

CHAPTER II.

DESCRIPTION OF CALCUTTA—ITS DIRT—HOTELS—SERVANTS—SALAAMS—HORSES AND PONIES—EDEN GARDENS—GLARE IN THE SUNLIGHT—NATIVE WAY OF PASSING TIME—THE PARIAH—THE BEESTIE CONVEYANCES—THE INDIAN BARBER—THE HUBBLE-BUBBLE CARRIER—COCOA-NUT OIL—THE ADJUTANT BIRD—ANTS—RHADA BAZAAR—PURCHASES TO BE MADE—HIRING SERVANTS.

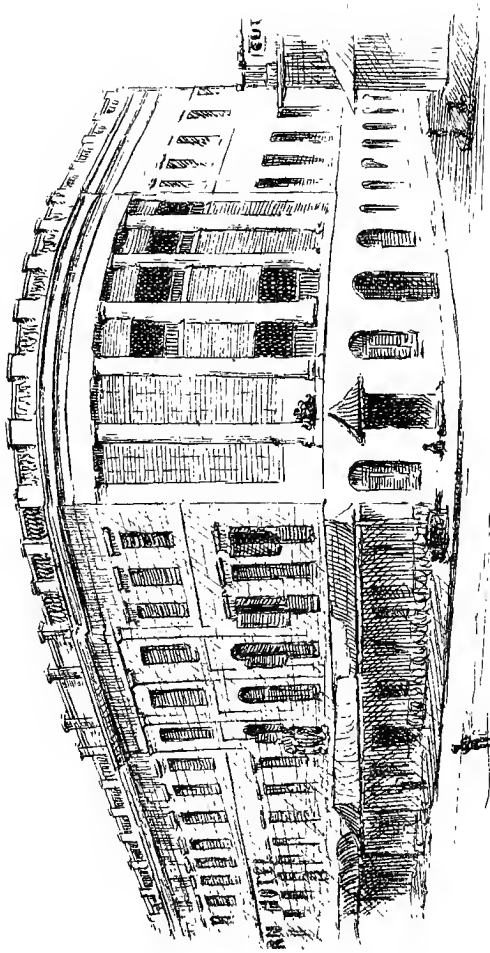
THE passage of the Hoogly safely accomplished, notwithstanding all its dangers of odd currents and multifarious sand-banks springing up in most unsuspected places, than which for us not even Scylla and Charybdis had more terrors for the ancient mariners—here we have arrived at Calcutta. Thank goodness, the miles of slowly steaming by that dreary flat waste of land, which forms the river's banks and stretches from the Sunderbunds to Garden Reach, are things of the past. Visionary horrors dart across a too retentive memory of Saugor Island, an arid tract of desert, that seems at some period to have been cut adrift from the parent Sahara and settled down at the mouth of the Hoogly, for the sole purpose of striking terror into the hearts of all new arrivals, who, full of delight at the near completion of

their voyage, must pass it on their way to Calcutta. Just below the capital, the King of Oude's palace forms a great attraction. Here the badly used old monarch has quietly settled down, after a somewhat troublous time of it, and has converted the palace into a kind of Zoological Gardens; a hobby, by the way, which helps to dispose of by far the greater portion of his large income. Thousands of his pigeons are to be seen circling around the palace, on whose roof men are constantly at work waving about long bamboo sticks and shouting, in order to frighten them off, and keep them perpetually on the wing.

Calcutta from the river presents an imposing appearance: the Strand, in the foreground, bristling with the masts of countless ships from every corner of the globe, with a background of vast white palaces, their windows decorated with bright green sunshutters. The dome of the Post Office, a prominent point in the panorama for the eye to rest on, rises high above the surrounding buildings, making one's thoughts fly back to that grand old dome in London. The leading thoroughfares of the town are broad, well kept and watered, but some of the turnings off the main streets are filthy, badly-drained alleys, emitting such odours as to enhance considerably the value of lavender water. All the streets—if they can be considered worthy of the name—in the native quarter of the town are a disgrace to Calcutta and those connected with its municipal administration. They seem

to be entirely guiltless of any attempt at drainage. The huts, or, more correctly speaking, dirty hovels, alongside the street are built according to no plan or principle. The sweet will of the native tenant has caused to be erected a residence that no well-minded pig, having an eye to the first rudiments of sanitation, would take to. It is to be devoutly hoped that some time or another—may the day be not far distant, though probably not until after a few thousands of these people have been swept off by an epidemic, and the English quarter of the town has been threatened—the authorities will proceed to pull down these eye-sores, and replace them with something habitable. But that these places should remain as they do, stagnating in dirt, is very reprehensible, and the moral responsibility of the powers that be in case of an outbreak of infectious disease, would be a burden that I should not envy them.

Calcutta—gigantic city though it is—boasts of only one fairly good hotel, the Great Eastern, carried on by a Company. Here can be bought everything. The premises under the hotel have been fitted up as a vast store, which is kept freshly supplied with the latest English novelties by the continuous stream of ships coming out. The hotel itself is fairly comfortable, the table being kept on a very liberal scale, and the general arrangements as complete as can be expected in a huge establishment of this kind. As there are many extensive boarding establishments in the town, the hotel is mainly used as a place to put up at for a



GREAT EASTERN HOTEL, CALCUTTA.

few days, until some more permanent arrangement can be made with one of the boarding-house keepers, if a lengthened stay is contemplated. Many of the best houses in Chowringhee facing the Maidan, and formerly private mansions, have been converted into boarding-houses to meet the demand for this kind of living.

It is as well on arriving at the hotel to engage a servant to wait at table : there are always several to be found hanging about in the corridors, on the lookout for employment.

The supply of hotel waiters is limited in number, and the delay at dinner, caused by a crowd of eager attendants surrounding the servers is vexing, and not conducive to that calmness of mind which for good digestion is a *sine quâ non*. Especially among the Kitmutgars a warm spirit of rivalry exists to secure each for his own master some choice dainty that has just come straight from the kitchen ; and it is quite a common occurrence for one man to watch his opportunity until another has got his hands full, then snatch and bear off in triumph the coveted dish. They are splendid waiters, quiet in their movements (they cannot make much noise as they walk, for boots are denied them when in attendance), stately in their carriage, very attentive, anticipating each little requirement, anxious to please, and withal decidedly picturesque. These men are usually engaged by the day, for which they get eight annas (about tenpence). Out of this pay they supply their own food. They devote to your service the whole day, from six in the

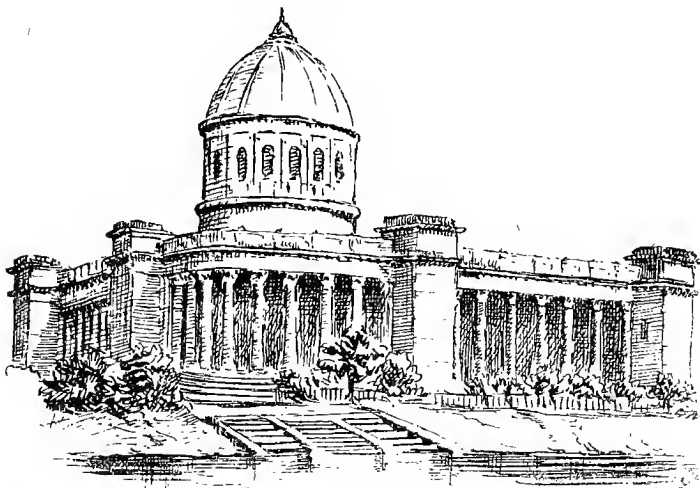
morning, when they bring *chota hazree* to your bedside, until after dinner, about nine o'clock ; then they make their salaams and retire for the night. The salaam is the most marked feature in the difference of greeting as adopted by Eastern and Western custom. The attitude of the hands, placed together before the face, suggests at first sight supplication, but the dignity which ordinarily accompanies the action cannot fail at once to remove the idea. Of course there are salaams and salaams ; the salaam of a native gentleman, or well-to-do merchant, and that of a street box-wallah are two very different things ; the former greets with an air of respectful equality, the latter with cringing servility distasteful to look upon. The view from the hotel window, up and down Council House Street and overlooking the grounds of the Government House, conveys a fair notion of the size and wealth of Calcutta. Long lines of carriages, with magnificent embroidered trappings, the vari-coloured garments worn by their native owners, the cries of the hawker, the screams of the kites, as they lazily flap from house to house, and the bustle of foot-passengers, make the front of the hotel at five o'clock on an afternoon a most



SALAAM.

entertaining and lively spectacle. All the carriages—and their name is legion, for everybody keeps one—are remarkable for one very noticeable falling off. However gorgeous the conveyance and the liveries may be, the horses are invariably a most weedy broken-down looking set of screws. There are more miserable specimens of the equine race in this one town than could be matched throughout all England. They are mostly Walers (a name given to all horses imported from Australia) or country bred: very few English horses find their way out so far. An extensive trade is done with Australia in horse flesh, there being a regular season for sending over large consignments for the periodical sales held in Calcutta. Most are sold at public auction, and command prices ranging from three hundred and fifty to eight hundred rupees: a fair specimen will average about four hundred and fifty on landing, when they are rough and in bad condition. After they have been on shore for some time, and have shaken off the effects of their voyage, their value is much enhanced; besides, prices rule much higher for an animal when he is acclimatized. Burmah or Pigou ponies are generally used up-country. Ponies have much the best of it over the uneven ground on a tea plantation, and can be more easily handled. Their prices in Calcutta are variable; but these hardy little fellows command an average of three to four hundred rupees at the sales. I should certainly recommend any man going up-country to take a good pony with him,

especially if one is to be had a bargain. There is always considerable difficulty on arrival up-country in finding an animal with a pretension to pace or soundness; these rather important points are set off against by any amount of vice and defects, that do not, as a rule, tend to make the animal a source of enjoyment to its possessor.



POST OFFICE, CALCUTTA.

The sights of Calcutta can be seen in the three or four days that must be spent there, waiting for linen clothes to be made, and collecting things to take up-country. They are the Government House, the Post Office, the Law Courts, the Seven Tanks, the Maidan and the Eden Gardens. The Seven Tanks lie a short distance out of the town, and boast, as their chief

attraction, some splendid carp, venerable fellows with a dignified mien, who swim slowly and with an apparent weighty sense of their own importance. They are quite tame, and come to be fed at the summons of their attendant. Their age, like that of a lady, is veiled in uncertainty; but this much is known—that one of them is three hundred years old, and a fine portly old gentleman he is, weighing, I should roughly calculate, over twenty pounds. His antiquity can probably claim a few centuries farther back than he is given credit for; to him a hundred years more or less must be of but small account. Who shall say that the great Buddha himself has not fraternised with this old relic?

The Maidan, stretching along by the river, answers the purpose of our Rotten Row. Here everybody is to be seen in the cool of the evening, driving or riding up and down; and again, before the heat of the day commences, people take their early morning canter. The ground is kept in good order, the grass regularly watered twice a day—how refreshing to the eye is the cool green!—and the roads are conveniently laid down round the grass plot, so as to make the Maidan thoroughly appreciated by both residents and visitors. At the Law Courts end of the Maidan an inclosed portion forms the Eden Gardens, a very happy name for a most charming spot. These gardens are glorious in their wonderful wealth of luxurious vegetation. Here can be seen specimens of almost every tree grown in the tropics. The view of the masses of wavy

feathery-looking leaves, broken here and there by the stiff broad leaf of the plantain, presents a most pleasing sight. The cost of restocking and keeping up this place must amount to no inconsiderable sum per annum; but it is to Calcutta what the parks are to London, and could be ill-spared. In the grounds



PAGODA.

are a lake, a Burmese pagoda—picturesque in its ugliness—winding pathways everywhere, arched over by tangled trees, interlaced with many varicoloured creepers, and a splendid piece of turf laid down for promenade purposes. Each evening this point is lighted up brilliantly, and offers a very

pleasant way of passing a couple of hours before dinner. The regimental or town band meanwhile plays away merrily. Other places of interest, as the Zoological and Botanical Gardens, can be visited by those who have the time to spare.

The intense whiteness of the houses in Calcutta, although of great assistance in helping to keep the temperature low inside, is at first terribly trying to the eyesight, the strain at times being almost unendurable, more particularly when the sun is not quite at its zenith, but throws its rays slantingly. There is no shade in the town, the white walls of the opposite side of the street reflect the heat as well as the glare, rendering the atmosphere like that of an oven, and walking more of an exertion than a pleasure. As midday approaches, the intense heat confines people to the house, exposure to the sun's rays at this time of his strength being injurious and likely to terminate in sunstroke. Even the ever indolent native is affected, and becomes more lazy—if such a thing be possible. As the sun mounts higher, you can watch him growing uneasy (for the rays are falling directly on him), then shift his quarters to a doorway, where he squats down, prepared to sleep until the evening cool comes down to wake him. One of the marvels to the active-minded European is the amount of sitting down, without visible occupation of any sort, that a native can get through during the day. What does he think about? His naturally heavy countenance is no tell-tale of his ponderings,

for he wears an expression of utter vacancy. Is there some deep-laid scheme revolving through his brain, that takes time to evolve, with which some day he will burst upon an astonished world?—or does he nurse discontentedly a feeling that Nature has been unkind to him in not placing him in the world on an equal footing with that sahib who has just passed by, resplendent in all the glory of civilised raiment? My firm conviction is that he thinks of nothing, that his brain never works, that he lazily and stupidly stares at passers-by without a wish or desire for aught. What a picture of contented happiness! By his side, or a short distance from him, lies a friendly pariah; he too will court sleep, and his wooing will not be in vain. Much as I esteem



SQUATTING NATIVE.

the pariah when performing his appointed functions as a scavenger, he is most objectionable when not occupied at his proper business. Like all idlers he gets into mischief, and is frequently discovered under your horse's feet, fast asleep in the middle of the road. Here he lies calmly still until his wretched carcass is jeopardised, waiting to see whether you will not turn to the right or left and leave his slumbers undisturbed; but he is astonish-

ingly nimble in getting out of the way at the very last moment.

At four o'clock in the afternoon the bhistie, equipped with a goat's skin full of water, and slung on his back, commences to water the roads. This he does by jerking in circles the contents of his skin, round the nozzle of which he keeps a tight hand, as he hurries along. The hoses in the main thoroughfares are turned on, all Calcutta begins to wake up, carriages



BHISTIE
(WATER CARRIER.)

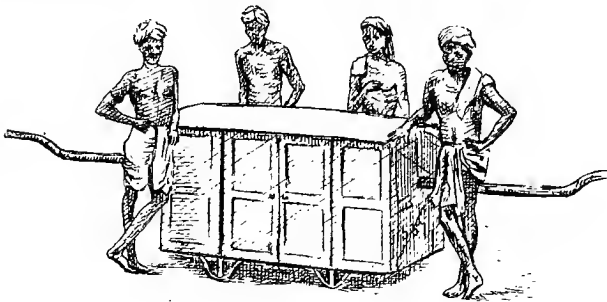


INDIAN BARBER.

roll along, palkee men trot here and there, even the pariah shakes himself together, yawns, stretches, and slowly trots off to select a site, and make arrangements for stealing his next meal.

A choice of two modes of street conveyance can be exercised—either a cab or a palkee: the former a narrow, stuffy one-horse conveyance, with sliding shutters to keep out the heat and dust; the latter a long box, having doors or windows in the centre,

fitted like the cab with sliding shutters. Along the roof a stout pole runs the length of the box and projects four or five feet at each end, where it is slightly curved in order to rest more comfortably on the shoulders of the four men who carry it. The bearers shuffle along at a good round pace, and manage to get over a lot of ground before they are fatigued, meanwhile accompanying their steps with a peculiar humming sound, or chanting an epic in honour



A PALKEE.

of the occupant of the palkee. Throughout the East anything in the shape of hard work is always attended by a most distressing series of noises emitted by the labourer. I do not know whether it is singing, or a relief for superfluous energy; but any way it is cruel on the listener. The disadvantage of the palkee is that, although cheaper than the *gharri* (cab), it has only accommodation for one person, and that one must lie down flat on his back, *nolens volens*.

Another oddity is the Indian barber. Turning

sharply round a street corner the sightseer will several times in the course of a day come upon a couple of men squatting down on their haunches, face to face. In the East there is none of that delicacy of concealment while performing the toilet that we boast of in the West, and so that hidden mystery, the process of shaving, is here conducted, *sub lumine cœli*, in the face of all men. In the course of a morning's walk, hundreds of men in the various stages of being shaved will be seen; for not only is the face submitted to this process, but the head, arms, body, and even legs: the barber's occupation is, therefore, no light one, and it takes a considerable time to get a gentleman finished and turned off entirely to his satisfaction.

The hubble-bubble carrier is another mysterious personage, a wonder amongst many wonders. Watch him as he wends his way down the street, stopping to exchange a few remarks, now with the coachman on the cab stand, and then with some general street-corner loafers, giving them each a pull at his hubble-bubble. I never was able to find out how this man was paid, for no money, visible to the prying eye of the curious, was seen to pass between his clients and himself; yet I cannot think that he was sufficiently well off, or a disinterested philanthropist, to devote the whole of his day to supplying his friends with tobacco (such horrible stuff as it is); and the only solution to the question that I could hit upon was, that he must have had a system of annual or monthly subscriptions paid in advance, like a circulating library.

There are many strange people with stranger modes of obtaining a livelihood to attract attention and excite wonderment on first arriving in India, all of which form a perfect fund of amusement. The reversal of European ways of doing things is especially remarkable. To take a few instances. To remove the hat in England is a sign of respect; in India the boots are removed. Nearly all work is done in what we should consider a back-handed way: the needle is pushed away from the person; the plane is moved from left to right, towards the carpenter; and even the saw is reversed as to its teeth.

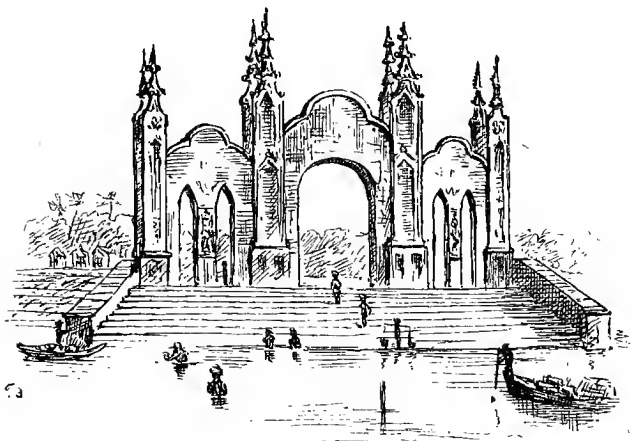
The mode of carrying babies, slung upon the hip or over the mother's shoulder, wrapped in a long cloth, does not strike one as a particularly happy position for the little one, although it has the advantage of allowing the woman the free use of both her hands.



WOMAN WITH BABY.

Cocoa-nut oil plays a prominent part in the native toilet. After his bath, which he takes at one of the ghâts on the river, shortly after sunrise or before sunset, he walks home, drying his cloth on the way by the simple expedient of letting it float out behind him as he hurries along; then he goes home and oils

himself. This it is that makes him so objectionable to the olfactory organs of his white brother. If the native could manage to exist without anointing himself with this vile compound, it is reasonable to conjecture that he would be much dearer to the heart of the white man. As it is, he is an object not to be closely approached, and to be addressed at a distance.



BATHING GHÂT.

The superior class of natives do not use oil ; or if they do, a carefully prepared kind, and less of it.

We must not pass over, without mention, one more curiosity, peculiar to Calcutta, viz., the adjutant bird. On this fellow, with the able assistance of jackals, pariahs, and crows (these latter have justly earned a character for the most consummate impudence) devolves the greater part of the scavenging of the

city. The ludicrous appearance of the adjutant, his lavender-coloured coat, picked out here and there with broad white and black markings, topped by an imbecile-looking head, most of which seems to be beak (giving him a top-heavy effect), the whole finished off by a pair of long spindle legs, is irresistibly comic. The Government House is their headquarters here, until the midday sun drives them to seek shelter. They are to be seen stalking slowly and solemnly round the broad parapet, or standing apart in their favourite attitude, on one leg, and looking knowingly out of one eye. They are so useful in helping to keep the city clean, that an order has been passed prohibiting their capture, and a heavy fine for killing one. They certainly deserve to be preserved, if only on account of their absurd appearance and laughter-provoking powers. They are splendid fellows at all kinds of offal: nothing is too good or too bad for them; they can eat and digest anything. Many amusing stories are told of their ravenous appetites and capacity for comfortably disposing of the most unlikely articles. The tale still obtains credence how that an enterprising thief of an adjutant, looking down from his lofty elevation, espied a poor box-wallah selling bars of Windsor soap. Awaiting



ADJUTANT BIRD.

an opportunity for a clear flight, this ill-conditioned fowl swooped down, seized his prize, and retired out of reach of missiles to discuss the savoury morsel. Though not quite to his taste, his gluttony got the better of his inclination, and would not allow him to relinquish it ; so, with a pertinacity worthy of a better cause, he tried to like it, and was observed throughout the remainder of the day discomposedly flying about from place to place, throwing off as he went a fine stream of soap lather, but still not finding it in his heart to surrender up his ill-gotten treasure. Another made a light but delectable luncheon off a litter of kittens, all of which he polished off with no semblance of an effort, and without being inconvenienced in the least by their somewhat fluffy exterior. No mortal, up to the present time, has been able to discover what things the adjutant would refuse to swallow on the ground of their being indigestible.

The many Government offices in Calcutta are chiefly and more cheaply conducted by *babus* (native gentlemen) under English management. They are a very difficult class of people to have dealings with, and surround themselves in a mysterious atmosphere of importance, pleasing enough to their own dignity, but detestable to the public. This is especially displayed among the Post Office *babus*, where the term civility is as little understood as it is in a certain London Government office not one hundred miles from the Strand. It does not redound greatly to the honesty of the natives that, when sending a

letter, it is as well—in truth it is a safeguard universally adopted—to cross the stamps with pen and ink, thus spoiling them for any further use, and getting rid of the temptation that may be put in the way of an unscrupulous servant to take off and re-sell them.

Countless disagreeables are attendant on Indian indoor life. One of the most prominently objectionable is the impossibility of leaving any food about. Ants are to the fore among the great drawbacks of life in India; their number in a house is incalculable, for they have reserve forces extending over the whole neighbourhood. Anything and everything edible is agreeable to them. A plate with some small delicacy upon it, left in the middle of the table, becomes, in a quarter of an hour, covered with a moving mass of little black beasts, each tugging away in its own approved direction—a sight in nowise calculated to stimulate a failing appetite. To meet this difficulty, the legs of tables and articles on which food is placed rest in brass cups, which are filled with water, thus rendering it impossible for the ant to crawl up the legs or sides without first risking a watery grave. Precautions must be taken that there is no other communication between the top of the table and the ground, as frequently the edge of the tablecloth, or the end of a ball of string hanging down, will stultify all the most thoughtful arrangements.

A great nuisance in Calcutta is having to write or answer and acknowledge the receipt of *chits* (letters) and parcels. This frequently takes up a good portion

of the morning, but it is the only way of checking dishonesty when parcels of any value are forwarded by the hand of a native carrier.

Before leaving England it is much better to buy all those things that are likely to be required up-country, and take them out (except cotton clothes and camp furniture). The freights for extra baggage are not

excessive, and prices in Calcutta for all kinds of English goods are high, and when purchases are made in the China Bazaar, where—although the articles may be cheaper than at the shops in the town—the risk of having inferior goods palmed off upon you—especially in the case of tinned provisions, or other articles that are likely to have been kept a long time in stock—is proportionately increased. The China and Rhada Bazaars are well worth a visit, if only as



KITMUTGAR.

one of the sights of Calcutta. The narrow, twisting lanes of small shops; the noise made by the shopkeepers in their endeavours to attract attention; the difficulty of fighting a way through a crowd of these shrieking fiends, each flourishing some specimen of his goods, which he thrusts in your face; the absurd gibberish, half English, half Hindustani or Bengali; that they indulge in; the stifling heat and smells; the

Babel of sounds on all sides—sounds that would render a visit to the noisiest of madhouses quiet by comparison—all help to make the impression of a very disagreeable novelty. The denizens of the bazaars have everything English or native for sale, and must be treated in the same way as our friends who came on board the ship to sell their wares—offer them one quarter of the price first demanded, and then probably they will realise a handsome profit on the transaction. This is, undoubtedly, the best quarter for the purchase of camp furniture, white cotton clothes, rezais (a kind of eider-down quilt), and pots and pans to take up-country. Camp furniture is more easily handled and less cumbrous than ordinary furniture in use: the bed folds up compactly, as also the table and washing-stand; the chest of drawers divides into two parts, and can, without unpacking, be easily transported from place to place on an elephant; in fact, all this class of furniture is handy and durable, being made of well-seasoned wood, and can be re-sold at no great loss. Saddlery is best brought out from England.

Before starting from Calcutta, procure at least one servant (a kitmutgar), who will prove invaluable on the travels. If it is possible—and sometimes one is to be obtained—this man should know bearer's work (valet and housemaid combined), besides being able to wait at table, cook if required, and look after his master generally. Sixteen or eighteen rupees a month would not be too much for a good servant

like this. An arrangement is entered into with all servants going up to Assam to stay for one year, as there is great difficulty in inducing them to leave Calcutta and go up at any price. A servant in Calcutta does not earn above one-half the money that he could command in Assam; but there is a prejudice against that country, chiefly arising from a superstitious belief, into which the native mind

has fallen, that the place is peopled with unearthly spirits and devils.

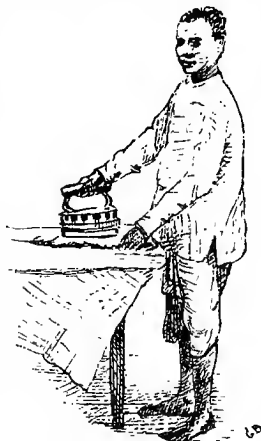


AN AYAH.

A duly signed contract is all the more necessary on account of the distance from the town and expense of having another servant sent up, if the one should fall ill, or were tempted to leave by the offer of larger wages by another sahib—a very unusual proceeding, by the way.

When there is a lady in the party, an ayah, or native maid, might be added to the staff of domestics; but good ayahs are scarce and get large wages. A bad ayah is a terrible nuisance, and will prove an incumbrance. A personal character from some lady in whose service she has recently been is a *sine qua non*. Not unfrequently ladies leaving for England bring their ayahs down with them as far as Calcutta, where they can

be picked up. A dhobie, or washerman (all the washing in India is done by the male sex) is sometimes a necessary evil. This, however, depends on the distance that separates the tea gardens, and the neighbourly feeling that exists in the district. Sometimes one planter will keep a dhobie who can do washing for one or two neighbours—an agreeable arrangement, and one that saves an increase to the already too large stock of servants—if it can be entered into, is much better for all parties. All the servants' characters must be well inquired into, as the Bazaar supplies written characters to native servants at so much a piece, according to the length of the manuscript or the number of lies contained therein.



A DHOBBIE