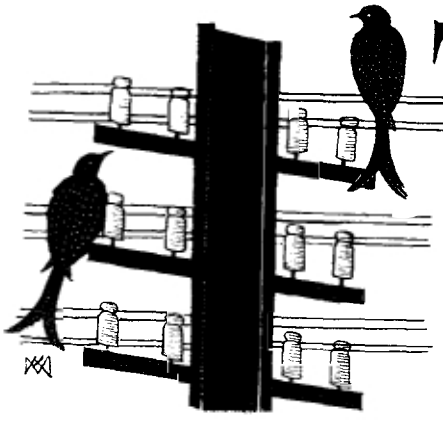


Telefauna

BY M. KRISHNAN

IT was Dewar, I think, who first remarked on the great opportunities for bird watching that railway travel in India provides. Many decades ago he said that the traveller from Peshawar to Madras "should, aided by good field-glasses, be able to distinguish fully one-third of the commoner birds." Possibly because of the expansion of our railways since, the remark has even more substance today than when it was made. I know of no better way of introducing a foreigner to our avifauna (that, I fear, includes the majority of Indians) to our commoner birds than a railway journey.

Of course it is unnecessary to undertake the pilgrimage from Peshawar to Madras to get to know many of our common birds, and I would suggest, with due respect to Dewar, your leaving your field-glasses behind. The only equipment you would need is a seat next to a window and, if you are sensitive to strong light, lightly tinted glare-glasses. You are then ready to enjoy your education, perhaps for the first time in your life!

There are two conditions precedent, but these seem so obvious that they need not be considered. You should take a day train and possess a good book on the birds of India with coloured pictures. Turn your back on your fellow passengers and address yourself to your window—if necessary you can always pretend you are deaf.

The passsing scenery will include many birds, along with agaves and lantana, hills and river beds and stretches of thorny scrub. These birds are often far away and are best left to those familiar with our avifauna; if you have wisely left your binoculars at home, you will not be tempted to try and identify these remote birds. Sometimes, of course, birds peculiar to a locality can be watched on the ground or in the sky from the train. When passing a stretch of water you may see many water birds not too far off—storks, ibises, spoonbills, egrets, herons and, on the water, ducks and diving birds. Seringapatam, on the way to Mysore, offers such scope. Again, the flat country between Gooty and Guntakal is excellent ground for harriers, hawks and Tawny Eagles. These, however, are the incidental opportunities for bird-watching through the train window, dependent on your route. The constant, the great opportunity, is provided by the telegraph lines.

The telegraph lines are always close to the window, and most often not much above eye-level, and the birds you see on them are fully displayed in bright light, with no foliage or shade-gloom obscuring them. That is why a railway journey is such an excellent introduction to our commoner birds.

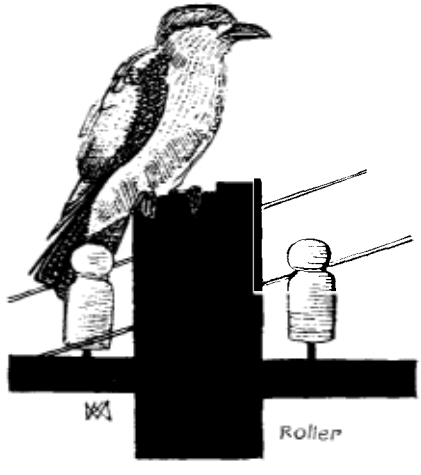
There are many sorts and conditions of birds on these lines and I would rather not give you a list of birds guaranteed unfindable on the wires — I have seen some very unlikely fowl on them. But barring freakish appearances, a good many birds do not take to these convenient perches specially erected for them by a thoughtfnl government. Game birds and other ground birds do not use the wires as a rule nor do water birds or foliage-loving birds that live in thick cover. Moreover, birds of a certain size do not frequent the lines. The largest you are likely to find on them are kites, crows, and where they occur, White-eyed Buzzards.

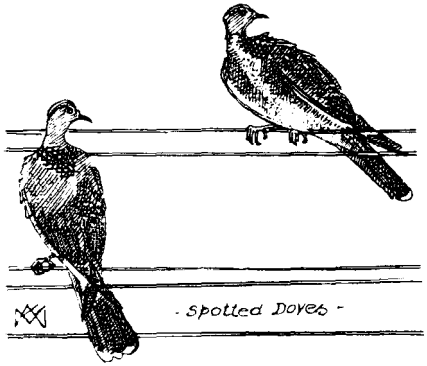
For the rest the 'telefauna', as I term the regular addicts of the lines, is a varied assortment. Birds that hunt from perches must be given pride of place in this class, for they are there on business and not merely sitting pretty. The roller will as often be found on the pylons as on the wires, a slumped, dead-looking bundle of drab feathers that comes startlingly to life when it spreads its broad, lazy wings and displays the brilliant contrasts of blues in them. Rollers are usually solitary on the the lines.

Bee-eaters, in company, are quite a feature of the telefauna, unmistakable emerald-green birds with two pin feathers projecting from their tails. The fork-tailed king crow is equally common. Shrikes prefer lower stances, in thorn bushes, but are quite common on the wires.

Many birds use the wires not to hunt from, but as convenient perches. The White-breasted Kingfisher and the Pied Wagtail are both familiar near the waterside, but while the wagtail sits on the lines merely for a change of stance from where to wag its tail and whistle sweetly, the kingfisher is there mainly on business—this most interesting bird has largely given up its hereditary profession of fishing and has taken to perch-hunting.

The dove is no symbol of peace to one who knows its quarrelsome temperament, but it is true that it is a conjugal sort of bird and is most often found in pairs on the lines. Sunbirds, robins and chats are among

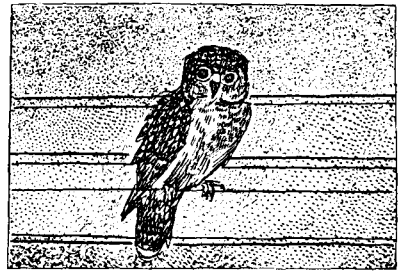




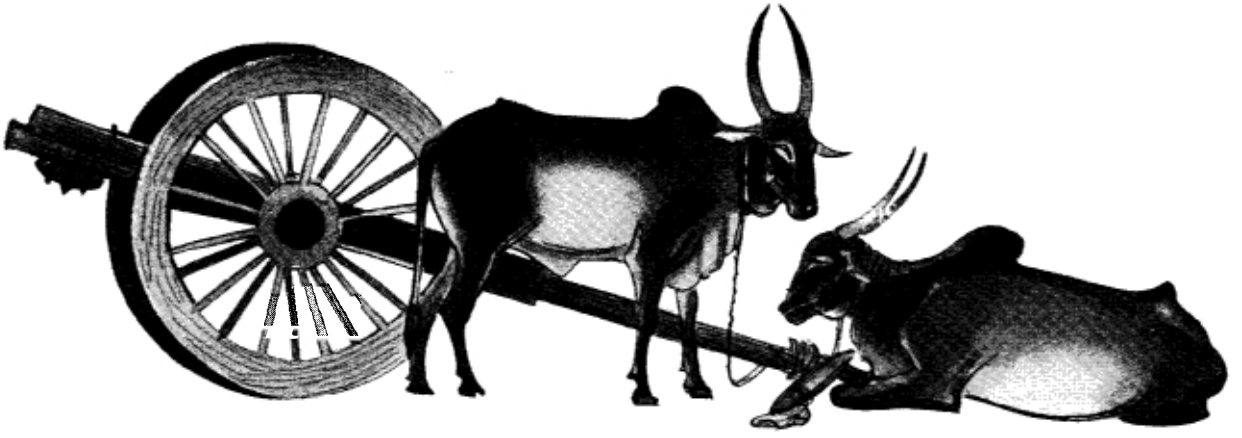
the regular addicts, specially near stations, and bulbuls are equally common. I have often seen the White-headed Babbler near stations, and think it is safe to suspect the approach of human colonies from the presence of this bird on the wires. Even mynahs and parakeets frequent these perches, though neither can feel very much at home on them. Sparrows and other seed-eaters are also common here. I have mentioned only the most familiar of the telefauna, and would like to repeat that no exclusive list is possible.

The type of country you are traversing will, of course, determine the telefauna to some extent. The season, again, is a major factor. During the colder months, swallows are quite a feature of the telegraph lines, crowding them in hundreds as night approaches. Other migratory birds also use the wires.

As the evening darkens, you are likely to see quite a few of the non-habitues on the lines, and see roosting birds in numbers. Suddenly you notice that even the bee-eaters are grey and dark ; the darkness has overtaken the land. Then you notice that there are no longer any bee-eaters on the lines — they have retired to their roosts, and so have most other birds. It is now that you will notice a bird that was rare earlier, the squat, softly-barred cubist form of the Spotted Owlet on the wires and pylons, sometimes three or four together. That is the signal to quit bird-watching, for it is too dark to watch anything outside.



AN OWLET



Amrit Mahal bullocks sketched from life

CARTWAYS IN THE COUNTRY

By M. Krishnan

SOME time ago I travelled across a hundred miles of very flat country in the Deccan. Long stretches of metalled roads, meant specially for motor traffic, traversed the area, but our jeep rarely used these highways —we followed cart tracks from village to village, and even took cross-country 'short-cuts' which sometimes proved rather circuitous. There was an elderly gentleman with us on this trip (in fact, he owned the transport) who knew the country intimately ; he told me of days long past when automobiles were unknown here, and of more recent times when the few motor cars there were (he owned one of them) kept sedulously to the 'pucka' main roads.

Many villages could be reached only by primitive cart tracks, tracks that shifted their course with the season,for with the harvest over the carts could go as they pleased across the flat, bald earth. And the bullock cart was the only transport available to those who valued comfort—people who enjoyed excercise or who were in a hurry went on horseback. My host sighed for those spacious, not-too-far-off days, when India was India (and landlords had a certain estate and power :) and there was not this frantic craze for speed and motor vehicles. However, I thought his lament over the passing of the bullock cart premature. In fact, it is still very much in evidence there and everywhere.

It is true that travel now is largely independent of the bullock cart in rural India ; there are buses plying between the towns and the bus routes are often close to the larger villages. It is also true that the types of carts and bullocks used exclusively to convey opulent humans are considerably replaced by motor cars—such carts, with bow-springs and padded seats, deeply arched roofs of closely woven bamboo matting and glass windows, drawn by a pair of high-mettled bullocks matched in every detail, belonged to the rural rich, who were quick to change over to motor cars. However, there are still thousands of villages in India that lie some distance away from bus-route and railway where the bullock cart ~~still~~ conveys humanity, and bullocks still move the produce from agrarian villages to the urban limits, and draw heavy loads over millions of miles every year. The heavily-laden freight bullock cart is one of the most familiar sights of the countryside today, and I see no reason to apprehend its decline tomorrow.

Yes, the horse is no longer what it was even 25 years ago ; motor vehicles have ousted it completely. But if you think deeply you will see that this had to be so. The noble beast survived so long only because in battle and across the roadless countryside there were no swifter means. It survived longer in areas where it was harnessed to many kinds of carriages, till the buses came. Even now horse-carriages are to be found in places where buses are not too common—in Banaras, for example, the 'ekka' is still popular.

But the bullock cart never had any pretension to consuming speed. It was and is the cheapest, the handiest, the most versatile transport available to the people of the countryside. In a way, the survival of the bullock when the horse has run its race is reminiscent of the fable of the Hare and the Tortoise, but make no mistake, the resemblance is purely superficial. The bullock is no tortoise. It can haul heavy loads and convey humanity, singly and in teams ; it can plough and harrow its master's small holding and serve a hundred uses on the farm, subsisting largely on the by-products of agriculture and even providing the best manure for the land ; and when it is dead, its hoofs and horns and hide still serve mankind in various ways.

Moreover, it is a wholly Indian beast ; though our cattle have been exported to far countries, like South America, they belong anciently and exclusively to our soil. I do not know that it is correct to speak of the bullock as an Indian domestic beast, though it is an Indian domestic institution, in fact. Through the turbulent and changeful course of our history, it was the one institution that provided food and transport and stability, the one thing that sustained life unostentatiously. Westerners, and even Indians speak sometimes of cow-worship in our country as if it were some curiously primitive and ingrained superstition, an atavistic blot on modern, enlightened India. These poor people speak in ignorance of our culture and traditions and history. I think it is the unobtrusive derivative bullock, even more than the cow, that is really responsible for the natural veneration in which cattle are held in our culture. National progress is in no way retarded by a realization of the fundamentals of indigenous culture, nor advanced by the slavish copying of the swift,

mechanised means used in wholly alien countries. I do not think the bullock cart will ever be an anachronism in our country, but should the 'B.C.' era ever be spent, then India will assuredly not be India.

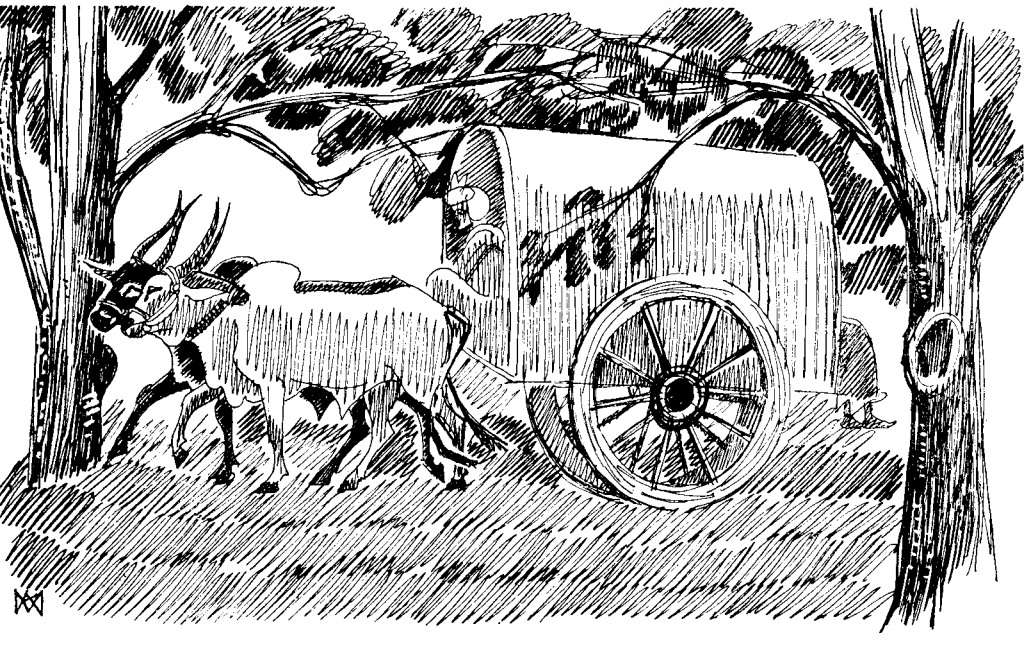
Many of our common domestic animals, dogs, asses, poultry, reflect a certain national indifference to livestock breeding. But we have evolved and maintained many fine breeds of cattle through the centuries. It is significant that the description, "dual purpose cattle", always indicates a breed that provides good draught bullocks and milch-cows here—never beef-cattle, since the majority of Indians do not eat beef. I do not know if I am following any recognized classification, but it seems to me that the better-known breeds of our cattle can be split into two main groups—one more noted for its milking cows and massive, slow bullocks, such as the picturesque red Sindhi, the beautiful, white Nellore and the Ongole breeds and another mainly supplying fast, powerful bullocks, such as the Amrit Mahal, Kangeyam and Hallikar breeds. This is a rough division and there are breeds like the pigmy Punganoor 'Kuttai' (which supplies splendid milkers, considering the dwarf size, and little 'trotting-bullocks' for the 'reklah' type of sulkies) which do not belong to either group. However, the division still holds, and it is remarkable how jealously the breed characteristics have been preserved in these races.

The ideal bullock must have power coupled with quick muscles and considerable spirit. The one thing that the cart driver abhors in his pair is a philosophical temperament, a willingness to lie down and chew the cud in unshakable resignation when they have made one effort to clear the obstacle in the path and failed. It is spirit in a bullock that hauls the cart over dips and elevations. Nor is this all ; in addition to these qualities the ideal breed must be uniform in size (and preferably in colour and markings and horn as well), for discrepancies in size diminish the team value of a pair and present major problems in the yoking—the larger beast is apt to get its hind quarters abraded by contact with the body of the cart.

The celebrated Amrit Mahal breed of Mysore is as near perfection as may be. These bullocks are clean-limbed, quick, long-striding and tremendously powerful—they are slow to mature, taking some six years or longer to arrive at their prime, but are then nearly five feet at the shoulder, and weigh some 750-800 lbs. They are so spirited that it is unwise for strangers to approach them, and when they are grazed in the jungles even the tiger does not brave the combined armament of their sharp, long horns. Hard-muscled, tireless and mettlesome as they are, a pair is still capable of deep attachment to each other and to their master.

The cart and pair meant for luxurious travel is, as I said, much less popular now than it was, and is not to be found except in the deeper reaches of the countryside. The moffusil bus has displaced it, but waiting hopefully for this vehicle with my luggage and a number of fellow waiters around me, I have sometimes wondered why this displacement has occurred. People living in the villages do not enjoy walking 2 or 3 miles to the nearest bus stop, and waiting for the next bus which may or may not provide them with a seat,—believe me, they do not. Why, then, have they dispensed with the bullock cart which can convey them in comfort through the cool of the early morning or late evening, to their destination some 15 miles away ? I do not think it is the relative speed of the bus that is responsible, or even the availability of privately owned motor cars ; I am sure it is the conversion of what was once soft, uneven cartway into hard metalled road.

The bullock cart works on the principle that the soft earth-road has a cushioning 'give' on the surface—all the springing is provided by the yielding soil, dry and powdery or squelching ; even carts with bow-springs cannot get along without this 'give'. Every time the seasoned cart driver prefers a sandy, dry river-bed to a shorter and harder road, it is not only the human contents that get so bone-shakingly rattled on an unyielding surface – the beasts, closely yoked to the cart, also feel the rattling. When the long, winding, soft-faced earth-roads that linked life in the countryside were converted into the much longer, much straighter, metalled roads, meant for pneumatic tyres, the bullock cart had to go, carrying with it much of our village culture and a lot of our rural virility. Balancing the advantages against the disadvantages of this measure, I am inclined to imagine that there is much to deplore in it.



Progress along a cart road

THE YALI

BY M. KRISHNAN

PEOPLE living in North India would not know the Yali. They would even be apt to mispronounce its name, the way it is spelt here, for English lacks the 'l' sound that it needs (and so does Hindi)—it is a "ll" with the tongue caressing the roof of the mouth, but it is no use spelling the word 'Yalli' for that would make the 'a' brief and in fact the 'a' is long, marked with a macron—the word rhymes all the way with 'Kali', the goddess, as pronounced in Sanskrit or Marathi where the 'l' has that sound.

The Yali belongs entirely to the South, to the far, Tamilian South. I will not offer to wager that you cannot find it in non-Tamilian stone, for Indian art has a remarkable cogency of character considering Indian history, and with this polymorphic beast it is hard to say just how some specimens, identified as Yalis by the pundits, differ from lions. But certainly the Yali is a feature only of the sculpture and literature of the Tamil country, even if it does occur outside that area.

And it is a remarkable creature. It was always easier to find the Yeti in the warm South than a live Yali, for the latter is one of the few Indian animals that are wholly fabulous and imaginary. Of course one can find Yalis in hundreds in low and high relief, formally adorning the lintels and supporting columns in southern temples—even Yalis in the round, in corner-stones.

Literature is more certain than art in regard to this little-known animal. According to Tamilian literary and folk-story traditions the Yali has the face of an elephant and often its limbs, but is otherwise like a lion and has a leonine mane. Its strength and ferocity were beyond belief (and it seems to have had an uncommonly hearty appetite) for it could kill lions and elephants with ease, eating them up afterwards. That is as far as literature and legend go. No precise and circumstantial description is available. The old Tamilian story-tellers knew the value of restraint and undisclosed power in describing what was, undoubtedly, the most terrible of all beasts.

Art is vague about the Yali in an altogether different way, losing it in florid detail and formal curves. I give you a sketch of the Yali I think most typical, from the Kaveripakkam corner-stone in the Madras Museum (which I was very kindly permitted to sketch)—this conforms to literary traditions. I made my drawing in a dim light intentionally, and with an eye to mass, but even so the rythmic scroll-work on the head is clear; the trunk and a part of one hind limb are badly chipped, but otherwise this is the most perfect Yali I know.

Other specimens may be much more leonine. They have redundant canines and many of them (especially the ones from friezes on lintels) also have the faces, limbs, and claws of lions, altogether lacking any touch of the elephant. Many of them have a somewhat mastiff-like face, though.

Once I asked an expert on South Indian sculpture how he could say these leonine figures on friezes were Yalis and not lions. He could not tell me just why, and in the end came out with the curious theory that because lions were never common in the South only the most unmistakable representations could be called lions (no doubt borrowed from the North) and that the rest had to be styled Yalis. As if Yalis were common here!

As I said, every degree ef variation is found in the forms of Yalis, from specimens that are even more elephantine than the Kaveripakkam beast (these are often found supporting pillars—they have long trunks, large ears, and frequently stone boluses rolling free within their mouths) to wholly leonine ones. The only community that I can find in them is that all of them are purely decorative.

I should explain the last sentence. I have noticed that a feature of our art is that the marked formalism of shape and linear rhythm of our sculpture is often relieved (especially in carvings of animals) by realism, not in detail but in gesture. Formal geese that are purely rhythmic in conformation turn round towards their fellows to gaggle, as geese will; recumbent stags are shown scratching at their ears with their hind limbs; elephants push and pull and horses rear—even human figures are shown engaged in some life-like movement, for all their formalism, plucking at a thorn in a foot, combing the hair. No such realism in gesture marks the Yalis—they prance across friezes in purely decorative packs, and are rampant or couchant as the needs of their support of pillars or adornment of corner-stones require; they are formal in posture as well as in shape. Nor is this surprising, for who has seen a Yali in conversation with its fellows or scratching its ear?

Coccinia indica Acalypha indica Achyranthes aspera

WASTESCAPES

By M. KRISHNAN

I LIKE WEEDS. Some of them are rank and ugly, but some have a strong symmetry, even floral beauty. It is weeds that lend grace and character to the large-acred commons of our villages and to urban roadsides and plots of waste. Yes, I like weeds. You see, I do not own a cent of agricultural land.

In our hospitable country many of the commonest and most conspicuous weeds are foreign. They cannot compare numerically with the indigenous weeds, but where they have territory they dominate the scene, prevailing over the natives easily—that is, practically on all types of waste land and pasture.

Quite a few herbs and shrubs from the Americas (especially from South America) seem to find the Indian soil even more congenial than their home-lands, for they have run riot here and are now characteristic of our landscapes. Here are the most familiar of them peering and nodding at us through the masks of their botanical names. However, since I cannot point them out to you in person, I list them, giving you their vulgar English names wherever available : the agave (*Agave Americana*) flanking the railroads ; the Mexican Poppy (*Argemone mexicana*) growing thick on the most barren plots, decorating them with spiky, gray-green foliage and yellow flowers ; *Tridax procumbens* reclining at ease in the open (introduced originally as an ornamental plant, for its pleasantly irregular leaves and daisy-like flower heads) ; the gregarious *Alternanthera echinata* whose spiny carpet is spread on playground and meadow, even in the backyard ; *Creton spserseflorus* (bristling with androgynous spikes of flowers, in spite of its name) and *Jatropha gossypifolia*, unlovely weeds both ; the ubiquitous lantana, and the notorious water hyacinth that chokes up canals and impedes navigation.

Other countries have contributed to the flora of India. Australian acacias and eucalypti, and English herbs and shrubs are very much at home on some of our hill-tops. Other countries have even contributed bothersome weeds to our plains, such as the squat-thorned *Tribulus terrestris* from the Mediterranean coastland, less common now than, say, 25 years ago. But it is the land-hungry weeds of the tropical Americas that have influenced the flora of our wastes most permanently and profoundly.

So many exotic plants are now such prominent features of our wastes and agricultural tracts that it is not always easy to tell the natives from them, especially as some of these foreigners have been with us for centuries. In fact, though not original to the country they are now so much part of it that I think it would be better not to use the word 'foreign' in specifying them, distinguishing them from the true natives by calling the latter 'aboriginal'! However, it is possible, without consulting old books and experts, to know the indigenous plants roughly in two ways.

The weeds valued by old-time Indian herbalists for their therapeutic potency (however imaginary) are likely to belong to the country, but this test is not wholly reliable. Certain long-established introduced plants have also acquired virtue in their systems of medicine—for instance, the Mexican Poppy (known by the name 'Brahmadandu' in some Indian languages) is well known to indigenous medicine, and so is *Tribulus terrestris*—more recently the leaf-juice of *Tridax procumbens* has been put to antiseptic use in the countryside, though the plant does not seem to have found its way yet into native pharmacopoeias.

Plants with long-established vernacular names are almost certainly indigenous. Only, the name must be really old, and for this the language must be really old. Where a plant has an ancient vernacular name and is also valued for its medicinal properties, it may be taken that it is aboriginal. I list some typical weeds of our waste lands that satisfy this double test : *Achyran-*

Argemone mexicana, Lantana and Tridax procumbens, Central and South American plants now established features of our countryside.

thes aspera, the garden and ditch-side green with long, predacious bunches of thorny fruits that stick so tenaciously to the passer-by ; *Abutilon indicum*, a charming little shrub with yellow, hibiscus-like flowers (much smaller, though) and unmistakable, cog-rimmed capsules ; *Phyllanthus niruri*, tiny and inconspicuous but so good for one's liver ; *Acalypha indica*, that used to reign undisputed on rubbish heaps ; the modest, round-leaved *Centella asiatica* ; *Coccinia* (*Cephalandra*) *indica*, the crimson of whose fruit is the simile for the lips of beautiful women in classical Tamil ; *Eclipta alba* valued in many systems of medicine ; the prickly, uncouth *Solanum xanthocarpum* ; the cylindrical, much-branched 'kalli' (*Euphorbia tirucalli*) growing in dense clumps on parched land ; *Calotropis gigantea* that loves desolation, and the poisonous datura.

This is merely a sample list of indigenous weeds. However, what intrigues me about waste land flora is not its indigene, but the way it has been changing. The old Tamil poets who were faithful to nature in their plant ecology (though in few other ways !) would be puzzled by the countryside today, for it is not only weeds and wastes that have changed. But why seek such a remote contrast to prove the changes ? My son can never know the landscapes of my boyhood, marked by the massive, ovoid silhouette of the prickly pear in town and country, for this plant (also from America) which once dominated Indian scenery is now rare—so quickly did it perish before the imported cochineal insect, blighted in its rampant prime. I can remember the days when the lantana still had the charm of unfamiliarity, and I am by no means elderly.

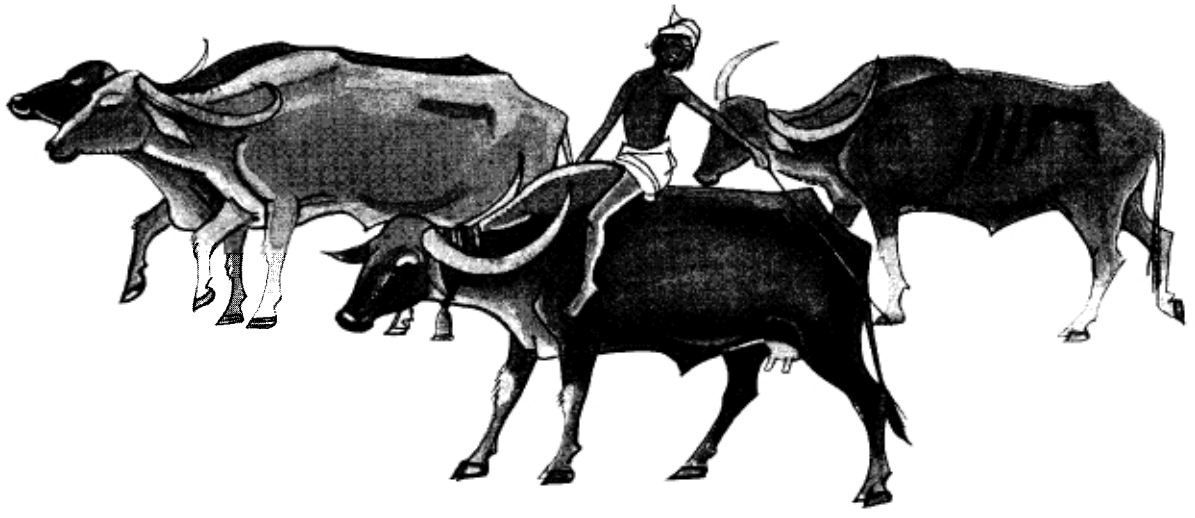
Acalypha indica ruled the rubbish dumps and roadsides near my home in Madras only some 15 years ago. An equally graceless, equally Euphorbiaceous foreigner, *Croton sparsiflorus*, now disputes the soil with it, and is gradually gaining supremacy.

No one can predict the course or periodicity of these changes—remember what befell the mighty prickly pear. We can only say that the more cunning and resourceful of these weeds are likely to survive. The forestry expert and the agricultural expert may condole with each other over the versatile, bird-distributed lantana, but it does look as if it has come to stay—and no doubt wild beasts that would lack cover otherwise, and bulbuls and a host of other birds, rejoice in the fact.

It is also safe to say that it is in the interests of agriculture and not of wild life (the two may well be antagonistic) that human effort will influence the destiny of our weeds, and that most often this influence will be eradicative.

The patriarch of Agra.
Reproduced by courtesy of Dunlop Rubber Co. (India) Ltd.

WATER BUFFALOES



A herd of water buffaloes.

THE 'Delhi buffalo' is black and weighs a ton. It has small curly horns, and often a white star on its forehead suggestive of generations of domesticity; the cows are heavy milkers. The Murrah buffalo is not so tall and not quite so black, but is also a massive and most excellent beast. Then there is the common village buffalo, an animal varying in size with locality and strain but always low-to-ground and with sweeping horns, ranging in colour from dark slate to a light pinky grey. There are many local strains of these beasts and some herds are pretty wild, the Toda herds at Ooty, for instance.

All are descended from the Indian wild buffalo, now on the verge of extinction. The readiness with which the domestic strains will interbreed with the wild, or run wild if given their freedom, shows how little they have changed inwardly.

It is this not too latent wildness in the village buff that lends it charm and character. It is the most typically Indian of our domestic stock for the wild progenitor is probably not found, truly and originally wild, outside the country, though the domesticated strain extends as far as China and has been exported to far countries. And it is one of our oldest household beasts. The earliest Tamil literature, one of the oldest literatures in the world, speaks of the water-buffalo wallowing in agricultural ditches with loving pride.

Naturally, for there is no more dependable and loyal domestic animal. Its occasional truculence is reserved for strangers and outsiders. Who has not seen the village herd being driven in, in charge of an urchin probably ten years old, riding upon the back of his favourite cow and periodically dismounting to exercise his authority over his massive responsibilities, with urgent thwacks of his stick and shrill commands? It is wonderful how gentle and forbearing these great beasts can be with children—and the grown-ups they know. Somehow, the thick hide, the robust power and the indifference to rain of these buffaloes have given rise to the stupid idea that they are insensitive, and to sayings like the Tamil "thick-skinned as a buffalo" In fact the water-buffalo is a sentimental creature, capable of deep attachments and prejudices and very intolerant of cutaneous irritations. Only to those whom it knows will the buffalo cow yield its milk, and there is nothing it loves more than to have its chin tickled and its throat scratched by the human who understands it best (not necessarily the owner, it may

be the herd-boy), and to hear reassuring clucks and suctorial noises addressed to it.

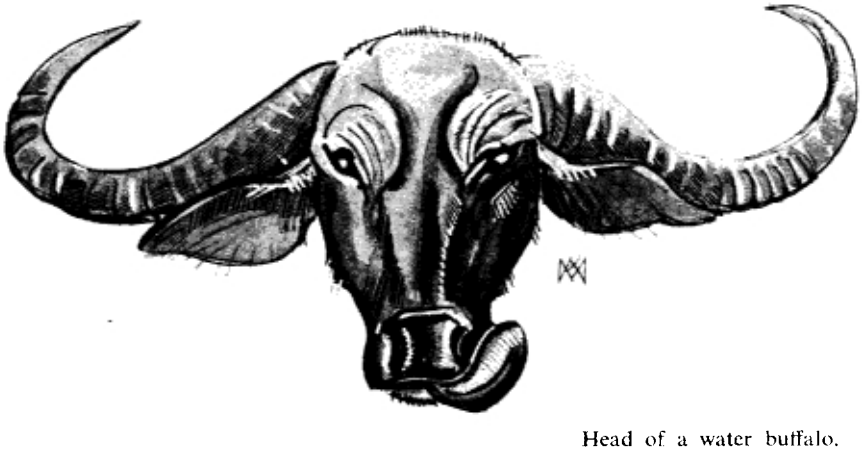
It has been said, by experts, that buffaloes are much hardier than other cattle, and no doubt this is true. A buffalo will recover from wounds that will kill a bullock, and I don't think it is entirely a question of its sturdier physique that makes it hardier—its indomitable courage may also have something to do with the fact. It is wrong to think that because it is hardier, the buffalo is less percipient or lacking in sensibilities. I should think infant mortality is highest in buffaloes among all domestic beasts, and even grown animals are sensitive to neglect, particularly of the skin, which they love to have well scrubbed and occasionally rubbed with castor oil.

It is the reckless loyalty of these beasts towards the weaker members of the herd, whether human or bovine, that really proclaims their great heart. Everyone knows that a herd of buffaloes is used in following up "the most dangerous wild animal on earth", the wounded tiger that has retreated into thick cover—the herd holds together and charges the tiger when they scent it, so creating an opportunity for the hunter to shoot it while its attentions are otherwise engaged. But how many people know that buffaloes will rescue a calf or herdsman attacked by tiger or panther by driving away the killer, though often they succeed in rescuing only the corpse?

Even a single buffalo will not hesitate to go to the rescue of such a victim from the herd. I know of such an instance, where a big, one-eyed buffalo cow, the only buffalo in the herd, charged a full-grown tiger that had sprung on an errant heifer and drove the enemy away, though it got a terrible mauling. The heifer had succumbed to the attack, but long after the tiger had been routed that gallant and gory buffalo stood fiercely on guard over the corpse, and it was all the herdsmen could do to bring it home. Incidentally, the tiger was shot a few days later, and a bulging discoloured swelling on a foreleg bore witness to the buffeting it had received at the great horns of the rescuer. It is a fact that few panthers will dare to attack a calf in a herd when there is a buffalo or two grazing with the herd, and the imprudent felines that do so soon learn better, if they survive the initial reprisal.

Our dairy experts merely regard the buffalo as a source of richer milk and more milk than zebu cows can yield, but in the countryside, thank humanity, there is a warmer feeling for the beast, especially among milkmen. The peasant who has lost his favourite bullock and the rural milkman who has lost his buffalo are truly inconsolable and only another bullock or buffalo can compensate them for the loss of bovine companionship, even more than bovine utility.

—M. KRISHNAN.



Head of a water buffalo.