

## CHAPTER VII.

COOLIES AND THEIR TROUBLESOME WAYS—HOW THEY ARE PROCURED—THE AGREEMENT (TERMS OF)—PAYMENT STIPULATED AND SERVICE FOR A CERTAIN TERM OF YEARS—THE COOLIE PROTECTOR—COOLIES ON THEIR TRAVELS—INEFFICIENCY OF GOVERNMENT ARRANGEMENTS—COOLIE FESTIVITIES AND ROWS—PAY-DAY—LOVE OF DRINK.

AH me! what a host of past troubles that one little word "coolie" conjures up! The climate is not all that one could desire, the insects are infamous; the coolie is worse than either, and makes the two former feeble by comparison with his own powers of inflicting torture. The secret of success in a planter's life, after starting a good garden, is to have a temper that nothing can ruffle, and to avoid seeking after the somewhat desultory pleasures and follies of civilized life at the nearest station, endeavouring thereby to put on one side garden worries. By keeping these principles in view, and allowing nothing to cause a disturbance of serenity and equanimity, a planter can hope to enter on his varied duties, equal at all points to the coolie; but let him be especially provided with the latter's particular mainstay—a phlegmatic in-

difference to everything and everybody. Lengthy personal acquaintance with their idiosyncrasies is the only means of getting to understand their management, and it is simply ridiculous to hear the remarks made by people in England, as to how they would alter the existing arrangements and change the management of affairs, if they had anything to do with natives. There is no similarity on any one point in the two modes of looking after European and Eastern labour, nor will any amount of theorizing be able to break through the intensely practical manner in which natives have had to be dealt with for the last one hundred and fifty years.

All difficulties notwithstanding, coolies have to be brought to the gardens to work for the planter, and it is concerning the troubles of both master and man that this chapter shall be devoted.

In the first place, when procuring coolies, two courses are open—either to recruit, or obtain them through the Government agents in Calcutta. The first way is only capable of being worked if the garden has been established for a considerable period, when there are men of a certain standing whom the sahib can trust to go away to their own country and return again. Naturally there is great eagerness displayed amongst those who can claim to have been sufficiently long on the garden to be among the selected to go on a recruiting expedition, and at the first intimation to the sirdars that some two or three men will be required for this purpose, all those present

themselves who have established any pretensions to be considered trustworthy; besides many others, who boast of innumerable friends in their own village over whom they possess great influence, which they need but exert to probably persuade at least two or three hundred relatives and acquaintances to accompany them back at the conclusion of their successful campaign. Having selected, with judgment, the recruiters, their expenses are given them for travelling to their own district; meanwhile ordinary pay continues, and in addition they are allowed a bonus of so much (according to an arrangement or a fixed garden tariff) per head on all coolies brought up. They will be away for four or five months, during which space of time they are supposed to use all their powers of eloquence to induce friends to accompany them back to Assam, doubtlessly pointing out the exhilarating effects of cultivating the tea plant, the enormous fortunes to be acquired by industrious coolies, and to what an improved position they can hope to aspire; but forgetting to mention the deadly climate, the miseries of being in a strange country, and other drawbacks. During a season of great drought, which in India means famine and pestilence, recruiters have no difficulty in securing as many labourers as they require; but at other times, when there have been good seasons and an abundance of rice has been harvested, nothing will beguile the Bengali from his native land, and recruiters must put forth their most strenuous exertions, telling stories that cannot be quite veracious, before

they can induce even the discontented fellow who wishes to travel and see the world, to try his fortunes in the land of tea. Now and then a recruiter disappears: then it dawns upon the planter that his confidence was misplaced, that he has—vexatious thought—paid a coolie's travelling expenses to go to his own country, from which he had not when he started off the slightest intention of returning. A sad waste of money; but, fortunately for the trusting nature of mankind, this does not occur frequently.

A recruiter who has found his men returns with them to his garden, assumes a higher place, has his pay raised, and bears himself like the successful man that he is, looking forward with certainty to the time when he shall again be paid for five or six months' idleness.

The other mode of obtaining coolies for the garden is through a Government agent in Calcutta. This way of getting together labour is not unfrequently resorted to when there is an immediate requirement to fill up the vacant places of men whose agreements have expired and have gone away, or if opening out a new garden. Government agents procure their men by a regular system of recruiting established throughout the thickly-populated districts (some people unkindly say that the business bears an uncommonly near resemblance to kidnapping), so that the supply hardly ever runs short in a case of emergency. The great drawback to this method of furnishing a garden with labour is the expense; for the cost of this way

of doing business compares very unfavourably with the first mentioned. A general calculation, which is in no way excessive, puts the present price of an individual coolie, duly landed by the Government agents at the nearest point of disembarkation on the river to the scenes of his future labours, at about ninety rupees a head. When, therefore, it is necessary to procure a batch of eighty or one hundred men at a time, the initiatory expense is considerable and unsatisfactory. It is a preposterous price to pay, when the fact is considered that it would give the agents a handsome profit, after landing the coolies at their destination, to charge fifty rupees a man ; but planters continue to be very long-suffering, and slow to combine together to present a front against the many standing abuses.

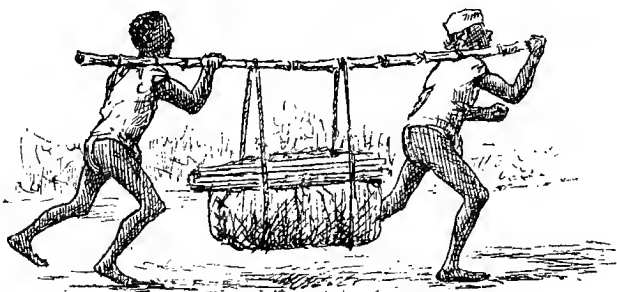
The agreement entered into between coolies and garden proprietors used to provide for three years' service, but now, since I left Assam, extends over five. It was necessary, and in favour of the employer, to make an alteration in the three years' system, on account of the comparative shortness of the term ; for a man at the end of three years, who had become inured to the climate and was well up in all garden work, just at the very time his services were beginning to be valuable and repay the money spent on his bringing up, was, by his agreement, entitled to claim his discharge. He then either went home, or more probably, if he had any desire to accumulate wealth (a rare occurrence amongst coolies), entered into a fresh

agreement with another planter at a higher rate of pay ; for, inasmuch as he was posted up in his work and was acclimatised, he became a valuable property. Great feeling exists amongst the planting fraternity on the question of the admissibility of hiring coolies who have come from a garden that is close at hand. It seems indeed unfair that a man who has been put to no expense in bringing up the labour should be able, by the promise of an additional rupee a month to their pay, to entice away from his neighbour several time-expired coolies. On this account itinerant coolies who proffer their services have their antecedents carefully inquired into, letters (or "chits," as they are styled) are exchanged between the old and would-be proprietor, in order that no misunderstanding may afterwards arise between them, for it is reckoned, and justly so, a most heinous crime to entice away or employ another's labourers without his cognisance and consent to the arrangement. Try to imagine for one instant the result on the community of each planter working entirely in a selfish spirit, and inducing his neighbour's coolies to throw up their present employer at the end of their agreements. Life, under such circumstances, would be unbearable. Every man justly suspicious of his neighbour, the small amenities of existence would cease to be, and each planter's daily occupation would be to scheme how best to keep his own coolies and how to gain over his friend's, if such a term could exist. Now there is a kindly neighbourly feeling, and no planter entertains an idea

of employing men who come to him haphazard, without first finding out the exact reason for quitting their last garden; and frequently, if they have displayed any ill-feeling, their would-be employer will have nothing to do with them, out of respect to their former master.

The agreement sets forth that, while in force, five rupees a month shall be paid to the males, that rice shall be supplied from the garden at three rupees a maund; and there are other minor conditions referring to the amount of labour to be imposed, etc., which at this stage are not of much consequence. The clause concerning the sale of rice has always proved the most difficult one to deal with. No doubt the idea in inserting this stipulation was to protect the coolie in case of famine, or in the event of some other influence causing the price of grain to rise, and in its general purport is a most humane provision. The loss entailed by the cultivator of a large plantation, where hundreds of hands are employed, is enormous whenever the prices happen to go up. In 1879 prices rose on account of the general failure of the crop, and at the end of the season all the gardens had heavy losses to face; one, indeed, had to write off as much as £2,000 to loss on sale of rice. This is, of course, very hard upon the planter, especially at the present time, when the tea market is in such a deplorable condition that even with favourable circumstances it is difficult to make receipts and expenditure balance. An incumbrance like this thrust upon him does much to discourage an industry

by which that same Government that has exacted so much from him, bound him down so tightly, and given so little in return, profits immensely. However, it is one of the questions that is most difficult to meet, a problem whose solution will be thankfully accepted by the planter. Some gardens are situated at such a distance from the rice districts or the river, our highway of traffic, that ghari hire



COOLIES CARRYING RICE.

adds immensely to the value of the grain, and it is especially on the owners of these outlying plantations that the loss falls with additional severity.

Coolies do not trouble the garden for rice when prices rule low, but trot off every Sunday morning to procure their week's stock at the nearest hat (native market); directly prices rise above three rupees a maund, the garden is at once requisitioned, and no matter whether there is any in stock or not, rice has to be forthcoming at the stipulated price. A sudden fluctuation in the market price, if sustained for a time,



has a serious effect on the profits for the year. Few gardens having any accommodation for the storage of grain in large quantities, and when it can be bought cheaply against a coming bad season, it has to be transported speedily from long distances, at an immense outlay.

A functionary (of the duality I am not certain) has been appointed to look after the welfare and inquire into the treatment of the labourer in Assam, who delights in the appellation of 'coolie protector.' Amongst a certain section of the rough and ready fraternity, men who value a coolie on the principle that the immortal Mr. Gradgrind did his "hands," this gentleman's services are very desirable, and without doubt, the improvement in the coolie's condition, from a humanitarian point of view, tends to raise his working capabilities for the benefit of his taskmaster. That a protector is really required now that a different class of men has taken the place of the old planters is another question, but the powers that be, viewing the state of things through maternal spectacles, see in the present race of planters only the successors of planters that have gone before, inheritors of all their faults and vices (for they had a very bad name). Quite enough that we shall be tarred with the same brush. Now, is it not ridiculous to suppose that owners would wilfully maltreat their servants, knowing that everything depends upon their being in a good state of health, coupled with an amount of willingness, sufficient, at any rate,

to complete a Governmentally prescribed day's work?

No; the interest in the health of the garden labourers cannot give way to the private feelings of a manager, much as he would like at times to point an argument with a sound thrashing, yet the knowledge of the loss of a man's labour for the ensuing week acts as a powerful deterrent, and feelings of vindictiveness have to be sacrificed to general interests.

Of the way in which the coolie protector, whom I had the pleasure of meeting, carried out his disagreeable duties, no commendation can be too high. A more courteous, kindly gentleman does not exist, but his official position is a questionable boon both to himself and his fellows. It is pretty certain that his visits, which occur about once every six months, create a bad effect amongst those in whose interests he appears, and a management that may have been very successful in establishing a good feeling between master and men is unhinged for a time by the semblance of a doubt being thrown upon the general happy tone that had hitherto prevailed. When everything is working smoothly—a highly to be desired state of affairs, and not so frequently brought about that an opportunity for strengthening it can be overlooked—it is undesirable, to say the least, to have anyone on the garden questioning the men concerning the treatment that they have received, and stirring up in their naturally suspicious minds grave doubts of their having been as well dealt by as they

deserved. The sanitary condition of their dwellings, the purity of the drinking water, rate of mortality, etc., are surely things that must much more closely concern the owner than any Government official.

On page eleven of Colonel Money's book on Tea\* (a work that I devoured with much eagerness before leaving England), will be found most interesting reading on this same subject, written by a man of larger and more varied experience than the present writer's.

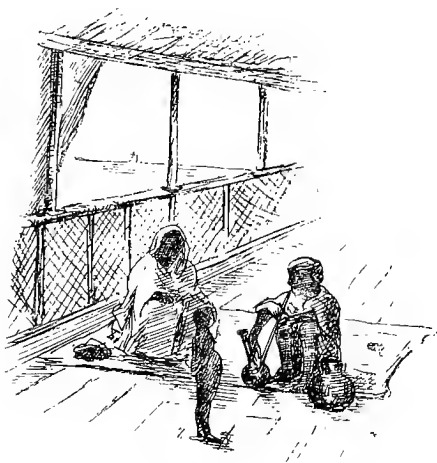
Given the loss of ten or a dozen men in a year through bad drainage, or some other preventable causes, on whom does the cost, say 900 rupees, of bringing them up country fall? Losses like this would speedily open the eyes of any man to the consciousness that it is cheaper at the beginning to be careful of the drainage, and to do away with the cause for such mortality. At the end of each year, a printed blank form is sent round to every planter, and it is required of him to send in a true report, duly filled up and signed, of the number of births, marriages, and deaths amongst the coolies, how many have left, and how many new arrivals there are, etc.—necessary, I suppose, for census purposes.

The mode of conveying coolies up country is by steamer. A party of two or three hundred will, at certain intervals, leave Calcutta, despatched by the Government contractor to their various destinations, under the charge of a doctor, whose duty it is to accompany them throughout the whole of their

\* London : Whittingham & Co. Calcutta : Thacker, Spink & Co.

voyage, until the last man is landed. They are sent overland to Goalundo by rail; there they join the steamer and proceed up country. Arrangements for their reception are always complete, every vessel on this line being fitted up for carrying at least two hundred. The after part of the upper deck is reserved for their accommodation (?): and here they are huddled together in a shameful fashion when there happens, as is of too frequent occurrence, to be an excessive number on board. Luckily they do not travel equipped each with a bulky portmanteau, or the space would not suffice for one half the number; their paraphernalia is of the simplest description—a blanket, a lotah (brass pot), a hubble-bubble, and a small parcel done up in a handkerchief, containing chunam and betel-nut, a comb (if the party is proud of his or her personal appearance), and one or two other trifles dear to the Bengali's heart. The family of three or four will take up their quarters by laying the blankets, stretched out one over the other—a protest against trespassers. Each family, or party, then occupies a space of about five feet square. On this location they will squat about until it is time to retire for the night; then the blankets are distributed, and five minutes after this ceremony has been observed it would puzzle a faquir to be able to recognise that bundle as a man or a woman, or the smaller balls of blanket as children. There they lie huddled up close to one another, though the night be ever so hot, extending all the way down each side of the

deck and two rows up the centre, allowing barely sufficient room for a passer-by to avoid treading on some part of them. During the day-time they chat together in groups, play a game of chance—for they are terrible gamblers—smoke, or more often sit stolidly, doing nothing ; but when the vessel stops, a few are given leave to go ashore to cook their food



COOLIES ON BOARD.

(caste prevents some from cooking anywhere but on land), or to buy vegetables, fruit, betel-nut, or anything else that they may want ; while those on board fish over the stern of the boat, endeavouring to add to their scanty stock-pot.

The women, of whom there is always a fair sprinkling in every batch, take more pride in their

appearance than the men. This they manifest by the care with which they will arrange their hair, the gaudy-coloured raiment, the gaudier the better, that they affect, and the enormous silver or brass bangles studding their arms and ankles. Love of finery usually takes the form of bangles or earrings. Both of these articles of adornment assume gigantic dimensions; indeed, some of the bangles would compare favourably in size with the studded collar of a full-grown bull dog, and is about as massively made. It is a handy way of carrying their wealth, seeing that they do not possess pockets in which to carry rupees; but there a difficulty crops up when an outlay of money has to be made and a bangle must be realised, for the ladies are loth to part with their ornaments, notwithstanding that sometimes on one arm there will be ten or fifteen bangles, together weighing, I should roughly guess, five or six pounds. English ladies would be somewhat astonished if they were requested to put on one of the ornaments worn by these beauties of the East, and considering in what demand this kind of decoration was a short time ago, it is a wonder that genuine specimens, with their wealth of solid silver, never reached England. The carriage of the women is very erect, the result of bearing all heavy weights on the head, but a curious swaying of the body, and feet planted wide apart, renders their walk by no means a graceful movement in the eyes of Europeans.

On board, a barber is kept to shave the men, an

operation in which they seem to take an especial delight ; many of them have not only all hair shaved off the face, but also off the head, with the exception of one small tuft, that appears to be left for the satisfaction of any other gentleman who may develop a fancy for exercising his skill at scalping. The different styles of arranging the hair is often an outward signification of caste, and judging by the varied modes to be met with, the castes must be numberless. Concerning this interesting point, I was never able, much to my chagrin, to obtain any accurate information. Between the man

who has all his hair shaved off and the head of matted hair guiltless of comb, unkempt, uncut, and plaited down the back in two long tails, that present a greasy uncomfortable



TWO HEADS OF HAIR.

appearance, there are many intermediary stages of *coiffure* ; these two, however, may be considered as the Alpha and Omega of native hair-dressing.

The coolies' food and tobacco are measured out to them, on a fixed scale, by the doctor in charge. A large pot boils all the rice at once, in order to save many fires being lighted at different points and their attendant risk to the vessel. The doctor, if tolerably strict, has an easy time of it ; the only trouble that perpetually haunts him is a perverse habit of dying

that Bengalis have, to which the doctor strongly objects on the ground of its diminishing his income. For each coolie landed alive, the disciple of *Æsculapius* receives one and a half rupees ; for every woman, one rupee ; for a child, eight annas ; so it is to his interest that they should be able to hang on to life until off his hands. This system of paying has given rise to queer stories of the tricks adopted by certain worthy members of the profession : some of them have put on shore men in a moribund condition, but fortified to such an extent with rum, that they have been passed by the receiving agent as in good condition, an unexpected verdict that enabled the doctor to go on his way, rejoicing in having received his grant by the merest possible shave. At two or three important stations along the river, doctors are appointed to board all steamers with a complement of coolies for passengers, to examine into their state of health, to inspect the sanitary arrangements for their comfort, their food, etc. When the examination is completed, the visiting doctor certifies that, up to this stage of the journey, all is well, and hands the certificate of indemnification to the doctor in charge, who produces it, if called upon, at the next examining station.

It would be a noble work if Government facilitated the traffic of these poor wretches up the river from Calcutta. They are often wedged in, on a small dirty steamer, so closely that all idea of a healthy atmosphere is out of the question ; the thoughts of the moral effects are never considered. But what is



to be done? The visiting doctor can in no way alleviate their sufferings, for though the ship may be excessively overcrowded, the next steamer will not be due for another week, and in the meantime, if the coolies were put on shore, what would become of them? I have frequently thought, if some fearful epidemic were to break out on a coolie boat during its passage, how many would be landed alive? No; there are several screws loose in the system of immigration, which require an immense amount of rectifying, and the sooner a commission of inquiry, or some less ponderous and more quickly moved body, is appointed to examine into the existing shortcomings of the present working of the system, the better for all parties. Taking into account the fact that the traffic in coolies is a very lucrative business to the Government, there really is no reason why matters should not be improved, both for the coolies' comfort, by way of a more rapid service, and for the planter, by a diminished charge for each labourer. Immigration, with lower charges, would receive every encouragement, and many a poor Bengali would be enabled to go up country on his own account, with the certainty of procuring a livelihood, a hard enough task to accomplish in his own country, where the whole place teems with people. In thus encouraging willing labourers to be independent, and to seek for their own means of obtaining a livelihood, the authorities would benefit the whole Indian race, and prevent those disastrous famines that are for ever

recurring, besides assisting an industry in which voluntary labourers are badly wanted. Surely this is not a very enormous demand to make upon the Government, to help an industry that has been undertaken with private capital, and has done much for the trade and good of the country, and to encourage a healthy spirit of self-reliance amongst the natives by opening out a new field for their energies.

The change of climate has often a disastrous effect on newly imported coolies. It takes months before they get thoroughly acclimatised (unless in the meantime they perversely die) and learn their work—the latter not the least important consideration to their owners. For the first few weeks after their arrival they have no idea how to do any of the garden-work or make themselves useful, but they squat about aimlessly, pictures of utter wretchedness. Native mechanics, skilled in building, carpentering, etc., cost a great deal to bring up country, and ask for high wages before they will start; but they must be employed, in order to instruct the others how to work, unless the sahib can dispense with their services, and show men himself how to handle their tools. With a little looking after and practice, some of the coolies turn out fair carpenters, although they are slow to learn, and unretentive of anything that may have been explained to them but a day before. No persuasion can induce them to use tools in the same way as European. Sawing, planing—everything is done in a back-handed way; and it strikes anyone who sees

the men at work as an uncommonly awkward business.

Coolie management is the planter's worst trouble. All the other work is of a most pleasing kind, but coolie-driving rapidly multiplies a manager's grey hairs. Scarcely a day passes but there is some row in the lines, whereupon the jemadar (head man in the lines) brings up the delinquents on the following morning to the bungalow, with a view to getting at the true cause of the disturbance, and the punishment of the evil-doer. The sahib acts as judge and jury, and sits in judgment, listening to the evidence brought forward ; or more correctly speaking, endeavouring to listen, as the prisoner, plaintiff, and the witnesses on both sides talk their loudest ; and all at the same time. The jemadar makes "confusion worse confounded," exerting himself by dint of yells, threats, and the free application of a stick, to silence the whole party and state what he knows of the case—usually not very much. When silence has been procured, an effect never accomplished until everyone has had his or her full say, and there is no more breath left in the bodies of the conflicting parties, contradictory statements are carefully sifted, and a decision given on the general aspect of the case ; for it is impossible to believe one word that a native utters in an affair of this kind. Some very complicated cases frequently arise, in which a hasty decision would cause great dissatisfaction amongst the coolies. Diplomacy is much needed, therefore, to arrange the verdict with a

view to everyone's satisfaction. Between chelans (a name given to each batch of coolies that arrive together, and who, during the time that they are on the same garden, stand by each other) feuds constantly break out, either arising from jealousy or some trifling insult offered to an individual member which the whole of his chelan resents. Again, between the castes there are the same rows, but religious disputes nearly always result in much more revengeful and sanguinary terminations. It is in quarrels of this kind that all the diplomatic skill of the sahib has to be displayed; a responsibility of no mean kind rests with him, when the result of the arrangement is considered. A decision that does not meet with the views of one side will often cause the whole party on the first available opportunity, or when their agreements are up, to refuse to renew them and leave the garden, a dilemma in which no amount of persuasion or promises of increased pay in the future will effect a reversal of their decision, if the party has really determined to move off. As a chelan will sometimes number thirty or forty men, women and children, the loss is a serious one, and when a quarrel arises between a large and a small party, justice becomes very blind indeed, except to her own interests, and the decision is generally in favour of numbers. Many years of close observation can be passed while living in their midst, without obtaining much of an insight into the way in which the native's mind works; his mental arguments for compassing some desired result; the

small centre of ambition on which his whole thoughts are balanced; and every little thing that, unaccountably, seems to affect him.

Another source of difficulty is to persuade them to renew their agreements (Assamese, "bundibus"). Some of the better disposed will make no fuss when their time is up; but among the low castes, of which the garden labour is mainly composed, a sense of their own importance, and the impossibility of being able to dispense with their services, prevails, causing them to give as much trouble as they possibly can before signing a new bundibus. Long separation from their relations' sweet society, a longing to return to their own country, illness or perverseness, and a thousand and one things, make the renewal of agreements a time of suffering for the planter. A book is kept, in which is recorded the fatal days when the agreement of each man on the estate will have to be renewed, and the owner shudders as he turns over its leaves. At the expiration of the first three years a new agreement is drawn up and signed, generally for one year, unless the coolie wants money immediately to liquidate his debts, for in this weakness he is like his betters, well contented to glide into debt and there remain until the small storekeeper in the village, his one creditor, weary of waiting and promises of payment not fulfilled, makes it uncomfortable for him by presenting himself at the bungalow on pay-day and explaining the whole matter to the sahib. If his debts exceed one year's bonus (fifteen rupees) he will probably sign

for two years, and with any small balance that may be left over after the arrangement of his financial difficulties, he will purchase rum shrub and get uproariously drunk. In this blissful condition he will continue, while his money holds out, then back to work, a sadder and more headachy man, content to toil through one more year before he can again eat the bread of idleness for any lengthened period.

It is only when in the transition state from the end of one term of agreement to the commencement of another, that three or four successive days' holiday is given up entirely to their worst nature, not but there is a certain amount of debauchery on every native holiday, and on our Sunday, when all work, except firing, ceases, to enable the purchase of the week's stores at the hat. After marketing is over, the remainder of the day is given up to nautches and carousing. On Monday the effects are apparent, a bad muster, many down with sickness; and as for those that do turn out, the greater number are utterly unable to stand the sun and complete their full amount of work. Monday is always a bad day, especially if the sun should be particularly strong: in that case Tuesday also has a large return of coolies laid up by illness of some sort. They unquestionably lean towards a too ardent admiration for strong waters, and will do any amount of extra work if there is a bottle of rum at the other end of it. For an additional few annas, the value of the rum, they would not undertake an hour's labour beyond the regulation quantity. At

times of a heavy flush or backward state of cultivation, when something must be done to increase the labour power of the garden, brandy or rum—the more fiery the better—is the only inducement that can be held out, where money fails to succeed. Their mode of taking it is to pour it out and drink it off neat ; water would only deprive it of its chief virtue—its fieriness. A native can drink off a tumbler full of raw spirit without stopping to draw breath ; nor does he show any outward signs of being in the least discomforted.

Rarely a night passes in the lines but there is some form of festivity going on, to celebrate either a marriage or a birth. At the season of the native holidays and on Sunday the din is terrific, five or six tum-tums all going at once, mixed with a varied assortment of discordant wails and the perpetual monotony



TUM-TUMMER.

of the curious droning noise, that forms the basis of all native minstrelsy. This hullabaloo (I know no other more appropriate term), kept up without a lull until two or three in the morning, forms a charming accompaniment to a restless night. Continual tum-tumming in the lines is at first, to the uninitiated, a source of maddening annoyance ; I cannot imagine any more exasperating noise to a

musical man. Singing, nautching, and drinking. pleasantly pass away the spare time and holidays of the native. Happily these amusements are confined to their own quarters, except on one or two occasions, as, for instance, their new year's day (Behu), when the best nautchers are sent up the bungalow to display their skill and demand backsheesh. A nautch is impossible of description, no pen can describe the weird, wild, creepy sensation that steals over a European watching for the first time these strange people, twisting, writhing, wriggling about, to the sound of the most unearthly forms of music, the tum-tum always the chief offender.

On pay-day, after work is over, men, women, and children—in fact, all the coolies, present themselves, attired in their best, outside the bungalow or wherever the ceremony of paying is to be performed. They are called up by name and in rotation to receive their wages; a few have part of their money cut for idleness or insubordination, but with these exceptions all receive their pay in full and depart happily. Illness makes no difference, and pay goes on just the same. On a hot muggy evening none but those that have been present on a coolies' pay-day can imagine the tainted condition of the atmosphere surrounding three or four hundred coolies; but such things, perchance, had best be left unsaid.

The purchase of cows is one of the recognised modes of investing money or getting rid of superfluous wealth, but it does not often happen that a



coolie finds himself in this dilemma. During my stay there was a murrain amongst the coolies' cattle, for which, by the way, so long as it was confined to the coolies' cattle, we were thankful, as their number had increased to such an extent, that we were constantly lighting upon some wandering through the garden and committing sad havoc amongst the plants. The poor animals suffered fearfully from what was locally

called small-pox; but to detail the form that the malady assumed would be too much for my reader, and make him feel uncomfortable. Down dropped the cows all over the garden, died where they fell, after terrible sufferings, and were, in ordinary Eastern fashion, duly interred in the interior or jackals and vultures. The loss to the coolies must have represented a large

money value, for all knowledge of how to treat the disease remained undiscovered, and it was simply a question of time whether, at the cessation of the epidemic, any animals would be left alive. For milking purposes, the Indian cow is far behind her English namesake; a pint of milk a day is considered a fair quantity. But up country cows



A DOORGA.

can be sometimes bought, at a stiff price, that will give two or three quarts.

When the disease had run its course, the natives made poojahs, offering up sacrifices to appease the wrath of their offended gods. This was the occasion for more noise than I ever heard before. They outdid themselves. In order that their deities shall be thoroughly propitiated, natives adopt no half measures to gain their ends, but will go through an amount of self-denial that would make a good Christian deeply thoughtful. If they have saved any money, every penny will be disbursed for the purchase of sacrificial animals, or to give to the priests. If they have no money, they will borrow two or three months' pay in advance, so as not to be behind with their offerings. A poojah or a marriage will reduce a man to the estate of a beggar for a year or two; but he is quite happy in his poverty.

Superstition and love of drink are the two curses of the native. An instance of a curious performance arising from superstition comes before me at this moment. On a beautiful moonlight evening we were lounging, as was our wont, on the verandah of the bungalow, when the jemadar, accompanied by three of the head sirdars, approached, with profound salaams, in a great state of consternation. It took us some little time, spent in excited explanations on the part of our visitors, before we found that the cause of all this bobbery was a partial eclipse of the moon. The jemadar with pantomimic action, pointed out that

that spot on the moon meant disease, death, and all sorts of impending evils, and that the only way to checkmate the fearful omen was to dispel it by firing off a gun. They solemnly assured us that if we would lend them a weapon, with some powder—it did not appear that shot was requisite—they would soon put things straight; and with the reservation that this ceremony had best be carried out some distance away from our thatched bungalow, they retired to the lines, where we presently heard them tum-tumming and banging away to their hearts' content. The eclipse soon passed over, and "shooting the moon" had been successful. In England this expression is used with an entirely different signification, but the moral that it conveys in its performance is not quite so beautiful as the results achieved by my superstitious Indian friends. Gunpowder is always much sought after, on account of the difficulty that they have in procuring it. An Assamese will borrow a gun and some powder from the sahib, go off shooting, and bring back as a present three-fourths of the spoils, retaining the other fourth for his own *cuisine*. Their style of shooting is of cockney order. They will mark down their bird from behind a tree or bush, then stalk him stealthily, and shoot him as he sits. If he were to rise, that bird would come to no harm, for the marksman would not risk powder and shot on the chance. Even the most wary birds lose their lives to sportsmen of this class; and hornbills, parrots, and green pigeons, all of which are difficult for any European to get

a shot at, are brought to bag by the quiet-footed Assamese.

But to return to our coolie bothers. Government has recently hit upon a novel but, at the same time, infamous plan for increasing the revenue. Great difficulty has, up to the present time, been experienced in obtaining a spirit licence. Each well-populated



NATIVE OUT SHOOTING.

village has, perhaps, one licensed retailer of spirits, while the smaller villages are dependent for supplies on their larger neighbours. The result of this has been to make getting intoxicated a very arduous undertaking, and the general effect on the villagers and coolies in the neighbourhood has been of a most salutary description. All this highly commendable state of affairs has been knocked on the head by the

desire of Government to enrich the exchequer by a few rupees, paid for additional liquor licences—such a paltry few, indeed, that it is quite incredible that they can make any palpable difference to the purse of a great nation, while the amount of harm done is incalculable. Outside many of the large gardens liquor shops have been set up, an act alike unfair to the planter, who has paid the Government well, in the first instance, for his labourers, and on whose physical condition and powers of work his prosperity depends; and to the coolies, who, unable to resist the temptation put in their way, spend their hard-earned rupees in reducing themselves to a state of utter incapacity for to-morrow's work. This is only, of course, the planter's view of the newly ordained licensing system, but it is evident to anyone that the effect on the future working of a garden must be terribly demoralising. If the authorities had studied carefully to find out some means of injuring tea planters as a body, they could not have hit upon a more diabolical plot than this. Can nothing be done to impress upon the authorities the awful effects of placing such a temptation in the vicinity of a garden where many hands are employed? Already innumerable stumbling-blocks are surrounding the planter's footsteps, embarrassing him at every turn: these are surely enough to cause the whole faternity, in a state of disgust, to destroy every trace of their industry, and leave the land to go back to its original jungle, or for Govern-

ment to deal with as best they can. This last mode of recruiting funds for the national exchequer at the expense of the hardly-pressed employer of labour, calls for some sturdy complaint and action before further mischief arises