around, emitting offensive odours and spreading disease germs.

Neither is anything done to check the abuses which are allowed to be perpetrated by the lower class of Indian, who fouls any and every street at will. The question of adequate lavatory accommodation in these cities is a very pressing one indeed. It is no wonder that outbreaks of smallpox and other epidemics occur periodically in congested areas. The only wonder is that these outbreaks are not more common.

The first year or so you are in the East the heat will not worry you very much, but every succeeding year you will feel it more oppressive as your blood becomes thinner and your powers of resistance weaken. In England you probably never realized you had a liver; you make the unwelcome discovery in India, and those people who make it a rule to sleep in the afternoon discover it soonest. It is when you have reached this stage that you find the antics of some new arrival particularly irritating.

A case in point comes readily to mind. It concerned a





newspaper man who was on night work, and who used to get home about midnight. He shared a small house with a man who had lately arrived from Scotland, and who worked in the daytime. This Scotsman made a point of early rising, and as his way to the bathroom, which the two men shared, lay through the journalist's room, the early riser would persist in being merry and bright at the latter's expense. Pausing in front of the bed he would go through some vigorous physical exercises, at the same time singing merrily and assuring the recumbent journalist that it was good to be alive. No doubt it was, but the tired occupant of the bed thought at the time it was much better to be asleep. The Scotsman thought it no end of a joke, but it did not last long, for the two men parted company at the end of the month.

It is seldom that you wake in the tropics feeling really refreshed. No matter at what time you retire to bed there is always a tendency next morning towards that "morning after the night before" feeling. Not until an hour or so after breakfast does the average Englishman feel really fit and at peace with the world. Lucky are those men who habitually breakfast alone, or if married have wives sufficiently understanding to leave them alone with the morning paper and their favourite breakfast dish, and not look for intelligent conversation at this time of the day. Those people who somehow or other manage to contrive to feel merry and bright in the early morning are usually very dull dogs in the evening. The day's work over, all they are fit for is a meal and bed. The wise folks say that you cannot burn the candle at both ends, so for my part I prefer burning it at the dark end of the day.

Yes, these cheerful early morning people can be very annoying.

Then there is the megaphone voice. Your gentle Indian knows not the meaning of soft speech, save when he is taken to task for some misdemeanour, or asked a simple question which he does not care to answer; then he will





## 188 THE ORDINARY MAN'S INDIA

mutter unintelligible nothings in a whisper. But in the street he will bellow with the lungs of a "movie" director, and utter ear-splitting yells that for sheer power of penetration would make a steamer siren sound like a penny whistle.

Half the street noises of India emanate from dusky human throats, that scream conversation and interrogation across from pavement to pavement, or from house to house. If you venture to penetrate this intensive barrage of fiery rhetoric without taking the precaution of putting cotton-wool in your ears, some wretched fellow will do his best to render you stone-deaf by a "premature," which your unlucky ears have stopped in its flight. At night-time, should your flat or house be adjacent to one of the many little shops, called *busties*, wherein sit the sellers of *pan* and other delicacies, you will lie in bed an unwilling listener to all the Indian gossip of the neighbourhood; for these little shops, built into a niche or tacked on to some large building, like the mouths of their proprietors appear never to close.

I once had a bungalow with a small garden, the wall of which abutted on a main road. My bedroom was only about twenty yards away. Coolies laden with baskets of fruit and vegetables passed the garden-wall throughout the night, on their way to early morning market, and found that it was just the right height on which to rest their heavy burdens for a time, while they indulged in a friendly chat and cleared some of the dust out of their throats. My sleep was as often as not completely destroyed by the hoarse conversation and hawking and spitting that went on at intervals throughout the whole night. If I got out of bed and chased the fellows away more of their kind came a bit later, and the process had to be repeated. The most effective way of clearing the street was to drop an old electric bulb close by the group of chatterers. It went off like a bomb, and the result was indeed electrical.

The bulb horns used by most taxis in Indian cities are





## THE ORDINARY MAN'S INDIA 189

complete destroyers of peace and harmony. The Indian taxi-driver honks his merry way along whether there is traffic on the road or not. He honks to attract a likely fare: he honks at anything, everything, or nothing at all. And when the inevitable accident occurs through his reckless driving he seems to imagine that he will escape scot-free when he tells the police he "sounded horn."

The bulb horn has one equal for irritating monotony—the brain-fever bird. This pestilent fellow sits concealed in a tall tree and emits a honh-honh-honh! for hours and hours at a time. He gets his name from the statement, which I believe is founded on fact, that anyone who cannot get away from this monotonous noise will in time contract brain fever. I can well believe it, for the bird has driven me nearly crazy at times when I have been trying to get on with some work at home. The only way to stop the paralysing noise is to discover the tree in which sits the tormentor, and place your hand sharply on the bark. The bird will then cease to "sing," though how he realizes your presence, and why he should stop because you touch the tree, is a complete mystery.

Music is something which you will not appreciate in the East; and when I say "music" I do not mean the fox-trots you hear in hotels and restaurants, but the Eastern music of the streets. There are, of course, the tom-toms, or Indian drums, played by thumping the fingers smartly against the tightly stretched parchment placed across the ends of a sort of miniature beer-barrel. A crowd of Indians sit round on their "hunkers" in a semicircle and chant to this tom-toming, and maybe there are some reed pipes present, which add to the din. I sometimes wonder whether the exponents of extreme jazz music got their ideas from some such primitive gathering. Of course there is a real school of Eastern music, though personally it leaves me all on edge. I much prefer the imitation stuff which is dished up as the real thing in Eastern plays in London; it may not be true to life, but it sounds human to my philistine ear.





## 190 THE ORDINARY MAN'S INDIA

Now I must say a word about the moneylenders of India, for they annoy a number of people, sometimes maybe not without just cause. They are not often mixed up with Europeans, but exist on the poverty and misfortune of the poor Indian, and are a menace to the whole community, though, like the ready lie, a very present help in trouble. These moneylenders are Kubulis; they are sons of Anak. All of them stand six feet or thereabouts in height, and they carry sticks nearly as high as themselves. They are muscular and quite fearless, many of them strangely handsome in a fierce, wild kind of way, with their curling black locks and piercing dark eyes. These men wear embroidered waistcoats over gay-coloured shirts, and go about coatless, with white, loose, baggy pantaloons caught in at the ankles. On their feet are large clog-shaped leather shoes, with spiky, turned-up toes.

By twos and threes they have drifted down to the Plains from their far-away mountain country and are scattered in all the populous parts of India. In Calcutta alone the Kabulis number several thousands. They find clients in plenty, for the native of India is always wanting money. He has a daughter to get off his hands; money is necessary to procure a husband. He has borrowed from a friend and must repay the loan, otherwise disgrace threatens him and his relations. The only *certain* lender is the Kabuli; so, with the knowledge that all other channels are closed to him, the humble clerk, the small shopkeeper and the operative at the jute mill alike fall easy victims to the great black spider.

A small sum, say Rs30, is required; only too easily is it obtained by the giving of a piece of paper promising to pay Rs50 on demand, and in the meantime interest at the rate of two annas in the rupee every month until the promised Rs50 has been paid and the transaction closed. In many cases this interest runs on for years, for the wretched borrower finds it impossible to raise the necessary Rs50 to wipe off the debt. The first month's





interest is invariably deducted in advance from the principal, only the balance being paid over to the unfortunate borrower.

The first of the following month sees the Kabuli waiting outside the office or mill wherein his victim is employed. With him is another of his tribe, for these men usually hunt in couples, even though no other clients are inside. The debtor is duly buttonholed on emerging from his work, and the instalment due demanded then and there from the small wages which have just been paid over to him for the past month's work in the mill. Woe betide the borrower who defaults, for the big sticks are not carried merely as ornaments ; more than once a wretched defaulter has been beaten to death, and his assailants have escaped scot-free.

The Kabulis live together, and shelter themselves and their wealth behind a strong trade union. They meet each week in some sheltered spot and discuss their clients ; the enemy of one is the enemy of all, and woe betide the defaulter ! If he fails to pay the interest due, a group of Kabulis visit him ; if their threats fail to bring results, Kabulis haunt his place of residence and picket the office or mill at which he works. They make his life a burden in every possible way until he pays the interest due, and by their presence they place the man's job in jeopardy, for employers are not anxious to retain the services of men in the clutches of the Kabulis, who are a menace to commercial morality and a nuisance to the entire community.

Europeans are frequently amused at the susceptibility of Indians to any form of criticism ; they are much too apt to take offence where none is meant. In this respect Bengalis are perhaps the worst of all, for they take themselves so seriously as to attribute the slightest criticism on the part of Europeans to racial hatred. Praise and flattery, however fulsome, are always welcome ; but criticism, however true and well intentioned, cannot be borne, whether it be humorous or not.





## 192 THE ORDINARY MAN'S INDIA

This attitude could be justified only if Indians were really completely above criticism, but surely no people are in such an enviable position as to be pronounced perfect by their fellow-humans. The Indian attitude shows a sad lack of proportion and a very defective sense of humour. It is not disputed that Indians have many good points, but assuredly a sense of humour is not one of them ; and the foolish pretension that they lead the world in thought and culture is proof positive that Indians have no sense of the ridiculous. We Europeans do not take anything too seriously, not even ourselves or our own country, as witness *Punch* and other humorous publications. But in no part of India do you find any such papers ; neither would they stand the ghost of a chance of survival if they were born and sponsored by Indians for Indians.

Englishmen are noted for their good-humoured chaff of one another ; a little healthy leg-pulling is a fine form of exercise. The Bengali simply hates to have his leg pulled, for fear it might come off in the process. Yet these susceptible people, who hate to hear their unpractical political beliefs and slack ways of municipal government criticized, are extremely bitter in speech and action towards one another. In no country are elections conducted in such an atmosphere of personal hatred and acrid controversy as is the case in Bengal and India generally. Yet the mildest form of criticism, levelled quite good-humouredly at Indians by a European, is taken up as a national insult. It is fortunate that Scotsmen are not sensitive in this way ; all an Englishman's best jokes are at the expense of his friends over the Border. Does the Scotsman object ? Rather does he cap the story by another and better one against himself ! And what about the Jews ? They take all the chaff about themselves in excellent humour ! Why then should the Bengalis object to a few jokes at their expense, or cavil at some suggestions which, if laid to heart, might improve their national characteristics ?





## THE ORDINARY MAN'S INDIA 193

This absurd touchiness on the part of Indians in itself invites ridicule, as does the attitude of superiority they like to assume when talking about their country's ancient civilization, which they like to imagine is still virile. All the ordinary man notices is its decrepitude. Ancient it undoubtedly is, but moth-eaten; and about as much use in the cross-currents of everyday life as Noah's Ark would be in the Atlantic.

The Bengali's sense of humour is essentially childish and primitive, when it exists at all. If he can play a successful practical joke on one of his fellows he roars with delight at the other's discomfiture. For the Indian never really grows up; he remains a child all his life. He likes to be petted and stroked, and told what a good little boy he is, how clever and how original; but a word of rebuke or healthy criticism sends him into a tantrum which presently develops into sulks, which endure until some other supposed "insult" goads him into fresh fits of temper.

Truly these people can be very trying, especially just before the rains come.

Mention of the rains reminds me that when at length the period of excessive heat is at an end, and a grateful coolness sweeps over the land, you will once more feel that life is worth living. Prickly-heat will vanish, though maybe not all at once; and if you are in torment, and long to be rid of it, the wise-heads say you should strip and stand naked in this first downpour. I cannot speak from experience, but the experiment might be worth trying, if you have sufficient privacy and courage to venture on this speedy and pleasant cure.

But the rains have certain disadvantages. If your bungalow is not well raised above the ground you will probably be flooded out. I know a man who keeps a boat in his garden for use during heavy rains, for only by this means is he able to get from his front door to the main gate across the compound. It is quite the usual thing for the streets in the large cities to be axle-deep





## 194 THE ORDINARY MAN'S INDIA

in water, and lucky are those owners of motor-cars whose magnetos are set in a position sufficiently high to be above flood-level. If you get stuck in a good flood you must either get out and wade almost waist-high through the water, or sit tight till the flood subsides.

I knew a party of four fellows who were returning home in a car from the theatre through the floods when their engine conked out. They decided to stay in the car, and were discovered next morning fast asleep in their dress-clothes. The water having subsided, and the sun being sufficiently strong to have dried the magneto, they were able to proceed home, and arrived in sufficient time to get changed, have breakfast, and drive down to office none the worse for the little adventure.

It is no unusual sight to see visitors staying at hotels being carried on the shoulders of hefty coolies from their hotel to a waiting *ghari*, for the whole ground floor of these places is often under water during the heavy rains. No drainage system yet devised can cope quickly enough with the floods of water which pour down when the monsoon breaks in good earnest; and frequently whole streets have their surfaces completely broken up. Particularly is this the case where wood-paving is employed, and the wooden blocks are seen floating about like children's toys in a bath. It is at these times that the despised horse *ghari* comes into its own, for it can go through flooded streets which are quite impassable to most motor-cars.

The rainy season tests the roofs of bungalows beyond what most of them can bear. You frequently want every pot and pan in the place to catch the rain, which enters at every weak spot. It is a worrying time for landlord and tenant alike.

During the rains you find that matches become damp; the heads fly off and refuse to ignite. A remedy for this trouble is to put your supply of match-boxes in a gas oven—after the gas has been turned off. But you cannot do that with your clothes and boots, which soon become coated with a green mould. The only remedy for this





state of things is to take advantage of every bit of sunshine that comes along—and even in the rains there are few days when some strong sunshine is not available—and put every personal belonging out in the garden. A good bearer does this sort of thing without telling, and if he is up to his job you will find your clothing no worse for the rains. But you will not be able to get rid of a fusty smell which pervades the place as long as the rains last, which is usually a matter of three months; so that little annoyance must be put up with, and be the penance paid by you for frequent grumbles at the hot weather.

The strange thing about the Indian weather, which will never fail to give cause for wonderment to dwellers in temperate zones, is the undoubted fact that the hottest weather is invariably the most healthy for human beings. True, it saps your energy, but it spares your life.

The storms which accompany or immediately precede the rainy season in India are frequently of great ferocity. The hot weather of 1926 was broken by a veritable cyclone which heralded the monsoon's arrival. It followed the hottest day of the year in Calcutta, when the thermometer registered  $104^{\circ}$  in the shade, and proved the most alarming cyclonic gale experienced in Bengal for years. It created great havoc, particularly in the river and at the Kidderpore docks. Amazing scenes were witnessed at these docks, where eight liners, of from 5000 to 8000 tons each, broke from their moorings, and sank seven heavily laden country boats before they could be got under control. Steel hawsers snapped like so much string, and it was only by reason of a sudden cessation of the hurricane that a really serious disaster was narrowly averted. As it was, a crane hurled from the jetty sank the Port Commissioners' launch, and also a country boat, resulting in the death of four men. A large steamship was driven aground, and many small boats were sunk in the river and lost.

On the *maidan* a remarkable spectacle was witnessed. During heavy storms some trees inevitably give way,





## 196 THE ORDINARY MAN'S INDIA

but in the course of this particular storm literally dozens of giant trees, which had successfully weathered the storms of fifty or more years, were torn up by the roots and flung about the *maidan* like toys. Trees along the streets also were uprooted, and fell across the tram-lines, putting a stop to traffic for several hours. Hundreds of telephone wires were torn down, and the main power-station was affected to such an extent that lights and fans did not function for several hours. The force of this cyclonic gale may be estimated by the fact that heavy wagons were blown off the railway lines, and several huge cranes were overthrown.

The monsoon of 1926 took an unusually heavy toll of life and property throughout India and Burma. The rice crop was destroyed, and a succession of other disasters made the year memorable in the history of Indian monsoons. There were many breaches in the railway, and the tea districts were entirely cut off from Bengal. Extensive floods in Orissa seriously damaged the crops, and unprecedented inundation and havoc were suffered in Karachi and the surrounding district. In the Punjab more than one thousand houses were destroyed and practically all the crops were ruined. It was necessary for Government to grant relief, both in food and by loans, to an unprecedented extent, and many thousands of volunteer workers were kept busy in the stricken areas.

Luckily all monsoons are not as bad as this one, but tropical storms are always more or less terrifying to sensitive people and young children. The lightning is terrific; so is the thunder. The whole house seems to rock at each electrical outburst. On the whole it is safer to be indoors than out, though in hot countries there are no coal cellars in which the timorous can seek shelter and a mythical immunity from danger.

These tropical thunderstorms are most terrifying at night, and it is quite impossible for even the soundest of sleepers to remain unconscious of a racket that would wake the dead, and vivid flashes which light up every-





thing in the room as if it were broad daylight. Truly there is a viciousness about these electrical disturbances in the East which make the thunderstorms of temperate zones seem by comparison very mild affairs. So the monsoon may at first terrify the newcomer to the tropics. When it merely annoys him he will have ceased seriously to trouble about thunder, lightning and sudden death. He becomes a fatalist, like most of us do in the East.

The Englishman loves a grouse, whether he lives at home or abroad, and these many little things which annoy you when living in India quickly fade into their proper perspective when you are back in England once again. Then at home or at the club you will be talking of old times over a *peg*, surrounded by some kindred spirits from your part of the world. It is a hundred to one that rain will be falling steadily outside, and you will huddle over the fire getting what warmth you can, knowing full well that there will be no warm sun on the morrow to thaw your damp bones.

Then you will think longingly of India and its glorious sun : you will recall to mind that even during the monsoon there was always strong sun for at least an hour or two each day ; you will have forgotten all the little things which used to annoy you out East and a memory of only the good things will remain.

"Man never is, but always to be blessed." You will find it true of India as elsewhere, and maybe more quickly realize the many advantages life in the East can grant if your leave in England chances to coincide with a really wet summer.

I shiver at the recollection, and though I write in tropical heat yet I am content.





## CHAPTER XIV

The Shoemakers of India—Letters—Indian Credulity—The World's Oldest Woman—Indian Magic—The Rope Trick—Fakirs

INDIA, and the East generally, is not a good place for the shoemaker. For one thing a very large proportion of the population go barefooted from the cradle to the grave; and even those who have adopted footwear are content with one pair of crude and very clumsy shoes, which are worn continuously until they drop to pieces from sheer old age. Strangely enough, it is the uppers which give way before the soles. This is largely to be accounted for by the extreme heat, which quickly takes the nature and suppleness out of leather, and causes hardness and inevitable cracking. And as the last thing which occurs to the average Indian is to take care of anything, his acquaintance with polish and elbow grease is of the very slightest. This neglect, combined with an average temperature of nearly 100° in the shade for many months in the year, plays havoc with upper leather.

The Indian craftsman, or *mochee* as the shoemaker is called, usually combines bootmaking and repairing with harness work. He is a willing enough fellow, but hopelessly slow and clumsy at his work. The shoes he turns out are crude in the extreme, and as a rule he can do little more than make boat-like slippers, which only fit where they chance to touch. His customers are confined principally to the poorer class of his own countrymen; for, truth to tell, the lower-class Indian does not take kindly to the wearing of footwear of any kind. He plays football, and often cricket, in bare feet, and on hard ground can run like a hare and kick with the best,





though on wet ground his lack of footwear tells against him.

As in sport, so in business : the Indian clerk going to office during the rainy season may frequently be seen carrying his shoes in one hand and his umbrella in the other. His bare feet will dry—quicker than would wet shoes ; moreover they need no polishing—not that in any circumstances the shoes would receive much attention, for those seen are usually ingrained with the dust of many hot weathers.

Of boot factories in India there are but few. At Cawnpore there has been one for many years, while in recent times a modern boot factory has been built in Calcutta and equipped with the latest machines, though it is a quite medium class of footwear which is being manufactured.

Most Europeans in India buy their shoes from European shops, which stock many of the best-known British brands ; but a good many residents prefer to have their footwear made for them by Chinamen, who are very clever at this work. John Chinaman is a good business man, thrifty, and a great worker, and thus has attracted most of the bespoke work which is to be obtained. He makes it easy and attractive for you to patronize him ; he gives excellent value for money, and what he promises to do he fulfils to the letter.

He usually calls at your flat or bungalow in the early evening, when, after a weary day at the office, you have returned home altogether parched, and more or less irritable. But John knows better than to thrust his presence on you ; he waits while you have your cold plunge. He is still invisible and unannounced while you quench your thirst from a long tumbler of the most icy-cold whisky-and-soda a well-trained bearer can produce. Then, as the bearer brings in your second drink he discreetly informs you that John is without and seeks the honour of an interview. By this time you are feeling quite at peace with the world, and





## 200 THE ORDINARY MAN'S INDIA

the promised distraction is welcome, for this is the "off" hour before dinner.

John is ushered in, bringing with him a fine assortment of samples in box and willow calf, patent leather and glacé kid, all of excellent quality. The shoes are well finished, and although the soles are of sufficient thickness, the shoes are light to handle. Having admired his wares, you bargain and bandy words with the shoemaker. John is a humorist and likes a joke, even at his own expense, so, having agreed on a price, which is really astonishingly cheap, he will measure your feet, and promise delivery of the shoes on a given day. He keeps his word too; and you have no reason to regret, either then or thereafter, your dealings with him. John is very accommodating also in the matter of payment, and will not worry you for a month, or even two—an accommodation much appreciated in the East.

So good are these shoes made by the Chinaman that I know several retired officials from India who invariably have their footwear sent home to them in England regularly from the particular Chinese shoemaker who has made their shoes for many years. But as far as making for the masses goes, no one is ever likely to make a fortune out of shoemaking in India. Shoes are worn more for ornament than use, and on every possible occasion are discarded by their Indian owners, who will never buy a new pair as long as the old ones contrive to hold together, and are sufficiently strong to be carried as a sign of respectability.

Neither do Europeans wear out much shoe-leather. I can remember but two occasions when I sent shoes to be soled and heeled. Once was in Mesopotamia during the war, when a regimental shoemaker did a job for me very thoroughly; and once afterwards in Calcutta, when a Chinaman did the same sort of job equally well. True, rubber tips were needed occasionally for the heels, but the soles simply refused to wear out.

This economy is largely accounted for by the fact that,





## THE ORDINARY MAN'S INDIA 201

save when playing games or when dancing, the average European rarely uses his feet at all; the seats of his trousers wear out more quickly than do the soles of his shoes. I think the race-course, or at all events that part round the betting ring which is covered with gravel, takes more wear from the shoes of the average European than does any other ground in Calcutta. But then racing also accounts for very many worn-out pockets.

I have mentioned elsewhere that Indian servants of all kinds are obsessed with the belief that their European masters are in a position to find jobs for all the friends and relatives of their staff. And not only your servants, but men of whom you have never even heard bombard your house and office daily with petitions and letters praying for work and preferment for themselves and their relations. These letters are couched in flattering language and with a desire to please; you find yourself addressed in strange terms and given titles which you neither deserve nor desire. Here is one, reproduced word for word, which will serve as a sample of many that I have received from time to time.

To,

HIS EXCELLENCY THE RIGHT HONBLE SIR BROWN

May it please your Excellency.

I the under mentioned poor clerk beg most respectfully to approach your Excellency with the earnest request that your Excellency will be pleased to consider my case with favourably, I have none in this world to recommend anybody your Excellency's name with the epithet "Saviour of India."

During the term of the most responsible works entrusted to your Excellency's care, your Excellency has done many things that will develop themselves at no distant date, and improve the material prosperity of the country. Under the circumstances if you kindly grant me any job under your kind consideration it will give your Excellency pure and genuine gratification at home,





## 202 THE ORDINARY MAN'S INDIA

whether your Excellency be in the midst of domestic circle or political arena.

Regarding my qualifications I have served many offices in Calcutta, Ledger, Type, Record, Goods despatcher. I have got certificates for the same.

As in duty bound, I shall ever pray etc.,

I have the honour to be,

My Lord,

Your most obedient servant

---

The name and address were of some man of whom I had never even heard, and no copies of testimonials were sent. Indians rarely study essentials, but hope by flattery and persistence to obtain their desires. This letter was sent by a presumably educated man; the handwriting was almost perfect copperplate in style. But what use would a man of this kind have been in my office ?

Another letter, but of a quite different kind, shows that gratitude for favours received is rather spoiled by flattery and the anticipation of further benefits. It came to me when I was on service in Mesopot, and was sent by the father of one of my men who had lately recovered from a spell of fever. I reproduce it exactly as received, though it credits me with a higher rank than I actually held at the time ; incidentally, the envelope was unstamped, and I had to pay double postage in consequence.

COLONEL A. C. BROWN.  
KIRKUK.  
FIELD POST OFFICE 401.  
MESOPOTAMIA.

LAHORE.  
11-8-19

REVERED SIR,

I beg to express my heart-felt gratitude for the noble and sympathetic treatment that you have accorded to my son and your most obedient servant Sayad Rijaz Ali Shah in his recent illness.

Human race can reasonably be proud of men of your moral fibre. I cannot adequately express appreciation of





your sincere and self-less attitude towards my son. Had it not been for your kindness, he would have greatly suffered in a strange and distant country. By these instances of magnanimity and kindness you not only oblige me to your person, but impress me a great deal with the nobility of your national character. I place every confidence in you, and my trust in your disinterestedness is unbounded.

From the various letters I have received from Rijaz Ali Shah I have come to conclude that the climate of Mesopotamia has been uncongenial to him and that his health is deranged. If you think it advantageous for his health to return home I hope that you will allow him to come back. Being an old man I do not wish to suffer any shock an account of Rijaz Ali Shah, who is my only son. The matter is however left to your noble consideration, for you who have been so good to him in the past take as much interest in his well-being as I do.

You have been a guardian angel to a helpless person in a strange country. May God Almighty reward you for this beneficent behaviour.

Cherishing respectful feelings for your exemplary conduct and praying for your good health,

I beg to remain,

Sir,

Your most obedient Servant,

---

(Pensioner Post Master).

I am sorry to have to add that I was unable to accede to this request, for I was short of men at the time, and our little job at Kirkuk was not complete by a long way. But I trust that in the fullness of time Rijaz Ali Shah was restored to his old father safe and sound. He was a good fellow, evidently a chip off a good old block.

The credulity of many Indians is almost past belief. Even legal luminaries high up in their profession are not





## 204 THE ORDINARY MAN'S INDIA

exempt. Can you imagine a murderer in England setting up a plea that he imagined the man he killed was a ghost, and, moreover, getting away with the yarn? Yet this plea was put forward successfully in a trial before the Lahore High Court.

Great interest was aroused throughout India by the result of this trial. The facts were not disputed, and the truly remarkable judgment of the Court concluded with these words :

"The decision of the Court is that the slayer acted in good faith, believing that the object of his attack was not a human being but a ghost ; that the object of homicide can be a living being only : therefore the accused is entitled to acquittal."

A different form of credulity is instanced by the following account of an occurrence in a small village in the Noakali district of Bengal. It was thus communicated to the Calcutta newspaper, *Bengalee*, by a local correspondent :

"Authentic report has been received here about a strange freak of nature occurring in village Karathil in this district. On Friday the 16th inst. a young woman aged about eighteen was delivered of a creature exactly similar in appearance to a tiger cub, measuring  $1\frac{1}{2}$  feet in length, and with four legs, tail, scanty furs on the shoulder, prominent eyes, etc. The creature, which was alive at birth, was, it is said, thrown out of the lying-in room by the midwife in fear, when it died, and had one of its ears eaten by a dog or cat.

"A doctor of Sahapur village has preserved it in spirit, and people are flocking here daily to have a look at it. Some gentlemen from the town, having had occasion to go to the locality on business, also saw it, and the news having been confirmed by them is being sent to the Press for publication. Arrangements are being made for its removal to town. The young woman, since she came to know of the strange creature to which she gave birth, has been getting violent fits, and is lying in a precarious condition."





An Indian's age is always more likely to be underestimated than overestimated. As census figures are official, and therefore entitled to respect, I have no hesitation in giving the official history of a woman whose age is surely unique.

Quite recently I read of the world's oldest man dying somewhere in Turkey at the ripe old age of 140, but North India held the record for the world's oldest woman in 1921, and if she is still alive it will indeed be amazing, for she must now be the world's oldest inhabitant.

During the census operations of 1921 in Sikkim it was officially recorded thus :

"A Hindu woman named Ruka, caste Brahmin, village Simik, charge No. 1 Block No. 15, is aged 140. She is the original inhabitant of Khaptuwa, a village in Nepal. She was in her youth quite fair, but now, owing to advanced age, is much darker. Her eyesight is defective, she being able to see only large objects, and she hears with difficulty, but keeps fair health, and can eat and digest ordinary food.

"All her teeth have fallen out, except one in the upper jaw and one in the lower. She had fresh teeth at the age of 120, but they fell out after three or four years. She is now getting fresh teeth for the third time. The two remaining teeth are originals.

"She is able to attend to light housework and can still walk short distances. She first married at the age of 16 and bore her first husband, who has now been dead 40 years, five sons and four daughters. Two sons and two daughters still survive, but all are feeble and decrepit. Due to old age the two sons are unable to work and their old mother Ruka maintains them by begging."

It is difficult to doubt the truth of all this, for time and again when I have asked a grey-haired old Indian his age he has mentioned something between twenty and thirty ; but I have never known a youngster pose as a middle-





## 206 THE ORDINARY MAN'S INDIA

aged man, nor a man of fifty or thereabouts lay claim to being a centenarian.

There is very little in the way of magic or illusions on the part of Indian conjurers worthy of mention. India has no Maskelyne, no Lafayette ; no Horace Goldin and no Leipsig. The cleverest conjurer I have seen in the East was a major in the Indian Army, who did some really astonishing things with cards after dinner one night in the Mess. I believe that once when he was home on leave, finding himself more than usually hard up, he took a professional engagement at a prominent London music-hall and did extraordinarily well. He got a wiggling from the War Office for his temerity, but a nice fat cheque proved ample compensation.

As far as Indian conjurers' exhibitions go, I must confess to disappointment. True, these men have few "props," and even fewer clothes, but their assistant is never very far away ; and most of the tricks performed are very amateurish, while the more ambitious are certainly produced in much better style in England. A really good English illusionist would make these Indian magicians jump out of their skins from sheer fright. The mango trick has been performed on the English stage, and so have most of the Indian tricks which are worthy of reproduction. But I never heard of any Indian conjurer who was sufficiently expert, or entertaining, to justify an appearance before a London audience.

In this connexion you naturally think of the famous Indian rope trick. That, you will say, has never been performed by any European illusionist. Possibly not. But on the other hand the rope trick has never been performed in Europe by any Indian. Large sums of money have been offered in India to anyone who would come forward and agree to voyage to England and give performances of this trick ; but the thing has yet to be done.

True, at the time of the British Empire Exhibition at





Wembley an Indian conjurer was brought over to perform at the Indian Pavilion there. Whether his pretensions to perform the rope trick were tried out before he embarked I cannot say, but I feel pretty confident they were not put to the test. The fellow would bluff in true Oriental style and get away with it under some pretext of caste, custom or ca' canny. The plain facts are that when the man arrived in London and gave a trial performance before the officials of the Exhibition he failed to impress; indeed he could not manage the trick at all, and the idea of showing visitors to the Indian Pavilion a sample of real Eastern magic had to be abandoned. I never heard what became of the fellow, but no doubt he was sent back to India at the expense of the Exhibition authorities, and had the laugh on his side.

Famous English illusionists have travelled to India for the express object of finding some man who could do this rope trick. They have offered every possible inducement, have advertised widely and searched in the most exhaustive manner possible to locate this wonder-worker of the East, but all to no avail. Why, even the Prince of Wales himself was not sufficiently attractive to induce a performer of the rope trick to come forward and show his prowess! During the Indian tour of His Royal Highness the whole country was combed in an attempt to find a man who would thus uphold the honour of Eastern conjurers, but all in vain.

What, then, is this rope trick? Trick it undoubtedly is, and a few Europeans have testified to having seen it for themselves, though for every one who says he has seen it there are a score who aver that a friend of a friend of an acquaintance of theirs knows somebody else who was a relative of a man who actually witnessed the performance of the rope trick. It is rather like the war yarn of the Russians who travelled the length of Great Britain: nobody actually saw them, but lots of people had friends, far removed to the umpteenth degree, who saw the men and knew they were Russians, for they spoke to them in





## 208 THE ORDINARY MAN'S INDIA

Russian, and watched the fellows stamp snow off their boots on some wayside station platform !

So it is with the rope trick ; it is more talked about than seen. But nevertheless there is a certain amount of truth in the story of this Eastern magic. Let me give you the evidence of three Europeans, all of whom have actually seen the trick with their own eyes. One of these people I know myself, the other two have published their experiences of the performance.

Lady Waghorn wrote a short article in *The Daily Mail* a year or two ago, in which she bore testimony to the genuineness of the rope trick. In the course of this article Lady Waghorn wrote :

"But I for one have no such doubts. Though what I saw happened long ago, the scene is as clear now as the day I saw it.

"In 1892 I was living in an isolated place in the Madras Presidency in India, when one day the servant came to ask if I would like to see a native conjurer who was walking on his way to Calcutta.

"After doing, uncommonly well, certain tricks which I had seen before, he concluded with the rope trick.

"Watching from the plinth of the bungalow, about 3 feet above the garden and about 15 feet from the magician, I saw a fairly stout rope thrown up about 11 or 12 feet into the air. It became rigid, and a boy of about twelve climbed up and vanished at the top. A few minutes later he reappeared in the branches of a mango-tree in the garden 100 yards away.

"Besides the servants belonging to the compound only one other person was with me at the time, but we both saw exactly the same thing. What, I wonder, is the explanation."

The second testimony was given to me by Mr Bodalin, a Dutchman living in Calcutta. I recollect sitting with him in Peliti's one evening and discussing the matter till we both forgot our dinner-time was past. He is an eminently sound and practical man, neither is he given to





romancing, nor does he fail to take plenty of soda with his whisky. He was telling me of the first week he spent in Calcutta. It was a good many years ago, and he was new to the East as well as to India.

Walking down Chowringhi one hot summer's afternoon his attention was arrested by a small crowd of Indians collected on the *maidan* opposite. He was curious, so crossed the road and joined the throng. There was, as far as he can recollect, no other European present. In the centre of the crowd a space had been cleared, and a half-naked Indian was showing his audience a basket, a boy, and a piece of rope coiled inside the basket. Mr Bodalin's experience was very similar to that described by Lady Waghorn, save only that after the boy had apparently ascended the rigid rope the conjurer himself ran up the rope and shouted to the boy to come down. There was no reply, so the conjurer in a rage whipped out a knife and slashed it wildly above his head. When he slid down the rope the knife in his hand was dripping with what appeared to be blood. The man coolly dug the blade into the ground and cleansed it, while the horrified onlookers shouted that he had murdered the boy. Fortunately, before any reprisals could be attempted, the boy himself appeared, forcing his way to the centre from the outskirts of the crowd; whereupon the amazed audience paid cheerful tribute in silver to the skill of the illusionist, whom a moment before they had been ready to hand over to the police. My friend was frankly confounded by the whole procedure, and, beyond admitting that the sun was in his eyes a bit at the time, could not doubt that what he saw had actually happened.

After he had related his story I gave him the explanation I will now give you. It is not really mine, but the actual testimony of a gentleman who, at the time he saw the rope trick performed, was Commissioner of Police in Calcutta. Colonel Barnard, for such was his name, related his experience many times. I have seen it in





## 210 THE ORDINARY MAN'S INDIA

print on several occasions, but, for the sake of those who have not, I will tell the Colonel's story in my own words. It really solves once and for all the mystery of the rope trick.

The Colonel was invited to attend a private performance of this trick in the backyard of an Indian house in Calcutta. He asked another police officer to accompany him, and managed to take unobserved a small kodak also.

The yard of this house had high walls, which were whitewashed, affording an excellent background, and while the performance was going on the Colonel managed to secure several capital snapshots of the proceedings. He saw the conjurer, the rope and the boy. He saw the rope thrown into the air; he saw it remain vertical and rigid. He saw the boy climb the rope and disappear into the air above. And a few moments later he saw the boy reappear, large as life, and stand again by the side of the conjurer. He was frankly amazed, and said so; but when he developed those negatives he found that the camera had not seen as much as its master. There was the boy and the conjurer, but the rope was on the ground at the very moment when the Colonel had seen it in the air. And the boy also was on the ground—shown clearly on each negative. As the camera cannot lie, its evidence had to be believed; so the only explanation possible is that the whole affair was an optical illusion. In other words, everybody knows what the rope trick is; they see what they expect and want to see, and are self-hypnotized. The glare of the sun does the rest, for your Indian conjurer is careful to place his back to the sun in such cases.

So perhaps after all these years the trick is played out. Whether that is so or not, I cannot tell you where you can see the thing done for yourselves, for I have never seen it, and most probably never shall.

A much more obvious fake, which comes under a rather different category, is that of the snake-charmers. These





## THE ORDINARY MAN'S INDIA 211

men mostly are frauds, and the reptiles they handle are perfectly harmless.

The so-called snake-charmer produces a small reed pipe and plays some weird music, whereupon the snake pokes up the light lid of his wicker basket, rears himself in the air, and shoots out his *tongue* in magnificent fashion. You think these are the rapid strokes of poison fangs. Not a bit of it. The real poison fangs have long ago been extracted by genuine snake-charmers, who live in the jungle, and at considerable risk seek out and render harmless numbers of snakes, which are then sold to the townsmen, who make a fat living, exhibiting their pets to credulous tourists.

When you meet a gaunt, long-haired man clothed in nought save a loin-cloth, and with dried mud plastered on head and body, you see in him a holy man of India. "Fakir" is the popular name for the individual who affects this special brand of piety. Needless to say, it is not the sort of thing which will impress a European, but to the average Indian these fakirs are considered worthy of the greatest respect and veneration. They carry nothing with them save maybe a stick, and their little tin pan, which serves alike as a drinking vessel and a collection box.

It is considered the duty of all Indians to give what they can afford in the way of money or food to all fakirs whom they come across. Many of these religious devotees carry the practice of mortification of the flesh to great lengths. Some will sit outside temples with one arm raised overhead, day after day, month after month, and year after year. At length the arm withers, atrophy sets in, and the limb becomes fast set and useless.

Another way of showing his contempt for comfort, and all the joys to which normal flesh is heir, is for the holy man to make his bed on nails driven point upwards through stout planks. He lies down carefully on this instrument of torture and remains in a recumbent





position for many hours on end. His head is supported by a wooden "pillow," but the rest of his body is in continual contact with the nails. Some people say these nails are not sharp; possibly they are not, but I cannot conceive that they are much the less uncomfortable on that account. This mortification of the flesh is carried on, not in some secret place, but on the pavements of the principal cities; the more public the place the better pleased is the fakir, that his piety may be seen, appreciated and suitably rewarded by all men.

To anyone brought up in a Christian country the whole idea is repugnant, and its method of enactment distinctly pharisaical; but then India is not a Christian country, and Europeans who live there are bound to respect the religious beliefs of the vast majority of the inhabitants. Had the British been an intolerant people it is safe to predict that India would no longer be part of the British Empire.





## CHAPTER XV

Indian Transport—Human, Animal and Mechanical—Road Hogs and a Noah's Ark—Police and the Traffic Problem—Suitable Cars for India—The Closed *versus* the Open Car—Hints to Manufacturers

THE various systems of transport met with in India may be classified roughly as follows: human, animal, railway, tramway, motor and air. I have placed these systems in order of seniority, not necessarily of usefulness.

Human transport is still used to a very great extent; coolies do a great deal of carrying and lifting in all parts of India. They also pull the rickshaws and carry the *dandies* of Darjeeling and other hill stations, where their only serious rivals exist in the form of shanks' pony and those others of the four-footed variety. In some hill stations a few motor-cars are to be seen, but their orbit of usefulness is a small one. A motor-car may climb a mountain peak once in a way to provide material for an advertising stunt, but the feat is too expensive and dangerous to develop into an everyday pastime.

Carrying burdens on the head is still the method of portage most favoured by the Indian coolie. Those fellows who flock round and fall like hungry wolves upon your heaped-up luggage, when you arrive by train or steamer, will always lift suitcases and trunks to their heads and stagger away with the burden. And in the cities, when you buy or hire a piano, or have occasion to move your own from one house to another, the job is done by coolies, who carry the instrument on their heads. These men wear thick pads, on which the piano rests, and it takes about ten men to move one piano. You tremble for the safety of your precious "grand" as the fellows make off with it at a brisk walk,





## 214 THE ORDINARY MAN'S INDIA

jerking their forearms, while their necks are held rigid, though eyes flash left and right as a direct and fearless progress is made through the busy traffic. They invariably reach their destination all right, incredible as this may sound ; and the piano is delivered safely, and placed wherever it is wanted.

This piano-moving is one of the sights which strikes a stranger as being most curious. It is really one of the few times when you will ever see an Indian move quickly at work. I used to wonder from where these piano-carriers were recruited, and finally came to the conclusion that they were a special breed of men, whose origin and village were known only to piano-makers and agents. The art must be handed down from one generation to another, for such proficiency and briskness is unknown in other spheres of Indian life.

Animal transport is very varied. Thus in Karachi you will find camels drawing carts—a really grotesque and unique sight. In other parts of India elephants do their share of transport. In some of the Native States the guns are drawn by elephants, and of course these sagacious creatures are used very greatly by hunters in the jungle. You will see them also in processions ; but do not expect one to be waiting outside your hotel to take you to see the sights of Bombay or Calcutta. In these cities you must go to the Zoological Gardens to see elephants.

Horses are used principally in the towns for drawing private carriages, *gharis* and office *jauns*. They are mostly poor, underfed creatures, and I for one shall not be sorry to see them entirely displaced by the motor-car. Neither the heat nor the surface of the streets of Indian cities is suited to horseflesh in these days of congested and swift traffic. The time when it was a pleasure to sit behind a pair of fast-trotting bays has gone, never to return. And in India, at all events, a sensitive passenger suffers only a little less than the sensitive horse between the shafts when swift-running motor-cars dive at and around him from every conceivable angle, and the animal





is jagged here and there, pulled up, and then lashed on, by the ragged fiend who sits in command of the reins.

The great bulk of Indian transport, from the purely commercial point of view, is undoubtedly the bullock-drawn cart. I have said a great deal about the conditions under which these animals work in the chapter on the treatment of dumb animals, and I shall leave it at that. Bullocks are mentioned now merely because everywhere you go in India there the patient animals are to be found, drawing carts of all sizes and descriptions. You will also find bullocks dragging the curious wooden ploughs which scratch up the soil of the countryside. In a few of the more up-to-date states the mechanical tractor is now being used to draw a multiple-furrow gang-plough, but this is quite exceptional.

The motor-car is winning its way in India at a very rapid rate. There are, of course, taxis in all the towns; and in many places more or less dilapidated motor-buses function between one out-station and another. In the cities these motor-buses (in Calcutta alone there are four hundred operating) are mostly of quite modern construction and are gradually forcing the tramways out of action. If these latter manage to survive it will be merely because of the pressure of traffic at certain times of the day being so great that any and every form of transport must be pressed into use, in order that the multitude of office and other city workers may get home. It is very much the same problem which has for some time confronted London, and in proportion it is no less acute; but there is this difference, that the London trams are fairly speedy and comfortable, whereas those in India are very slow and very uncomfortable. Moreover, they are single-deckers and usually run coupled in pairs. Frequently they jump the rails and block the road: the system of braking is so antiquated that the driver can never pull up quickly, and sometimes cannot stop his car in a hundred yards.

I had personal experience of this sort of thing more





## 216 THE ORDINARY MAN'S INDIA

than once. The worst case was when coming out of police headquarters in Calcutta. In order to turn on to the road and cross to my proper side it was necessary to run at right angles across the tram-lines. The constable on duty stepped out and held up the traffic a moment to allow my car to get across the tram-lines. An approaching tram-car, although some considerable distance off, could not pull up, despite frantic efforts on the part of its driver. As for the moment my car was stuck broadside across the lines, awaiting a chance to turn into the stream of home-going traffic, I was powerless to move; several other cars were behind me, and a thick moving stream in front. So my car had the full benefit of the weight of the on-coming tram. Luckily only the side of my car was smashed. I believe the driver of the tram was prosecuted by the police for ignoring the signal to stop. The insurance company paid for the necessary repairs; but I never heard that the Tramways Company ever paid a penny as compensation. As usual they got away on some technicality, and I had to go without my car for a fortnight.

So you see I do not like trams, neither do other Europeans in India; they are usually patronized by Indians. I see that the Calcutta Tramways Company report a revenue for 1926 which shows a decrease of nearly eighty-seven thousand pounds on the takings of the previous year. A dividend of 5 per cent. has been declared as against one of  $7\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. in 1925. The official reason for the decrease in traffic is stated in the Directors' Report to be due to "communal disturbances and the competition of independent omnibuses." As a means of inducing more people to use the trams the directors have reduced the fares, and in addition have issued season tickets. It all reads rather like conditions at home, does it not?

The fine service of motor-buses which are now operating on the streets of Calcutta have filled a long-felt want. Also they go where no trams went before and where none





can go now, and they go quickly and comfortably. If motor-buses are kept clean and in decent repair there must be a great future for this form of transport all over India.

Indians have taken to motor-cars like ducks to water. It is the ambition of the majority of Indians to own cars and run them gloriously to death as speedily as possible. The taxi has long ago come into its own. You find taxis everywhere; and most of them are in a disgraceful condition, both as regards their mechanism and upholstery. The taximeters too are not at all reliable, and there is more than a suspicion that drivers juggle with these meters for their own benefit. Prosecutions for this offence are fairly frequent, but still the merry game goes on. There is always a good chance of getting away with it.

Speed limits are imposed in most parts of India, following, in the main, British procedure, and the rule of the road is the same. Accidents, however, are of common occurrence. This is partly because of reckless driving, but almost as much because of the extreme stupidity of the lower-class Indians, who stroll about the road without observing any rule, having no sense of direction. They change their mind and turn off without any warning and without looking for on-coming traffic. The driver of a car has to be constantly swerving, or jamming on his brakes, in order to avoid running someone down.

Thousands of pedestrians are killed every year, and many more thousands deserve to be, for Indians who walk imagine that the middle of the road is their special province; the pavements are merely useful for dogs and bullocks, and constitute a handy place on which to deposit the skins of mangoes and bananas.

But when all this is said it must also be recorded that numbers of Indian drivers are reckless in the extreme. Usually it is themselves and their like whom they kill, for motor accidents generally involve two cars. Danger from side streets is often totally ignored; and especially at night-time reckless Indians may be seen, in any of the





## 218 THE ORDINARY MAN'S INDIA

great towns, tearing along, two or three abreast, in their cars, and racing like the chariots of old in some amphitheatre. But these fellows do their racing on the main streets, and take the opportunity to "scorch" when they know that most of the police are off duty, and those who are supposed to be in attendance are probably having a quiet chat at some neighbouring *bustee*.

If the residents of India do not wish to have their motoring hedged round, even more than it is at present, with rigid and maybe inequitable legislation, it behoves them very seriously to discourage in every possible way the growing tendency to recklessness. The European of moderate means who owns a small car is rarely the offender. It is often his most precious possession: if it gets smashed possibly he will never be able to afford another one, and in the most favourable circumstances a smash means several weeks when he will be without a car. This is no joke in a hot country when you are used to riding everywhere in your own car. Hiring is costly, and, moreover, the owner-driver hates to be driven, especially by an Indian taxi-driver; it is much too risky.

It is those high-powered cars, owned generally by wealthy though scantily clad Indians, which constitute the chief danger of Indian towns. These fellows tear about at night, accompanied frequently by women of easy virtue, and goad on their drivers to go faster and faster, in a mad endeavour to prove their greatness to their fair passengers. Such hooligans are a menace to themselves and to every other user of the highway.

The decently behaved motorist finds traffic conditions all against him. Assuredly the man who can drive without mishap in Calcutta during the cold-weather season—round about Christmas—need have no fear of driving anywhere in the world. In no other city that I know of is so much wilful and unnecessary obstruction to be met with in the streets. Where else have you so many people with perfectly good eyes which they refuse to use? In what other country are cattle allowed to wander freely on the





roads, their own sweet will taking preference over that of human beings ? And where else are to be found such a number and variety of antediluvian vehicles moving at such widely varying speeds ? In the streets of Bombay and Calcutta you have the sacred bull ; he resembles the lilies of the field in his activities, but in no wise resembles them in appearance. Then there is the water-buffalo, who treads his heated and weary way, to the everlasting disgrace of all humanely minded people. The cow also is everywhere in evidence, and there she remains until too weak to congest the traffic any longer ; she then goes to the butcher to be made into what is the Indian equivalent of roast beef. The bullock likewise endures—until he, too, passes on to the sausage machine.

Then there is the wretched donkey, weighed down by a huge pile of “ washing.” He staggers under the burden, and often falls before the wheels of your car. I suppose he will continue to cumber the roads, for we must be clean, even if we cannot be merciful. The miserable *ghari* horses, of previous mention, also get in the way when least expected. And in addition there are dogs, cats, and sometimes even monkeys. A veritable Noah's Ark !

To this collection must be added the numerous cyclists who ride recklessly, to their own danger and that of all pedestrians. These fellows are for ever getting in the way of faster traffic, for they simply will not pull aside to allow cars to pass. No wonder they frequently go under.

It will be seen that the motorist must keep ceaselessly on the alert, with one foot on his clutch the whole time and one hand always ready to apply the hand-brake ; for in the emergencies which so often arise in Indian streets the foot-brake alone is rarely sufficient. He must also keep his teeth well filed, for fear of puncturing his heart, which at these critical moments rests all a-flutter in his mouth.

No wonder that insurance companies have raised their motor-rates all round, and will no longer insure taxis in any circumstances whatsoever.





## 220 THE ORDINARY MAN'S INDIA

It will be realized that the traffic police have no easy job to control and regulate city traffic in India. Granted this difficulty, it nevertheless seems to me that the usual system adopted there is wrong, for, instead of trying to get rid quickly of a stream of traffic, the custom is to hold it up for a long time. In narrow streets this almost inevitably leads to a block of the entire street, for drivers get tired of waiting their turn and edge in on the off side, and then hopelessly block the way of on-coming traffic. Cars and *gharis* standing at the sides of the road make confusion worse confounded, and of course the constable on point duty, who is responsible for releasing the growing stream of cars and other vehicles, has little or no idea of what is going on behind him a quarter of a mile away.

These *parawallahs*, as the ordinary constables are called, have no idea of using their discretion, and are singularly lacking in intelligence and common sense. They are recruited from the villages mostly, and are drilled and given a fairly good grounding in discipline of a military nature. They give crashing salutes to their officers, even to their sergeants; but to the ordinary civilian, no matter what his position, they are rarely even polite. Some of the old school are good fellows right enough, but the youngsters are what is known as *jungle-wallahs*, who, until they came into town, had probably never seen a white man before. They have been taught to respect and obey their officers, but the rest of humanity consists of merely white and black material on which they can parade the authority which a police uniform entitles them to exercise. It is not altogether without reason that the police force is cordially hated in India; the jackanapes in office is always detested.

What matters will be like if complete Indianization of the police is ever brought about can readily be imagined. The corruption in the ranks which is now so freely alleged would then be everywhere apparent; snobbery would give place to jobbery, and nobody's life or property





## THE ORDINARY MAN'S INDIA 221

would be worth much unless a fixed monthly tribute was paid to both great and small police officials. The prospect is not an alluring one; and I think the peoples of India already know sufficient of the possibilities of bribery and corruption among themselves to be content with the devil they know rather than open the door wide to admit a devil whom they know not.

When this traffic problem of Indian cities is summed up dispassionately it cannot seriously be disputed that the traffic police on the whole grapple with a very difficult problem in a tolerably efficient manner. After all, they have much to put up with from all users of the road, and standing for long periods in the sun is not conducive to clear thinking or speedy action. Greater efficiency can be secured only by the permanent recruiting of more European personnel into the Indian Police Service. It is true of the police, no less than of the army, that the backbone of the service is the non-commissioned man. At present there are not sufficient white vertebræ to form a complete and really perfect spinal column.

To the average European dweller in an Indian town a motor-car is practically a necessity. Newcomers quickly become disillusioned about the desirability of walking in the heat of the day. This may be all right just round the shops and offices, but to walk long distances in the heat unnecessarily is putting a strain on your health which is foolish, for all your energies are wanted in other directions. You cannot do your work properly if you arrive at the office in an exhausted and moist condition. Moreover, white clothes soon soil; and to appear damp and bedraggled first thing in the morning is not likely to lead to quick promotion. Walking should be done before breakfast, when, clad in shorts and a tennis shirt, you can take all the exercise you will want until the sun begins to weaken.

I have told you about the trams. We will count them out, for usually they will take you only part of the way





## 222 THE ORDINARY MAN'S INDIA

on your journey to the office, and if you can afford to patronize a more expensive form of transport be sure the fact will be registered in your favour in the books of your *burra sahib*, and, what is perhaps even more important, in the books of his wife, the *burra mem*. These *mem-sahibs* frequently have been the cause of the advancement or displacement of young mercantile assistants who are in the service of a great man's firm.

So this journey to the office each day, and the return home, must be by public taxi or private car. For the moment I am ruling out the motor-buses, which are a quite recent innovation. Fellows who live together in a chummery frequently share the expense of a taxi. This answers very well if they all get up at more or less the same time and the chummery remains for a long time harmonious. But sooner or later the chummery breaks up. You are glad to be living alone in the early mornings; man becomes more gregarious towards nightfall.

You decide to purchase a car. Well and good. But what sort of a car? To begin with, it is best to understand from the outset that your car will be used mainly for town work. The roads in the towns are excellent, and if you cannot go very far afield you can travel very well. Once outside the town, however, you usually come across the most pestilential tracks, which are glorified by the names of roads; and as they mostly lead to nowhere in particular, it is not long before you turn back and confine your joy-rides to within a few miles of where you live. India is not like England in many ways; it is totally unlike England as regards motoring. There are no Brightons to run down to, no Folkestones and no Clactons and Mablethorpes to which you can travel by car for the week-end. You can, for all practical purposes, count touring out of your motoring sphere of activities. What you want is a car which will take you to the office and back, will take you to the races, to the Lodge, to the theatre and other functions, and generally





be unto you what a good pair of legs is in the English provincial town, or what the Tube railways are to the Londoner.

Then you must consider weather. It is very hard on a car to be scorched for many months and then drenched for nearly as many more. After experimenting with three varieties of cars I came to the conclusion that the closed car was the most suitable for all weather conditions in India. True, you miss the joy of the open car in the evening; but at night, when dressed for dinner or the theatre, a closed car is to my mind infinitely preferable, while in the heat of the day a splendid breeze is obtainable through the wind-screen and open windows all the time you are moving. It is only when stationary that it becomes a bit warm.

Even the most rabid advocate of the open car will agree that during the Indian monsoon a closed car is ideal. Rain comes on very suddenly, and frequently leaves off just as quickly as it started. With your open car you must fish about under seats to try to find the side-screens. Then they must be sorted out and placed in position—frequently a lengthy process, in the course of which both you and your passengers, if you have any, will become more or less soaked by the driving rain. However, you are finally closed in, and drive away. The celluloid of the side-screens is discoloured, and most likely badly scratched in addition, so that it is impossible to see out to right or left. But you manage in some way to turn to right and left and avoid collisions. Then the rain ceases, and somebody remarks on the heat. You must now stop and take the side-screens down. They are wet, but must nevertheless be stowed away somehow. More trouble, more broken and cracked celluloid; probably some bad language.

How about the closed-in car? When the rain starts you wind or pull up the windows, and when it ceases you let them down. The glass is clear, and can be kept clear if rubbed now and then with paraffin, and you can always





leave a window a little way open to secure adequate ventilation. That is all you have to do.

I think we may leave it at that ; but if you wish, try it for yourself and find out, as I did.

Whatever make of car you purchase see that it is adequately shod with large tyres ; if of the ordinary type, see they are oversize. The heat of India plays havoc with rubber, and your tyre bill will prove your greatest expense in motoring. Oversize tyres kept well inflated make for the most economy—especially in India.

Then my advice is to go in for a car which is more or less built on standard lines year after year. Those makers who are for ever changing their types of mudguards, radiators and what not are a source of great annoyance to motorists who have purchased one of their cars. Dealers are only human, and even a motor-dealer's bank account has its limitations. How can he possibly stock all the different sizes of all the various component parts which have gone to make up the many models of motor-cars placed on the market as annual new model for the past six years ? Yet that is what only too often is expected of him. It simply cannot be done, and the consequence is that a 1927 type of mudguard must be fitted somehow on to a 1925 model car. The result is not generally satisfactory, and it is often the same with other parts of the body or chassis. There is no need to labour the point ; any experienced motorist will realize what I am driving at, and those who are not motorists can ask a friend who is. He will tell you quickly enough.

Before I forget it, let me impress on you who will motor in India to fit bumpers, good, flat, and of the double variety, to your car, both back and front. They will save you numbers of dented and broken mudguards ; also I believe now most insurance companies allow a rebate on the premiums payable in all cases of cars where bumpers are fitted.

Wood is apt to shrink and rot in the extremes of heat and wet. That is why I prefer the wheels of a motor-car