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### THE HUNTER

Note his jungle tent and the net and snare in his hand The headgear is coloured to match the bullock behind which he hides when hunting

# THE LAND PIRATES OF INDIA

*An account of the Kuravers a remarkable Tribe  
of Hereditary Criminals their extraordinary skill  
as Thieves Cattle-lifters & Highwaymen &c  
and their Manners & Customs*

BY  
W. J. HATCH

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS & MAP

London  
Seeley, Service & Co. Limited  
196 Shaftesbury Avenue  
1928

**MADE IN GREAT BRITAIN**

## PREFACE

**A**S far as I know, no book for the general reader in the West has been written on the Kuraver tribe.

References have been made to this caste in books about India, and General Hervey many years ago chronicled carefully some of the crimes which were committed by them, but this volume is designed to record the romantic life of the people.

In the various gazetteers of the districts in South India published by the Government, mention is made of the castes living in the districts, and the Kuraver is named. The account is generally most interesting, but very brief. It was not possible for it to be otherwise, as the life of the caste had not been specially studied by the writers, who were hard-worked officials with other duties to perform.

Some years before the Mutiny, in 1857, a few special officers of Government, whose duties were to prevent the terrible crimes of Thuggee and dacoity, made a study of the criminal tribes, but the task was so great that it was only possible to deal with them in so far as it would help the police to understand their methods and catch them in their crimes, and, regarding South India, little or nothing was done towards giving a connected account of the life of this tribe.

In the 'nineties Mr F. S. Mullaly, District Super-

intendent of Police, wrote a useful brochure on these people, and before this the late Mr E. S. B. Stevenson, C.I.E., Deputy Inspector-General of Police, had studied their customs and habits and collected much material concerning them, but what he wrote was, I think, never published. Later, in 1905, Mr M. Paupa Rao Naidu, of the Madras Police, wrote a booklet on the tribe. This is quite a valuable little publication, but it is now out of print, as is also that by Mr Mullaly.

The most up-to-date and probably the best account of the Kuraver previously collated is that contained in *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, written by Mr Edgar Thurston, C.I.E., assisted by Mr K. Rangachari, M.A., of the Madras Museum, and published in seven volumes by the Madras Government in 1909.

It is, of course, not a full account of the tribe, but it gives many facts and some of the curious habits of the caste, and I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness for much help to these gentlemen.

My thanks are due to the Hon. Sir N. E. Marjoribanks, K.C.I.E., Member of the Board of Revenue of the Government of Madras, for placing at my disposal documents which are not usually open to the public, and for obtaining the kind permission of the Madras Government to publish certain figures.

In reading the book it should be remembered that India is a continent, and that this volume is an attempt to give an account of one of the numerous

tribes or castes occupying various portions of its widespread plains.

Much more could be written about the dare-devil life of these people, who have been called the "Land Pirates of India"; but what is contained in these pages will, I hope, cause some interest to be engendered, not only in the ethnological aspect of the tribe, but also in the efforts which are being made to introduce a new way of life and to bring them into the stream of a higher moral civilisation.

In the volumes mentioned above the name of the tribe is spelt in various ways, but I have used the word Kuraver as it is written and spelt in the Tamil country, the original home of the tribe.

W. J. HATCH.

INDIA, 1928.





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# THE LAND PIRATES OF INDIA

C H A P T E R

O N E

*The Kuraver : Who is He ?*

THE KURAVER belongs to one of the great robber castes in South India. The word is derived from the Tamil, Kuram meaning palmistry, an art which many of them practise. Most people fear him, no one will trust him, and he is haunted and hunted by the police wherever he erects his dwelling. The members of this tribe are scattered all over the Madras Presidency. Many of them wander from place to place and have no home, but a large number now live in a more settled state, and are to be found in numerous villages, both in the Tamil and Telugu country, as well as in the Canarese Nadu and in the Bombay Presidency. Often only one family will live in a hamlet, as the people object to their congregating together, and the Kuraver finds difficulty in making a living when there is a large number of his tribesmen in one locality.

According to the last census of 1921, and counting

the Tamil and Telugu-speaking members of the tribe, there are thirty-five thousand eight hundred and ninety-four in the Kurnool District, nineteen thousand six hundred and twenty-eight in the Chittoor District, nineteen thousand three hundred and thirteen in the Guntur District, sixteen thousand six hundred and seventy-three in the Kistna District, fourteen thousand and seventy-three in the Salem District, ten thousand two hundred and sixty-three in the Madura District, and the members of the tribe in most of the other South Indian districts are counted by the thousand—the total number being one hundred and thirteen thousand nine hundred and ninety males, and one hundred and six thousand nine hundred and sixteen females, or two hundred and twenty thousand nine hundred and six in the Madras Presidency, and the number in the Bombay Presidency is considerable.

In the census of 1891 they were returned as one hundred and thirty-five thousand. Their natural increase would hardly account for the great difference, and it is most unlikely that their numbers have increased to any large extent through admission from other castes, and so we may assume that the variation in the figure is accounted for by the more accurate enumeration in the last census.

In the Bombay Presidency they are known as Kaikaries—from the Tamil, Kai meaning hand ; kar, man, evidently a word connected with palmistry.

General Hervey, writing of them in 1852, says the tribe migrated from the south about four centuries ago.

Further east they are called Korwas, but they carry on their hereditary profession of thieving like their brethren in the south.

They are systematic thieves, and do not take up this method of making a living because of hard times or because work is not obtainable. They attempt to work when they are not able to steal, and as the opportunities for stealing are so numerous, they have little difficulty in gratifying their wish to become possessed of other people's property.

Indian criminals have been divided into several classes : the ordinary criminal, the habitual, the hereditary and the incorrigible ; but the Kuravers cannot be thus divided. They are all four combined, though perhaps we ought not to call them ordinary criminals. The Kuraver is hereditary, habitual and incorrigible, and yet we ought perhaps to draw the line at the last. Members of society, government and missionaries are out to change them and check them and charge them, and if they are really incorrigible and unable to be reformed their task is futile. This we cannot believe, though it requires tremendous faith in the adaptability of human nature and a belief in a power outside a man making for righteousness.



For the sake of clearness only we shall keep the term "incurrigible." The incurrigible is of two classes. There is the man who, by a defect of nature or through upbringing, has lost all count between right and wrong and who steals because he cannot help it. Well-to-do members of society have been known to steal as also the less fortunate, and they commit theft because they do not reason out with themselves the rightness or wrongness of their deed. They seem to be unaccountable for their actions. This kind of man is caught, locked up, and then let out, and at once proceeds to commit the same offence again ; and so we have the Kuravers who have been convicted six or eight times, and they still pursue their old profession. The second class of incurrigible is very different. He often does little or no stealing himself, but he directs others in the task, loving the game for the sport he obtains. The fact that society is up against him, with its prisons built to lodge him if he is caught, makes him astute, and only serves to add zest and pleasure to his existence. He has a high position in the criminal tribe. He is the brain of the organisation, directing the game from a safe place, and has honour and respect and loyal obedience rendered to him.

The Kuraver tribe includes each and all of these classes, and hence the Government have been compelled to recognise the whole tribe as criminal.

The only section of the tribe which, it is said, does not steal is the Nari Kuraver, but about them I have my doubts. There are other castes similarly registered as criminal, and of these the Kallars and Maravers are the chief divisions in South India. Both these castes are numerous, but they are not so scattered nor do their ramifications extend over such a wide area, and it is probable that they all have a common origin. The Kallar, which means robber, lives principally in the Madura District. They form themselves into a fairly compact community and live a more settled life. The Maravers are found in large numbers in the Tinnevely District, where they are a strong section of the community. These differ in many respects from the Kuravers, as they have not developed the lust for wandering. Large sections of the Kuravers are just gypsies without home, travelling from village to village, and, like the snail, they carry their house on their backs, with their other property on pack bullocks or donkeys.

The full history of the Kuraver has not yet been written for the general English reader, but what has been recorded is all against him. No one has a kind word to say for him. Everybody flings a brick at him, and thinks he has thereby done an excellent piece of service for the community. I came across a sentence in a Government gazetteer which is one of the most favourable things written

about them. It was as follows : “ Several other sub-divisions of the Kuravers, such as those which practise ear-boring and basket-making, are common in the district, but they are usually harmless folk.” It may be that the Kuravers in this subdivision have no chance to steal. The Kallars are there, and are masters in the art of cattle-lifting, and life would be unbearable should there be competition between the two criminal castes.

The common idea held by the people in South India concerning the Kuravers is that they are all thieves, and if it is known that an individual is not, then it is certain that he is going to become one. Whilst such is the case, it is better to think him a criminal and act accordingly.

The Kuraver tribe consists of the most daring and crafty of criminals. They are Dravidian people who prey upon the people in South India. Their operations are carried on everywhere in the south, but also extend as far north as Rajputana, and they have assumed various names in their progress towards the Himalayas.

Mr. M. Paupa Rao Naidu, late of the Madras Police, wrote of them : “ The police officers and the public generally detest them, and the former especially are only anxious to book them in some crime or other. Even honest village officers are ready to drive them away from their neighbourhood, their grain, vegetable and other produce

being quite unsafe from their women and children. The local magistracy is not without prejudice against them."

Speaking of a gang of about one thousand Telugu Kuravers, the Deputy Inspector-General of Police, Madras, said : "The gang all really subsist on the proceeds of crime."

Mr. H. R. Pate, I.C.S., writing of the Kuravers in the Tinnevely District, says the Kuravers are adept criminals and close students of police methods. They move about the country in gangs, committing burglary and any kind of theft that opportunity offers. . . . They are always armed with knives, which they do not hesitate to use in order to evade capture.

Many other quotations could be given, but enough has been said to show that our Kuraver bears a bad name even if he does not possess a bad character.

The Kuraver has good points. He is a sportsman; he does not believe in murder for the sake of gain, though many among the tribe have committed the crime. Many feel it is rather despicable to commit murder. It is an easy way of robbing people. A club, a blow and the deed is done, and the jewel can be carried off without the slightest difficulty ; but that is the work of a coward, and of the man who has no prowess, no skill. The Madura Kallar will kill in order to rob, but the Kuraver

does not like to do it unless there is no other course open for him to escape after the theft.

The Kuraver is a humorist and likes a joke, and the following story, recorded by the Superintendent of Government Railways, shows exactly the nature of the man whose history and life we hope to unravel in the following chapters of this book. One morning, while the butler was attending to his duties in the bungalow in Tinnevely, a man came offering a fine fowl for sale at half the usual price for such a bird. The butler, seeing that this was a good bargain, closed with the offer and paid cash down. With no small amount of pride in his ability for making a bargain he showed the bird to his wife. He was soon crestfallen as the woman could prove to him that it was one of the birds taken from their own fowl-house the previous evening. The seller was a Kuraver.

He may sometimes seem dull and heavy in appearance, but he is keen-witted and as lively as the grey squirrel which scampers over his rudely built hut in the field. When in the dock he can spar with the able lawyer, and he can more often than not out-manœuvre the police constable.

Man for man, apart from the nasty communal habit he has of stealing, the Kuraver is a very decent fellow, and those who have come closely into contact with a large number of them find that he has the spark of the divine in him, and, given a fair

chance and a patient innings, he may become a useful citizen.

“The little-minded ask, Belongs this man  
To our own nation ? But the noble hearted  
Regard the human race as all akin.”

*Panchatantra.*

*Their Origin*

“As a goat goes with its kind, so tribe with tribe.”

*Tamil Proverb.*

IT is never easy to give the origin of any caste in India. The sacred books tell us that there were divisions in Indian society of the Vedic Period, 1500-200 B.C., but nothing existed to compare with the modern social system as it is seen in India to-day, with its infinite variety of sects, each separated one from the other. Our concern, however, is with the Kuravers, who belong to one of the recognised castes, having the community spirit and caste privileges, with customs which may not be broken, and tribal law which must be obeyed. They live a life separate from all others, and are most tenacious in following their customs and the rules governing their clan. In the same manner and in the same sense these Kuravers are as self-contained a community as other castes in India. They are respected up to a point, because they are not of the lowest grade, and they are certainly feared. For example, a well-known lawyer in his city said to me: “I would never appear in a Kuraver case; they are such terrible people.” But they have full rights

according to their position in Indian society. They are watched by the police, and their movements, their absence or presence in a village, are recorded. A man does not become a Kuraver because he becomes a thief. He is a thief because he is a Kuraver. It is a matter of birth and blood, not of profession or occupation, and so the question arises : How came such a caste into being ? In considering the beginning of this robber caste we have to be careful in coming to any conclusion as to their origin. We read of no such tribe in Vedic times, though there were thieves and robbers who preyed upon their neighbours. The Kuraver comes into existence as a caste at a much later date in Indian history.

: In a poem supposed to have been written in the ninth century there is a reference to Kuramakkal, or children of Kuravers, but there is nothing definite about the caste. The Kuraver has been given a mythical beginning by some, and, of course, a god was the founder of the tribe, or beings from another world took a prominent part in establishing their position and giving them their place in society. One story, taken from the sacred books and quoted by Thurston, is as follows: Venudu, son of Agneswathu, who had directly descended from Brahma, was ruling the world, but could not beget a son and heir to the throne, and, like all mortals, died, but, unlike others, his body was not burnt or buried, but



embalmed. The seven ruling planets could not allow the country to be without a legitimate ruler, so they decided in solemn conclave to produce a man from the right thigh of the embalmed king, and gave life to their new creation and called him Nishudu. He was not beautiful to look upon, and their work was found to be a failure when regarded from the standpoint of kingship.

They made a second effort to produce one who could be fittingly crowned as king, and this time they succeeded, and called him Proothu Chakravarthi, and he was installed as monarch. This angered Nishudu, and he begged the gods to be allowed to rule, as he had been created for that purpose. But Chakravarthi had already been enthroned, and no change could be made.

Nishudu in great grief went into exile, but was recognised as ruler of the forests. He became the father of Boyas, Chenchus, Yanadis and Kuravers, and because he watched in silence to know the mind of God, certain of his descendants were given the name of Yerukulas, which comes from the Telugu word "to know"; Yerukulas and Kuravers being branches of the same stock.

Another story from the Mahabharatha is given which says that the Kuravers are descendants of Prince Dharmaraja, who, to avoid a quarrel with Duryodana, went into exile, and a woman who loved him greatly went out in search of him disguised

as a fortune-teller, and in this manner found him, and their children were known as Kuravers—from Kuru, which means fortune-teller. This would indicate that the Kuravers were originally from the north. It is true that in the Mahabaratha there were exploits performed by the Kurus which are befitting the genius of such a tribe as the Kuraver. Yet we must be slow in thinking that the old Kurus were the forebears of the modern Kuraver.

It is believed by some—Oppert, for example—that the Kuravers are of the same stock as the Vedans in Ceylon, and the Vedans are said by Taylor, in his book on anthropology, to speak an Aryan language something akin to our own English.

Had the Kuravers and the Telugu-speaking branch known as Yerukulas and the Vedans come from the north, it might be thought they would speak a northern language, but as a matter of fact the language of the Kuraver is Dravidian. If they had migrated or been driven down from the north, it must be supposed that they have entirely dropped the use of their own mother tongue and adopted the language of the people among whom they lived. This perhaps is the natural supposition, but they would certainly retain a considerable admixture of their former northern speech, whereas this is not so, as their language is a mixture of the Dravidian dialects.

Perhaps in keeping with this idea of a northern

origin is the conversation related by Mr. J. C. Molony, I.C.S., when an old Kuraver said that they were descendants of a party who landed in a huge ship on the shores of the great sea. There is little to support their northern origin. In a book entitled *The Tamils Eighteen Hundred Years Ago* it is said that the Kuravers feared nothing, and that they were out to rob and steal, and were a daring set of highway rascals.

The physique of the criminal castes, when fed properly, differs very little from that of the other castes in South India. They do not look a low type. They do not possess that flattened head, with ears low down and long, which suggests the criminal. They have a head sometimes long and narrow, but with a high forehead, suggestive of the type found in northern and western countries.

Mr. A. F. Cox, writing in 1881 in the *Manual of the North Arcot District*, gives another theory of what was reported to be their origin. Parvati, wife of Siva, wanted to perform the ceremony called Gourinomu, and, needing a winnow for that purpose, knew not how it might be obtained. She asked Siva, her husband, to produce a man who could make the winnow, and he ordered the ox on which he was accustomed to ride to make the man. This was done by Vrishabam, the ox, and the man became the ancestor of the Thappai Kuraver, as well as the Meduras, a sect who earn their livelihood by

making bamboo baskets in the same way as this division of the Kuravers. Mr. Cox hazards the opinion that, as the Arcot Kuraver is degraded in his manners and methods of making a living, they may be the illegitimate descendants of the Meduras. This would be hotly denied by the proud Kuraver.

In some parts of the Tamil country they maintain that they were originally Vedans, or hunters, and were the children of Nambi Raja, with their original home in the Madura District, and Valli Ammal was the mother of their tribe ; and the following story was related to me. Nambi was a monarch reigning in Madura when Valli was born to Anthi, whose husband was Baghavan. She had therefore a divine father and a mortal mother, and the child was beautiful to behold and grew to be a charming maiden. Another story says that she was the offspring of a deer, and Nambi Raja found her in a field.

Valli Ammal was sent, as was customary for girls, to take care of the cattle grazing on the hillside and to watch the corn growing in the fields. Their home was on a mountain called Velvi, and here Valli Ammal passed her days very happily, adored by all her people. Whilst still young and doing her daily task she became the attraction of the god Subramania, and he tried every device to win her. She was young, and could not leave her home and parents even though wooed by such a deity.

Subramania, finding his words falling on deaf ears and his love making no impression on her, went away and later returned dressed as a Sannyasi, or ascetic, and carried her off by force, after a great struggle with her caste people, and made her his wife. Like most Indian women, she soon became content with her lot, the wife of a god, and, even though taken away by stealth and perhaps against her will, bowed to circumstances, and became the mother of a family which has now developed into the Kuraver caste in the Tamil country, the Yerukulas in the Telugu District, and with other names further north, such as Kaikaries, Korachas and Korwas.

A slightly different story is told by other divisions of Kuravers, and these say that many generations ago Nambi Raja begot three sons from a concubine. The first was Vedan, the father of the Vedans, the hunter caste. The second was Irulan, perhaps the father of the caste bearing that name, who are predatory in their habits, and are a very uncivilised tribe, living in the jungles, and most shy at seeing strangers ; and the third was Kuraven, who became the father of the caste known by that name. This account of their origin is in harmony with the theory adopted by Oppert, though in this case the Vedans have their origin in India, and we may easily assume that they migrated to Ceylon and settled on the island at a later period. If we agree

to accept the theory that Madura was the country of origin of the Kuraver tribe, and that Nambi Raja was one of the chief forebears in the history of the caste, and that Valli Ammal also played a great part in the early beginnings of the tribe, we then want to know why it was that the tribe became criminal in purpose and devoted its energies to the nefarious work of thieving which has continued to this day. Imagination is necessary, and we need have no misgiving at what we shall discover by allowing our minds to wander back and ponder over life as it must have been lived in olden days in South India.

King Nambi ruled over a contented people, and held sway in his circle and governed with all the éclat befitting his position. His wife was queenly and his concubines were numerous, and his greatness was measured by the number of sons they produced. The sons were many, and with them he could stand at the gate to defy all enemies. His large household and the growing number of his dependents compelled him to demand more support from his people, and they gave him as much as they could spare, and the huntsmen shared their spoils with their royal master. Children increased, the needs of the families became greater, sons were given in marriage, and daughters were provided with husbands, and so great became the pressure of population on the land that food was

not sufficient to supply all their needs, and the king's sons began forcibly to take more than their share. Hatred arose against those who were in authority, taxes were refused, quarrels sprang up, and bitterness and civil strife ensued. There was not sufficient room for all of them, and the more daring decided to seek new fields where life would be easier, and they could live as freebooters and roam at pleasure.

In the country where Nambi ruled Subramania had been married to Valli by stealth, and they decided to leave the hillside, find pastures new, and seek adventures and their fortunes in what was to them new country in districts beyond. Others accompanied them, but few had been accustomed to work. They had been hunters and experts with the snare and net, and they had been taught to use their wits when out among the wild animals of the forest.

More than this they would not do, so they became gypsies and wandered from place to place, begging their food ; the people gave to them, and when enough was not given and their hunger great, they took what was at hand and fed themselves. Begging was never a disgrace in India, and no shame would therefore be attached to this mode of living, and there was not much that was derogatory in increasing their income by doing a little stealing.

Disinclination to hard work and love of adventure drove them from their home, and, finding a docile people wherever they wandered, they found it easier to beg and steal than to work. They took to the criminal path of the robber, and, as the principle which guides Indian social life is "as is the father so should be the son," the way was made for all to follow.

This theory of their origin does not coincide with that given by Mr. Paupo Rao Naidu, who has made a study of the caste, but more especially from the police point of view. He agrees that they have a Tamil origin, and that they were originally men from one stock, but they were originally servants of the temples in South India, and were driven out from their position by a higher class of priests who came at a later period. We have no historical records, I think, supporting this, and the only reason for holding this view is that the names of their *gotras* or clans have a religious significance which seems to indicate that they had a special function to perform in the temples.

I should hesitate to accept this explanation ; first, because it is not such a natural theory as the one indicated above. It is true that temple service in India is not considered to be connected with moral goodness and holiness in the Western sense, but it assumes that men who were serving the gods left this temple service and betook themselves



straightway to the life of freebooters. Secondly, names having a religious significance are often given as a matter of custom, and no account is taken of the meaning or origin of the word which might previously have had a religious meaning. I am rather inclined to think that the names which had a religious significance were adopted in their *gotras* with a view to deceive, and to make people think that they were religious devotees rather than members of robber bands. They went round the countryside pretending to be temple servants, and because of this they were received and supported, and it was a splendid method of Kuraver deception to lead the people to imagine they were members of an honourable profession.

*Seventy-five Years Ago*

SIR W. H. SLEEMAN had just finished breaking up the gangs of Thugs. He had been assisted by a splendid band of Englishmen, of which General C. R. W. Hervey was a distinguished member. These Thugs were professional robbers and garotters, and their principle was to kill the victim they wished to plunder. Their motto was "Kill, then rob," and their method was to poison or strangle the traveller and then take his property, and there was no means of checking their depredations till Sleeman formed a special department to deal with them. Individuals among the Indian nobility were afraid of making any attempt to curb their savagery, and no government but that controlled by an Englishman would dare to take measures to stop the crimes. Merchants left their business to go to a distant town and never returned. Travellers were seen on the high road, but they never reached their homes. They simply disappeared. In this way hundreds of the population were mysteriously lost to view. The gangs were so well organised that no ordinary forces of the law could touch them, and they had a free field, and the high road was considered to be a place of death,

and that of the cruellest kind. Sleeman, with his selected officers in the Thuggee Department, so worked that the roads were made comparatively safe, and these terrible assassins had to give up their profession.

Alongside of these Thugs there existed the Kuraver, or, as he was called in Southern Maharatta country, the Kaikarie. General Hervey claims to have discovered the existence of the tribe, and that it was found all over Southern India. He says : " They were extremely formidable because of their numbers and from the boldness and intelligence displayed in their depredations." It was also reported to Government that " in no class with which we were acquainted had the crime of dacoity been found more completely systematised and adopted as a hereditary profession, and in none would it be found more difficult of complete eradication." That has been found true, for the task has not yet been accomplished.

Officers of the old East India Company were compelled to listen to the stories told by villagers of the depredations of these wild tribesmen, who would suddenly pounce upon a village in the dead of night with lighted torches, sometimes carrying swords and bludgeons. If there was any opposition to the removal of property there was no hesitancy in using the weapon. Cries for mercy or an appeal for gentle treatment had no effect.

A rich banker, a feeble and aged man, was speared by a dacoit, and a young man of the house, seeing the plight of his grandfather, rushed forward to assist the stricken man. The Naik, or leader, cried out : “ Fifty rupees over your share of the spoils if you kill him,” and the lad was slain on the spot.

Two of the dacoits were caught and hanged, but shortly afterwards the house in which the robbery took place was burnt to the ground and the whole family was ruined.

In another robbery, quoted in the *Calcutta Review* of December 1860, the gang tried to take the silver bracelets from the wrists of the son of the house, and it was seemingly impossible. One dacoit suggested that the hands should be cut off, another suggested that the arms should be broken, but whilst they were rubbing oil and using rice husks the ornaments came off, leaving the lad’s arms excoriated and lacerated beyond description. If anyone in such a case were punished, it would probably more often be someone who had never taken part in the crime.

Statistics were published, covering a period of three years, for the Madras Presidency, in which it was stated that there were three thousand seven hundred and thirty-seven cases of gang robbery, in which twenty-one persons were murdered, one hundred and seventeen tortured, seven hundred and thirteen wounded, and three hundred and thirty-

seven suffered personal violence. The value of property stolen amounted to Rs.4,29,720-0-0, of which only Rs.20,249-0-0 had been recovered. As many as fourteen thousand nine hundred and seventy-five persons were supposed to have been implicated, and of six hundred and sixty-nine persons sent up for trial only nineteen were convicted.

The professional dacoit and the hereditary robber had a splendid field, and our Kuraver gloated over his plunder. Practically no written records of the tribe before this time exist, and only from isolated passages and notes in reports can we piece together a connected account of their history and obtain a knowledge of their life.

There is no doubt that for many years the police were hand in glove with the gangs rampaging round the countryside, and that they took part of the spoils of the robber bands. Sir Thomas Munro, in Madras, within a period of seven years convicted ninety-four per cent. of police employees. Of one hundred principal Indian District Police Officers in that period, not more than half a dozen were free of peculation, and some time later a member of the "Torture Enquiry Commission," instituted by the Government, wrote : " I have no hesitation in stating that the so-called police of the mofussil is little better than a delusion. It is a terror to well-disposed and peaceable people, none whatever to thieves and rogues ; and if it was abolished *in toto*

the saving of expense to the Government would be great, and property would not be a whit less secure than it is now."

What then could be expected but that hereditary robbers would carry on their nefarious work without hindrance and the people would be in fear of their lives? But, let this be said, it was not a general principle for the Kuraver or Kaikarie to kill the victim he wished to rob. His object was twofold : to rob and to escape punishment ; and if he could be sure of plunder and equally certain of not being reported upon and punished, his victim was allowed to escape with his life. If these two objects could not be obtained, then the worst might take place. The Thugs and the dacoits made robbery a religious matter, but the god of the one enjoined murder, whereas in the other it was only permissible in case of no other way of escape.

It was because of such facts that the Madras Police was reorganised to cope with the Kuraver and other dacoits which overran the peninsula. Many of the old police were members of criminal tribes, and those who were not were afraid to meet the organised robber gangs. As soon as news reached them that a gang robbery had taken place they would be called together, and, taking their time, would march to the village beating drums and carrying torches, and, as they entered the village, would fire off an old musket. The only

thing such a company could do was to assure the villagers that they had come, and that therefore the robbers had probably gone, and that as the villagers themselves had escaped with their lives they should be grateful. That was all. The men who had committed the crime would certainly not be caught by such a force. The police would then make a show, and prove that they had done something towards capturing the culprits, and so they would proceed to arrest some poor, helpless fellow who could not defend himself, and try to get him punished. Not much else could be done by such men, and the real dacoit was assisted rather than hindered in his profession by the police.

Here is an interesting story showing a clever method of theft. The man concerned impersonated a recruiting officer for the cavalry, and went to the village pressing men to join up, and pointing out the splendid position they would have in the corps and the high wages they would draw. He collected about two hundred men, and marched them to headquarters in order to present them to the English officer. On the way he drilled them and promoted some of them to jemadars, who gave him valuable presents for his kind offices. On reaching the town he told them that he must go and arrange with the officer to receive them, and, as this should be done in style, he borrowed a horse and a pair of gold bangles from one of them, and left, requesting them

to wait till his return. They waited, but he never came back, and they discovered that he was an impostor, and they had been duped and relieved of their hard-gotten gains.

Those who have had to deal with the robber tribes of India have always been struck with the keenness they exhibit in their profession. This applies to all branches which practise dacoity. Their tenacity is exhibited in the report which General Hervey sent to the Government concerning the Kuravers who formed the "Lop-handed Gang" in 1867. There were nine men who had committed many dacoities, and on one occasion carried out a raid in the house of a wealthy merchant in a native state. They were caught and brought before the magistrate, who was an Indian. He forthwith gave orders that the right hand of each man should be chopped off. This was done and the men sent away.

As soon as the wounds were healed they straightway went on to the high road again, and continued their exploits for years until the leader and one of the men were caught in the Nizam's territory. They were condemned to transportation for life, and the gang thus broken up.



*Sorcery and Magic*

**A**LL primitive peoples believe in occult powers, and it is to be feared this belief is only too prevalent in Western lands, where education might have been expected to remove its influence. The mascot is very much in evidence, and, though it is generally considered as an object for a joke when a reason is asked for its use, yet there is a lurking feeling that it might ward off some evil, or that something unfortunate might happen if it is not carried.

As long as the mascot is a subject for fun it has little influence on life, but when it is thought to represent some unseen magical power, or to possess some mysterious spirit, it has an effect which may be pernicious and undesirable, and inevitably leads to a crude superstition with baneful effects on human character.

The old alchemist, living in a cave, working in the dim light of a tallow candle, mixing strange-coloured chemicals, refusing to speak to passers-by except in monosyllables, groaning whilst at his task, and moaning in his sleep, had a weird influence in his day. He was a sorcerer as well as a pseudo-scientist, and was supposed to control hidden forces

which acted under his orders and carried out his behests.

This belief in the power of sorcery still exists, and there are Kuravers who practise it in India, and I have had instances of the effect of the belief. The first-born child of a man died three days after birth. The father of the child was away at work in the fields when the event took place, and the grandfather, who was present, at once and without informing his son or the proper authority, buried the child at the back of his hut near the door. He acted thus for he believed his enemy would come and take the child's body if buried in a distant grave, and, after dissecting it and distilling the oils by boiling, would with certain *mantrams* (spells) sprinkle drops of the liquid on the posts of his house, and bring ruin to the family. In the case of an older child's death it is believed that their enemy, through a sorcerer, will take the bones, hair and teeth, and bury these portions of the body in land belonging to the father, and so prevent crops becoming ripe for the harvest.

In another case a Kuraver buried his child in his house, and then went and built another hut near by, watching the house he had left so that no one should enter or remove anything from it. After a certain time, when decomposition sets in, the necessity for watching ceases to exist.

This belief in sorcery is shared by others beside

the Kuraver, and it acts and reacts upon the individual, and often makes life a burden, causing much restlessness in many families.

An old Kuraver told me with much glee how the people are gulled by the wizard or the man who claims to practise magic. Kiripettai Raman was a well-known expert in alchemy, medicine and native drugs. He was also a smart thief, and used his magic to help him in his nefarious work. One story told of him is as follows : He was in need of money, and magic was practised to extort it. The magician took quicksilver and drugs and chose a young and tender tree, perfect in form, and then placed the chemicals in the bark, where they would be absorbed in the sap, and after a certain time, known by experiment to the magician, the tree would begin to wither and die. The drugs were inserted unknown to the party to be influenced, and the magician then called on the man whom he wished to captivate and allure. The crowd gathered to see what the magician would do. He laid down his demands, worked himself into a kind of frenzy, and stated the amount to be given him, saying that unless the money were handed over at once a terrible calamity would befall the victim. He then pointed to the tree he had treated with his drugs, and the people saw that it was quite normal in appearance. Then he chanted mantrams, and with his spell cursed the tree. There was silence and he waited his time,

and then, before the eyes of the astonished villagers, the tree began to fade and wither. He announced in solemn tones that such a calamity would happen to the man whom he bewitched. The people at once began to urge their friend to pay the money so as to prevent such a calamity befalling him, and the magician went off with his gains.

Not many men can become sorcerers, as a great deal of courage as well as mental alertness is needed to become a master of this Black Art. It is also a dangerous profession, and often involves visits to a cemetery and work which must be done in the dark.

A place of burial is always associated with evil spirits. It is the abode of ghosts, demons, hobgoblins, and any or all of them are hard upon the intruder whom they suspect of interference in their own particular realm. It is difficult to persuade a sorcerer to explain his methods or show his art. If he is locked up in a jail he will perhaps yield and go into some detail concerning the things necessary to be done. I assured one sorcerer that I should not attempt to use the knowledge he would give me to ruin or kill any enemy, and being an Englishman he trusted me to keep my word. It was, however, with great diffidence that he told me his method, and he assured me he had actually brought about death by his magic and sorcery ; and upon my expressing some disbelief he said that it was a miracle

to an Englishman, but it was a common event to an Indian, and that there was no doubt as to its effectiveness, as he had personal experience of its power.

The method for dealing with an enemy is to make in secret a clay model of the man to be cursed. A sufficient amount of clay must be brought ; head, arms, legs and body must be properly formed, and in the joints thorns must be fixed. The model should be about two feet high. After being duly shaped, with eyes inserted and thorns properly inserted in all the joints, the name of the enemy is written on a piece of paper, and the time within which he must die. If he is to die within six hours the time stated on the paper must be six days. If he is to die within six days the time stated must be six weeks. The paper is tied round the neck of the clay figure, and a grave is dug as near the enemy's house as possible, and the image is placed face downward with the head towards the south. It is then covered with leaves, and earth is thrown in until the grave is filled level with the surrounding land. The next step in the proceedings is to secure saffron, rice, and the blood of a chicken. A mixture is made and is sprinkled on the ground round the grave and up to the house where the enemy resides. Then follows another process. A visit is secretly made to a wood, and a crow's nest is obtained to be used as part of a sacrifice. A new earthen pot is purchased, and an oven made by the side of the



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Guarding a tapioca field He sleeps on the cot



grave. A bird known in Tamil as “ karunkuruvi ” (English : king crow ; Latin : *Dicrurus ater*) is snared, killed, and put on the crow’s nest, and the whole is covered by the pot and then set on fire and completely reduced to ashes. The sorcerer next day brings a cocoanut, and a hole is made through the shell, and rice and some of the ashes from the sacrificial fire, containing the remains of the crow’s nest, the bird, and the spirit of Agni, the fire god, are put into the nut, and then, in silence and by stealth, the nut is taken and buried in front of the house of the man doomed to die. This having been properly and secretly accomplished, mantrams must be chanted, and the special powers of the sorcerer are here brought into action. The mantram is a series of slogums having a bewitching power over gods and demons in the upper and lower worlds. Neither gods nor demons can resist the sound of a mantram properly chanted or spoken by an authorised person, and the sorcerer, being such, controls the powers in the spirit world.

He begins by chanting in a monotone the name of his deity, and explains what he wants to be done. He tells the god where his enemy resides, and that he must die, or that his crops must be ruined, and he names the days or hours within which this must take place. He also appeals to the spirits dwelling in the mountains and the giants inhabiting the forests.



After explaining his purpose the sorcerer proceeds to threaten his god that should he not do as he is requested dire results will follow and his own existence will be in jeopardy. The sorcerer is out on a desperate business, and, as his god has the nature of a devil and is not moved by gentleness, the sorcerer is stern in his address. He says, "If you do not descend I shall come and put a thorn through your nose, and you will find it difficult to breathe. If you do not help me in my desperate plight I shall cut you in pieces, hang your limbs on the branches of a tree, and the twigs will bear the weight of your arms, legs and bones. Come at noon precisely, catch my enemy, and bring him to the grave. Let me have the flesh which is outside him, the heart that is within him, and the blood which runs in his veins.

"Bring him ! Bring him ! If not, I will cut your shoulder on the right, and on the left, and I will grip you by the throat till you are dead, dead, dead." And quoting the name of his guru and the mystical word "Aum," the mantram ends. If the spell has been properly chanted the enemy dies at the appointed time. Through the action of the thorns in the joints the man has great agony in all his parts, his bones get loose, his organs cease to function, and he dies. His friends then take him to the cemetery, and he is buried in the usual way. Thus ends the first act, and I have been assured

that this has happened, and that some have seen men who had thus died through the power of sorcery. This, however, is not all of the wonders of Kuraver sorcery. After three days the dead man can be brought to life again, but this is a dangerous task, and every sorcerer thinks carefully before venturing on the proceedings, but this, too, is believed to have taken place, and it is done in the following way. In the dead of night the sorcerer goes to the grave of the man, removes the earth, and chants a long mantram which brings him back to life. He then gives him two balls of rice, which he eats, and a conversation takes place. After a sufficient time has elapsed there is no more need to settle up old scores ; the sorcerer grips the dead man's hair and pulls it out by the roots, and with it some of the nerves of his body. To be quite sure that he has the man's nerves, he cuts out a section of his leg above the ankle. Wasting no time, he fills in the grave and makes a bee-line for his home, where he secretly dries the nerves, and keeps them for use on some other helpless man who may happen to offend him, or any other individual who proves to be an enemy.

The nerves of a man who has died by sorcery are very potent and efficacious in removing an enemy. The nerves can be used where the former complicated method demanding a model, a mantram and sacrifice cannot be practised. It was explained

that should the enemy be a man of wealth, or some one holding a high official position, it would be impossible to get near enough to him without being seen and detected. With the nerves of a former victim death can be brought about with ease and with practically no risk after these organs have been once obtained. In order to make them fully effective the sorcerer attends a temple where a buffalo sacrifice is being offered, and after giving a bribe to the priest the nerves are dipped in the sacrificial blood offering, and the only thing left to be done is to bury a portion in the burying ground belonging to the village where the enemy lives, and it is bound to have its effect on the man to be punished. If this is not done it may be buried in the land belonging to the enemy, and, as its action is certain, death will follow in due course. In all cases of death by sorcery there is great pain, especially in the joints, and by this it is known that the magic has had its effect, and the verdict is "Death by sorcery."

If a sorcerer possesses no nerves taken from a man who has been acted upon by his magic, he may take the nerve of another, and hence it is that the sorcerer is feared, and he in turn lives in fear, as his occupation is such that demons and ghosts and hobgoblins may pounce upon him when he goes rifling a graveyard in search of potions and things necessary to carry on his necromancy and his other nefarious tasks.

He himself runs great risks, probably greater than those of the enemy he wishes to destroy, and this has a deterrent effect, and prevents the art being studied and practised by any but men of peculiar character and desperate disposition, with a love of the weird and occult.

Another effective way of removing an enemy is as follows : The cobra is a very deadly snake, and is found almost everywhere in South India. The poison is extracted from the teeth, and thorns are soaked in the liquid till they are saturated. A friendship is formed with the washerman, and the poisoned thorns are inserted in the clothes of the enemy, and are taken to him by the washerman. Unsuspectingly the man puts on his shirt or lies on his sheet, and he is pricked, but, thinking it is an ordinary thorn so common in India, he takes no heed, and turns over only to get another prick. In due course the poison enters his system and the man becomes ill and dies. Who is to say he was bewitched or poisoned ?

When this method of removing one's enemy was being explained to me another old Kuraver sorcerer said : " Yes, but I know an antidote to that," and told me that to prevent this having effect, *gram*—a common Indian grain—can be obtained, and certain drugs mixed with it and boiled, and if eaten the effects of the poison are nullified.

Sorcerers are greatly feared, as they are expected

to do such uncanny things and perform such weird and terrible ceremonies. In some places, should the first-born child die, one of its fingers is cut off lest a sorcerer should exhume the body and extract its brain, and with it do much harm to his enemies. A body minus a finger is useless to a sorcerer. Whilst writing this a Kuraver called on me and said that his brother had died, and his death was brought about by sorcery.

I myself, so it is said, was secretly operated upon by a sorcerer some years ago, but he only succeeded in making me ill when I was inquiring into a murder case.

*Divisions of the Kuraver Tribe*

IN the early days the tribe was no doubt homogeneous and governed probably by one set of laws, but this is not true to-day. Like all other castes in South India, they are divided into many sects and sub-divisions. The Kuravers of one district will not inter-dine with those of another, and often they will not inter-marry. They are most jealous concerning their position in the various divisions, and disputes take place about their status and priority even in the same district.

I think there is a natural explanation for these different divisions in the tribe. They had a common origin and sprang from one family, as did the Jews, but with the growth of the tribe a dispersion took place, and, from force of circumstances and the nature of their occupation, they were compelled to go further afield, until the whole country was covered with their representatives. Their peculiar method of making a livelihood made it impossible for them to live in one particular district and remain there for any length of time. It was also impossible for the original nomads to keep their gangs intact, as they would in course of time become too large. When they became too unwieldy for the command

of one man some members would move off, and the less adventurous would settle down in a hamlet, and others who wished to wander still would form themselves into a new gang, and turn to a different direction and keep to another district. In this way members of the tribe wandered up to the Bombay Presidency and others settled in the Telugu country. Some went to the Canarese Nadu, others again went as far as Bengal and the United Provinces ; but as we go further north their numbers become less, and this, with the fact that they use words of Tamil origin, shows that their original home was probably in the south.

In the early days of the tribe it is evident there were two main sections, and these exist even to-day—the nomadic and the more settled branch. The latter term is relative, as it would not be possible for even the more settled members to remain permanently in one place in olden times on account of their profession.

Those who did not wish to live the nomadic life built a hut on the outskirts of a hamlet or village. It was generally in a place where there was a full view of the street or surrounding country, and the door was made of light bamboo and tied in position with a string. Here they would do a little work at basket-making, and would gain their real living by thieving or blackmail. As the family grew up marriages would be arranged for the sons, but after

marriage where were they to live ? Not in the same hamlet as the father, for the people would object, and, moreover, there would not be sufficient area within a reasonable distance for them to roam over and steal. So they would go to a new village and settle.

It must be remembered that the Kuraver tribe is not formed by the segregation of all the thieves and robbers in a district. It is not a question explained by the adage : " Birds of a feather flock together." There are thieves in all castes in India, and these exist apart from and in addition to the robber caste known as Kuraver. These Kuravers are one family, having blood relationship ; they are a distinct people living in India, as the Welsh are a distinct people living in Great Britain. They are not a group of people who have formed themselves into a mere Trade Union for the purpose of helping each other in their common occupation, though they are a Trade Union, with definite rules and a particular kind of government ; but it is not a common occupation or purpose which has brought them together. There is a blood relationship between them. They are a race sprung from a common stock, and the difference between the Kuraver thief and the ordinary thief in other castes is this : in the case of the ordinary thief, stealing is subsidiary to his making a living by agricultural or other methods, whereas in the case of the real



Kuraver agricultural or other work is subsidiary to his making a livelihood by thieving.

From early times these two main branches of the tribe—namely, the nomadic group and the village settler—have existed. These are not divisions in the strictly scientific sense, but the distinction must be made when considering the position of the tribe and the reasons for the divisions which have grown up among them. Pressure of population and the love of adventure made the first Kuravers leave their birthplace and, being men of a daring spirit, accustomed to the reckless life of the hunter on the hills, they carried the same passion wherever they went, and, as they were *budmashes*, the peace-loving people of the plains were afraid to offend them, as opposition would only make them desperate. These same dividing forces have been at work throughout the history of the tribe. The population has increased among other castes, and in their case the farmers have brought more jungle under cultivation and produced more food for their families ; but in the case of the Kuraver such a policy has not been observed. He, true to his hereditary instincts, kept to the profession of thieving, and was compelled to move on when the supply was not sufficient to meet the demand of his larger and ever-increasing family.

Only a limited number of professional thieves could make a living in any one given locality. The

law of supply and demand works here in the case of the thief. The increasing numbers of the tribe made it difficult to steal enough to meet the needs of their community. Farmers were not prepared to keep on allowing thefts to take place without making attempts to catch the culprit. The Indian farmer is a patient being, and he often allows his sheep, fowls and grain to be stolen, and will not make an effort to find out and prosecute the man who has done it. If he does catch the rogue, and a conviction is obtained, there are the criminal's friends, who are bound together by ties of blood, as also by the fraternal feeling of having a common purpose in life, and they will see to it that the farmer loses more than he gains by sending the Kuraver to prison. Whilst this is true in many cases, yet the wrath and ire of the cultivator are sometimes roused and reach breaking-point; then he will join with his caste friends and bring such communal pressure to bear upon the suspected thief that after a time, finding the opposition so strong against him, the Kuraver feels it will be better to pack up his few belongings and seek pastures new.

There is another reason for his dispersion, and, though perhaps it would be more true in these modern days, when the police force is highly organised, yet it is likely to have had due effect years ago. When there was an increase of theft in a district, Government and police pressure became

stronger, and it was not the custom to regard a man as honest until he had been proved to be guilty, and whenever suspicion settled upon a Kuraver, and he was seen spending Rs.20 a month when his natural income would be only Rs.10, they began to put on the thumbscrew, and the man felt that discretion was the better part of valour, and would make for another village, where he might start afresh and be relieved from the Government officials' special solicitation concerning his method of earning a living.

The Kuraver, like the farmer upon whom he preys, is subject to the uncertainty of the seasons in India. A bad year for the farmer and the failure of a monsoon affects the Kuraver in much the same way as it does the farmer. He suffers through famine conditions. If the grain is not produced and there is no food for the cattle, the farmer cannot keep them, and the Kuraver therefore cannot steal them. Hence the failure of the monsoon will often make the Kuraver migrate to another place, and many have gone to the tea plantations, and even to Ceylon and Penang. The forces that act upon the ordinary community act upon the professional robber, and he has to put up with the vicissitudes of the climate like his more honest brother, and go elsewhere to obtain the support necessary for his family.

We have therefore natural reasons for the scattering

of the criminal Kuraver community all over Southern India and parts further north.

It might be asked that, if they all sprang from one source, why are there these strong lines of demarcation between them, and why is it they are not more united and homogeneous? They now observe strict rules among the various sub-sects, not inter-marrying or inter-dining even in the same district. There is a natural explanation for this too.

The men making up such a caste as the Kuraver are naturally men of spirit and adventure and great daring. They are not actuated in their conduct by the ordinary moral rules of society. They may have quarrels over the division of the booty or over the area of the territory in which they had a right to plunder, and they thus became separated from the main division. There is no feud so bitter as that between brothers. The old quarrel is kept up for years, and in the third or fourth generation, when the children have perhaps no definite idea concerning why their people have kept aloof, they yet see no reason for uniting together, and the division has become permanent and they live apart, even though they sprang from one stock.

There has been no literature common to the tribe which could serve as a binding force among them, and they could not have read it had it existed. Means of communication were difficult as the distance was great. Many were "wanted" by the police

in the district where they were born, and so they did not return to renew old acquaintances and run the risk of falling into the clutches of the law. Thus in time they became separated and formed themselves into local communities to protect themselves, and as the caste spirit with which India is riddled makes each community look with some amount of suspicion upon all others outside itself, so the barriers thus made became very strong, and the divisions have become permanent, and any coalescing among the people who should naturally be one undivided community has become impossible.

It is now generally agreed that there are four major divisions in the tribe, namely (1) Sathepati, (2) Kavadi, (3) Manapati, (4) Mendragutti, and then under these there are many sub-divisions which are based upon the apparent means adopted for making a living.

Mr. Paupa Rao Naidu explains these divisions as follows :—

1. Sathepati is a corruption of Sathupati, which means adorning a Hindu deity with flowers, jewels and vestments.

2. Kavadi is a semi-circular pendant carried on a pole, having in it offerings for the god in the temple.

3. Manapati means singing the praises of a god in the temple.

4. Mendragutti is a corruption of Menrikutti,

which means stitching a pair of shoes and offering it to a temple, a custom still practised at Tirupathi and other shrines.

The main sub-divisions are as follows :—

(1) Kaval Kuravers, (2) Uppu Kuravers, (3) Thappai Kuravers, (4) Karuvepillai Kuravers, (5) Pam Kaikaries, (6) Pariki Yerukulas or Pachakuthi Kuravers, (7) Koot Kaikaries, (8) Bhanjantree Kuravers, (9) Ram Kaikaries, (10) Nari Kuravers, (11) Koonachi Kuravers, (12) Sadepati Kaikaries, (13) Koodekatti Kuravers, and there are other divisions generally based on occupation, though not necessarily their present occupation, but what was formerly carried on by their clan.

We have devoted a chapter to the Kaval section. The Uppu Kuraver was so called because he was a salt merchant, “Uppu” meaning salt, which he obtained by the sea coast and carried on pack bullocks and donkeys to inland towns. This sect never go to a court of law to settle their disputes. Thappai Kuravers were bamboo-splitters, and from bamboos they made baskets. Karuvepillai is a leaf obtained in the jungle much used for giving flavour to curries; the women sold these leaves and were called Karuvepillai Kuravers. Those who charm snakes are known as Pam Kaikaries. The Pachakuthi section were ear-borers and earned money by the art of tattooing. Koot Kaikaries are dancers, as the name indicates. Bhanjantree Kuravers are

musicians. Ram Kaikaries are stone workers. The favourite food of the Nari Kuravers is the jackal or fox, and hence his name, "Nari," meaning a jackal. They will also eat the eagle, and it is a special pleasure if they can catch the bird whilst he is feeding upon carrion. The Koonachi or Koochi sect are brush-makers, and the Sadepati section are a jungle people making baskets. The Koodekatti division make slings and nets as well as baskets. But these sub-divisions are not radical because not racial. Such sects may have strict dividing lines, and one division may not inter-marry with the others, but their names indicate in several cases occupational rather than really blood differences, and they may well be considered as belonging to one stock.



#### THE MINSTREL

These men can always draw an audience and the lyrics they sing are often in praise of some god or they describe the exploits of a hero





*Kuraver Ethics*

“Let him take who has the power  
And let him keep who can.”

THESE two lines sum up the Kuraver moral code, and his thought centres round these two principles.

The Kuraver is a fatalist and takes his life very philosophically, but he is not a mere stoic. He is not hardened in the sense that he has no feeling. He is human, and has a recognised place in the caste system of the country, but as his moral principles are not normal, he has to be treated in a special way. Society is up against him : laws have been codified, elaborated and framed in the Legislative Councils to prevent him having his freedom, but, like a philosopher, he governs his conduct and tries to dodge the representatives of law so as to get as little inconvenience as possible from those who object to his depredations. His business in life is stealing. He does not believe that he was intended to earn his livelihood by the sweat of his brow. Wits, to be developed by a special training, were given to him to be used for making a living. It is often openly declared, but the more diplomatic say

nothing about it, and just steal, and obtain a comfortable competence, their income being supplemented by that which is earned in what society calls an honest way.

There is a case on record when a Judge of the High Court had to try a gang of men similar to the Kuravers, but who were only day-thieves, and he sentenced them to one calendar month's imprisonment, and his chief reason for giving such a light punishment was because "the prisoners merely followed the practice of their ancestors and did not consider it wrong to thief." Government afterwards passed orders that the maximum period of imprisonment should be awarded to all such classes (*Some Records of Crime*, Vol. II., p. 382).

When considering the ethics of thieving the Kuraver considers the case in all its bearings, and not only from the standpoint of the supposed owner of the property.

It is true that society maintains certain rules, one of which is "Thou shalt not steal," but this is purely an arbitrary law. Why should a man not take wood from a forest as he takes air from the atmosphere round him? When a man breathes is he stealing air? When he takes water out of the sea is he a thief? When he lets sunshine and light into his house can he be prosecuted for theft? What is all this discussion about "mine" and "thine," when God made all things for men's enjoyment and use?

Freedom is the principle accepted and practised by the Kuraver. Society should not make laws which bind men and which take away their liberty. If they do, his belief is that these must be circumvented, for life is not worth living if it has to be governed by such inconvenient conditions, and, believing that Moses and all who support him are wrong in maintaining that the Eighth Commandment is binding on all communities, tries to organise tribal life so that the law shall be abrogated. The idea in the word "mine" when considered from his own personal standpoint is very clear, and he has no doubt as to its content ; but "thine" has no meaning, except that it may become his own personal possession when the fates decree that he is to obtain that privilege.

The Kuraver is not an individualist in his thinking or in his action. He does group-thinking, and always believes in group-action. He is a Trade Unionist of the most thorough-going kind, and united action is a necessity in his tribal existence. He must have the support of his caste because he lives dangerously, and is always faced with the fact that if he slips his fall may land him in a jail, and if he should make a blunder a great deal of trouble will come to his people. He often has to sink his personality in the tribal group, and complete obedience must be given to the head. There is military rule in matters relating to marauding, and

no one is allowed to act on his own initiative. The individual Kuraver has often to act alone, but this is under orders of the chief representing the gang, and he is acting then only to carry out the policy best adapted for the success of their scheme ; or it may be that a single individual is sufficient to accomplish the task decided upon. They form themselves into a close brotherhood, and though some do not steal, they are always loyal to the tribe and would on no account betray their fellow-clansmen. They are freemasons and help each other to the end. In fact, it sometimes happens that a man not guilty is allowed to be tried by the magistrate, and sent to prison instead of the leader of the gang, who has really committed the crime. He pleads guilty and his fellow caste men give false evidence so that he may be convicted, and the other more valuable man kept out of prison for the benefit of the tribe. The Kuraver method of making a livelihood forces them to form themselves into gangs. They do not of necessity live in one village, but often live far apart and meet at regular intervals to arrange their business. The wandering gangs which have no settled abode sometimes keep together, sometimes divide themselves into sections, and often change their places according to the amount of police supervision and pressure brought to bear upon them ; but they are one solid fraternity, bound together by blood relationship as well as

unity of aim in life. I met one gang on the road, and, to my surprise, there was only a single man among them, and he decrepit and nearly blind. There were young women, some children with older women, and boys, and on inquiry I found that all the able-bodied men had been sent to jail. There was a police constable following them, and they could go nowhere and do nothing without the representative of the law being with them. Could I not get him removed? This was their great anxiety.

In examining the ethics of the Kuraver and allied tribes it must be remembered that theft is a sporting method of making a living, and not a crime in the sense it is to a member of ordinary society. It is just love of adventure. The Kuraver boy has been taught from childhood to deceive and tell lies, and he has had lessons in thieving as an ordinary boy has had lessons in geography. So the Kuraver lad looks upon thieving as something normal, and the question of its being right or wrong is never considered. The Kuraver knows that society objects to his profession, but society objects to many things which are still done, and so he tries to dodge the difficulties put in his way, and goes on with his sport. If he sometimes has bad luck and has to go to jail, it is a part of his life which must be endured, but the chances are that he may have good luck and escape, as the majority do. Life is an adventure

anyhow, and there are risks, and why stop stealing because of the off-chance of having a short period in jail ?

A South Indian jail is generally a decent residence and, provided he behaves, the prisoner is well treated, but he never likes jail life, and would often prefer the whip. The daily discipline and the loss of his freedom are what he finds irksome.

When the lust for other people's property has become very great, and the Kuraver practices his principles with that thoroughness so characteristic of his clansmen, the Government have to take special steps to limit the activities of the gangs, and so the worst sections are registered, the names of all the members recorded, their thumb impressions taken. and the following facts will show the position of some notorious gangs.

One gang numbered fifty-five males. These had seventy-seven convictions recorded against them in a court of law. Taking these seventy-seven convictions, five were for dacoity, which is gang robbery ; one was for robbery, which is theft with violence. Fifty-seven were for house-breaking at night, and two for a similar offence by day. Seven were for ordinary theft and five for minor offences. One member of the gang had been in jail eight times, and another seven times. Only ten adult males had not been convicted, but these were blood relations of those who had been in prison.

A gang of Kuravers in my district numbered six hundred and two adult males, and of these two hundred and fifty-seven have convictions against them and have served a period in jail. Twenty-five have been bound over under the Security Sections of the Penal Code, and have had to give security for good behaviour. Thus forty-six per cent. have been proved to be of criminal propensity.

These two hundred and fifty-seven men have had five hundred and sixty-eight convictions against them, and in addition one hundred and five successful prosecutions under the Security Section of the Penal Code. Seventy-six of these men are dacoits, twenty-five robbers, eighty-five house-breakers, and sixty-two thieves. Four of these have been to jail seven times ; five, six times ; seven, five times ; thirty, four times ; thirty-four, three times ; seventy-six, twice. On a careful and exhaustive inquiry many stated that their means of livelihood was thieving.

Such facts concerning the life of a caste holding a recognised place in an ancient civilisation, such as is found in South India, make one think of the ethical code underlying such conduct and life. The ordinary student in moral philosophy might at once, after reading these facts, and I could give many more, say : " These are a depraved people, and they belong to a low type among the human species ; they are either moral degenerates, or there has been a break in their evolution toward a higher type.



Such a people are still outside civilisation and must be classified as degenerates.”

Knowing them as I do, I should not classify them as such. They are a highly developed community. They have a superior grade of intelligence. There are duds in the community, men with no vision, and some of low mentality, but taking them as a class they stand comparatively high up in the social and intellectual scale. Concerning their mental capacity there can be no doubt that they are as a class superior to many of the other castes in South India. They can hold their own amongst most of the village communities, and, given a fair field and an education on modern lines, they would certainly make good, and no one need doubt their ability for rising and keeping on a level with other more favoured castes of the country.

Among the Kuravers the ethical sense seems defective and different from others in one department only of their moral nature—that is, with regard to thieving. They hold it is right to steal. In all other points the Kuraver is as natural as other classes of society. Being a professional and hereditary thief, modifications of necessity take place in his conduct, but so far as ethical principles are concerned he does not differ from the rest of the community. He is a habitual thief, and it follows that he must become a liar, and a consistent liar, and to this end instructions are given, even when they are children,

to make them adept in this art. The way of a liar in any society is hard—especially is this so in a law court—and it would be impossible to find a man more expert in concealing the truth or twisting the facts than the really well-trained Kuraver. A Kuraver lad was called to give evidence in a case where the accused was his own father. The magistrate asked the boy whether he knew the prisoner, and the reply came pat and clear: “No, your honour.” “Have you never seen him?” “No, sir,” said the boy, and it would take the logical acumen of an Aristotle and the legal erudition of a Lord-Chancellor to draw out the truth from such a witness. Their capacity for lying is highly developed. They are watched by the police and are always being cross-questioned in private life; thus they become experts in deception and prevarication and in putting people off the scent.

The fact that they are always suspected of theft, and that it is assumed that they have committed the theft when any property is lost in a district, makes them adopt the cringing attitude when a case comes up for inquiry.

The Kuraver can be very keen-witted when the occasion demands it, and can get out of the most awkward positions by intellectual nimbleness when it serves his purpose. It is almost impossible to bring home his guilt. He always has his witnesses to prove an alibi when the crime was committed,

and his friends swear he was at least ten miles away from the scene of the dacoity. The evidence is produced that he is an old offender, and has been to prison many times. This is used against him by the prosecuting inspector, but he turns it round, tries to make the magistrate believe that, having experience of prison life and the lack of liberty in such an institution, he would never commit a crime again to result in such punishment, and the police are bringing a false charge against him because he would not bribe them sufficiently to make it worth their while to drop the case. He is then frequently let off because of a doubt. A liar must have a good memory, and the Kuraver possesses this valuable adjunct to his profession which often reaches a high degree of proficiency. To ward off the united attack of police and lawyers a certain amount of astuteness is required, and some members of the criminal tribes have this characteristic well developed. They have been compelled to make a study of the art of deceiving their enemy, the police, and of making him focus his attention on some one else. He can then escape into open ground, and, getting clear of the net put out to catch him, he can breathe freely.

The Kuraver who has committed a crime will sometimes volunteer to assist the police in the hunt for the culprit, and, knowing all the facts, puts them off the scent and the crime goes unpunished. They

are expert dodgers. There is no trickery they do not practise, and no knavery they do not understand, and so are interesting people to meet and talk with. They are often gentlemen in manners, and in their behaviour with their friends they are all that could be desired. A Kuraver once gave me a leather-bound English Bible. He said a friend had *given* it to him some years before, and as he could not read or understand English, he had pleasure in presenting it to me. They occasionally speak some truth, and are generous with other people's property.

*Marriage Customs*

**A**KURAVÉR'S ideas of marriage are difficult to define and express. He agrees that every man should have a woman as companion and helpmate. But the idea that he should have a permanent relationship with her would not find universal acceptance excepting in theory.

He accepts the principle that marriage is a matter of necessity, but it is not a sacrament, and though an appeal is made to his gods and help asked at the hymeneal altar, yet in his sub-consciousness he does not think the arrangement unchangeable.

A large number of Kuravers have two wives, some three, but none in the tribe marries for love. It is a question of convenience, as a wife makes a better servant than a hired person. She has a special interest in the family affairs which no outsider could possibly have, and the sense of possession and oneness is developed in the wife which can never grow in the servant who is a mere hireling. It is true that complications may arise—they often do where there are two or three wives—but the Eastern woman is not to be compared with her Western sister. There is a rich heritage of Christian life and thought which causes Western peoples, both

men and women, to revolt against the idea of a man having two wives or of a woman having two husbands. Such a condition of social life is, in consequence, impossible in the West. But this spirit of enlightenment is not yet developed in Eastern peoples—at least, not among the Kuraver tribe—and so two or three wives can have a fairly comfortable life with their lord and master if they serve him loyally, and have no upstart ideas about the equal rights of women with men.

The rank and file of the women have no hard and fast rule with regard to the marriage tie. In the case of the women, convenience and the hard life of the robber caste have to be remembered, and anything in the shape of an unbreakable bond might be most inconvenient and undesirable. Their husbands are often in jail, and at such times temporary marital arrangements may be made. When the husband is incarcerated the woman may be lent to another man, and she returns to her real husband by mutual agreement after his term of imprisonment has expired. So the marriage relationship does not hold the sacred place in the mind of the tribe which Western peoples associate with the relation of husband and wife. Quarrels among the men over wives and women are common, and many an hour have I spent with them in trying to settle a family feud caused by a man having run away from his wife, or by troubles which have come

through a woman living with a man who is not her husband. There are cases known where men have sold or mortgaged their wives, and then later bought them back.

Yet whatever views are held concerning its sanctity, marriage is a matter of supreme importance, and it is also an event of great interest in every class of society. The Kuraver is no exception to this universal rule, and the choosing of a wife for his son, or the negotiation for the marriage of his daughter, becomes to the parent a matter of mingled anxiety and enjoyment when money is plentiful and a good match possible between the families concerned.

The birth of a daughter is not always a joyful event in India, and there are cases where a husband has not seen his wife, or the little unwelcome girl born to them, for several days after the event, though they have been living in the same house. The coming of a girl brings special anxieties, and the Kuraver has to face up to the common exactions of his caste. All parents desire sons, they are more easily married, and the impression is that a man can always get a wife, and that it is often very difficult for a woman to get a husband.

The Kuraver, however, does not worry himself over much concerning the birth of a girl ; it is just a bit of bad luck for him, unless it be that his boon companion has been fortunate in having a wife

who has borne a son. They often then strike a bargain, and agree to the marriage of the two even though they are but infants. Kuravers have been known to make agreement with their friends that, in case a girl is born to one family and a boy to the other, they should in due course be married, Rs.2 is paid at the liquor shop, and the agreement is considered binding on both sides. Thus the engagement takes place even before the parties are born, and love and suitability of temperament do not enter into the transaction. From my experience I am not prepared to say that it matters much in the case of the tribe under its present mode of existence, but I would hardly recommend this arrangement to my friends in the West. In order to get a particular child as a wife for his son, it is reported in the *Indian Antiquary*, Vol. III, 1874, that it was a custom for the father of the boy to bring a rupee (two shillings in those days), tie it in the cloth worn by the father of the newly-born girl, and when the girl was grown up he would claim her as a wife for his son. For twenty-five rupees he could claim her much earlier. A brother often claims the first two daughters of his sister as wives for his sons, or, at least, he must have the first refusal of them and the privilege of getting them at a cheaper rate.

The proper and ideal time for a marriage to be arranged is at the age of twelve in the case of a girl,



and fifteen in the case of a boy. The boy or the girl has no voice in the matter. Their age and inexperience unfit them for making the choice of a partner, and so the parents have to make the decision and the best bargain possible. The marriage proper is often postponed to a later period, and in this respect the Kuravers show more wisdom than people of higher castes. I have been requested by young men to find wives for them, and it is a task I generally try to escape by asking some Indian friend to search for suitable brides. I once received a stern lecture from a lady having marriageable girls in her care, as she expected me to find good husbands for them. She did not in the least consider my reticence in choosing a partner for one of the girls, or my natural Western shyness in entering into negotiations and deciding who might be a proper man for her protégée. I do not mind choosing a wife for myself : in this I am an expert ; but choosing a wife for another man ! That requires daring, judgment, sagacity and a putting aside of all preconceived notions of what is proper and feasible. It is the Indian method, and the Kuraver father and mother have to adopt it, and they like the adventure. Marriage and betrothals are subjects of perennial interest, and the Kuraver, when he is not planning ways and means to replenish his larder, finds the occupation of choosing a wife for his boy a pleasant experience. His son



#### A KURAVIR BILI

Like the woman of the West, the Kuraver woman has her charms and is very attractive



must be provided with a bride, and he knows a beautiful girl who lives five miles across the valley, or among the foothills towards the setting of the sun, so here is the opportunity for a bargain. They count up their possessions and how much they can raise towards the expenses necessary, and try to calculate the wealth or the poverty of the other party, and after getting all the information possible they consult their relatives and friends, and decide on approaching the father of the girl. There is a fairly general recognised price paid for a girl in the tribe. The father of the bridegroom must pay eighteen varagams in the Tamil country, which amounts to about £4, 10s. at the present time, but the amount differs among the various divisions. This sum is not often paid cash down at one time. The amount is agreed upon as the proper figure, even though the bargainer is never expected to pay it, when the case for marrying his daughter is urgent. Quarrels often arise through non-payment, and there is a proverb which says that "The quarrels of a Kuraver are not easily settled."

In one case which came under my notice the parents of a girl were anxious to get a young man, the son of the leader in their gang, as a husband for their child.

The lad was likely to make a good position for himself among his people, though not as a highway robber, but in some profession because he had

been educated. They invited him to a special feast, as other means of attracting him had failed. The "medicine man" had been consulted, and, with his magic and alchemy and medicine mixed in the food, the parents were sure that the mind of the young Kuraver would be turned towards their daughter, and they would win a fine son-in-law. Much money was spent in the preparation of the special dish ; savoury viands were cooked and the best spices procured, and the medicine which charms and is supposed to work on the amorous nature of man was concealed in the food ; and after all was ready the much desired bridegroom was called to partake. To their great surprise as well as sorrow, the invitation was rejected and no coaxing or persuasion would prevail. He absolutely refused to be enticed. The food was afterwards buried in the backyard.

When a betrothal has been arranged the Kuraver goes to the liquor shop, and there the parties settle the contract over a draught of toddy—*i.e.* native beer. The father of the bridegroom-elect purchases a pot of toddy, and offers it to the father of the girl, and he receives it in token of the agreement that his daughter in due course shall become the wife of his son. The vessel is refilled and offered to the headman, and he, on behalf of the company, asks the girl's father why they are to drink this ? The reply is that "I have given my daughter to

his son as a wife," and they all drink, and are witnesses to the contract thus made binding between them. They all then go to the girl's house and have a feast.

An auspicious day has to be chosen for the actual marriage ceremony. The planets should be in a favourable position and the stars must not be ignored, therefore an astrologer should be consulted. There is a difference of procedure in this matter. The Uppu Kuravers will not consult a Brahmin priest, but they will choose one of their own leading men, who by his reputation and his natural ability has proved himself a man of judgment, and he decides on a suitable day, so that the heavenly bodies may have full influence on this great occasion, and bring good luck to the bridal pair. On some occasions Kuravers will pay a fee of four annas (sixpence) to a Brahmin for naming the auspicious time, and a present in addition will also be given if the parents can afford it.

The marriage ceremony takes place in the house of the bride's parents. A booth is erected in front of the hut, as a large company always attends, and, as the tribesmen love a feast, the parents always prepare for a crowd. Special pots must be procured for boiling the rice and cooking the mutton and chicken which have been obtained for this festive day.

The mother and relatives of the bride are responsible for seeing that the girl is properly dressed.

She must not only dress, but be adorned for such an occasion, and if there is no money for a gorgeous display of all the bright colours produced by the dyers' art, clothes may be borrowed, and certainly jewels must be obtained as a loan to wear whilst the hymeneal knot is being tied to bind man and woman together until one or both of them determine to live apart.

The bride is led into the Pandal to a place where she can be seen by all, and is seated under an arched canopy, and if there is a picture of misery anywhere in the village, it is the bride seated beside the person who is to become her husband. She does not, must not, speak, and to smile is a breach of decorum. She must sit with downcast eyes, and the ideal bride remains at an angle which shows that she appears to think it is the greatest indignity to be made to sit on a bench with such a man as they have placed beside her, who is to be her husband. The mother often hides away in the corner of the booth, or inside the hut ; and if she happens to be a widow, must not be present at a marriage ceremony. Everybody seems happy and all are enjoying themselves, except the bride. When the bride and bridegroom are seated the master of the ceremonies comes—among some sects he may be a Brahmin Purohit, and in others the head man of the clan—drums are beaten, the men with their wind instruments begin to blow, nearly bursting in the pro-

cess, and the marriage ceremony begins in real earnest.

The god of good luck, Ganesh, is represented by a special image made of cow dung, and brought in and placed in an honoured position. This god has the head of an elephant, and his favour must be sought, and worship and adoration are given him as an important part of the ceremony. A light obtained by wicks soaked in cocoanut oil, representing life and purity, must also be kept burning. The worship of fire is a necessary part of all ceremonies, and it is easily understood how a primitive people, whose mind could not get behind the mystery of life and nature, would reverence such a wonderful thing as fire. Through fire they obtain some of their chief joys. Food is cooked by it, warmth is obtained from it, and is it not natural that they should show this reverence for such a mysterious yet useful gift from God ?

A measure of rice is cooked, put on banana leaves, and, with cocoanuts, camphor and fruit, is offered to Ganesh and placed before the idol. The Kuraver woman does not wear a ring, but she wears a thali to show that she is married. It generally consists of a string or cord made of cotton thread dipped in yellow tumeric, with a gold ornament about the value of ten shillings fixed at the centre. This is tied round her neck on the marriage day, and must not be touched afterwards by any man



save the husband, and may not be removed without great disgrace falling upon the woman. Uppu Kuravers wear no thali, but tie a string round the wrist on the marriage day.

In some sections of the tribe the bride wears a necklace of black beads, but these people are considered to be lower in the social scale. The thali is shown to all the assembled guests, and a blessing sought upon it from all present, and it is then placed with the food offering in front of the idol. The priest, or the Arumakaran, who is the master of ceremonies then gives it to the bridegroom, who ties it round the neck of the bride.

Sanskrit slogans are recited at the marriage ceremonies of all leading Kuravers. This lends to the proceedings that air of mystery so dear to the heart of all Indian peoples. It impresses the on-lookers with the idea that there are hidden forces in existence which must not be forgotten. Magic has always greater potency when an unknown tongue is used. It overawes the audience with the sense of wonderment and bewilderment, never altogether unpleasant sensations to the Kuraver, who is a child of nature and who reveres the occult, and believes in its existence and power over men.

Prayers are offered by the Arumakaran, who has earned his position by his exploits on the high road, and his prayers are therefore more likely to influence the deity to help the bridal pair. Such petitions as :

“ O Swami, let these two now united have thy blessing. Give them health and wealth, long to live in the enjoyment of the good things of this life. Let them have sons who will grow up into stalwart men to support the honour and fame of the clan. Hear us, O Swami.”

During the intervals of these prolonged ceremonies the band is playing at a furious rate, and the din and noise are sweet music to the Kuraver ear.

The first part of the house and Pandal ceremonies being complete, the bridal pair march in a procession to the temple, and break a cocoanut before Ganesh, and do obeisance by falling to the ground in front of his shrine. They then go back and get some food, as they have not been allowed to take any refreshments before the ceremony of tying on the thali has been completed and prayers offered at the temple for a happy life.

The second day is given to music and dancing, and yellow scented water is thrown over the relatives and the other guests present. The third day is spent in drinking and a general jollification. A respectable Kuraver will not drink on the marriage day, but he lets himself go on the third, and makes up for his abstemiousness during the preceding days. The Kuraver is a hard drinker ; the Uppu Kuraver will even drink on the marriage day. This section would drink in their sleep, so great is their capacity for alcoholic liquor.

In some divisions the married couple are separated for a week after the ceremonies are over, and it is said that this period is often increased owing to a belief that it is very unlucky for three heads to enter one house in a year.

After ten days the couple take an oil bath, and the man gives a great feast to all who will come. Money must be obtained for this, and as the Kuraver has no strictures upon the method of obtaining it, he manages to get the wherewithal for the feast. Liquor is supplied in large quantities, and the success of the feast depends upon the amount of the liquid consumed on the occasion.

Kuravers who have no homes whatever, and there are many such, have their weddings under a tree, or any convenient place where there is room for a carousal, and where there is a certain amount of privacy away from the great high roads.

To meet the expenses of a marriage money is obtained in various ways. There is the usual method of borrowing, and there is also the "Moi System," in which everyone who knows the bridegroom makes a gift of silver to the father for the wedding. This takes place where the parties are considered of special position in the tribe. I know of a case where a Kuraver received Rs.500 (£40) from such a source. This is a large sum in India, and in this way he was honoured in the tribe. The grandfather of the bridegroom was killed in a brawl over stolen



#### THE FESTIVAL MORNING

A woman drawing designs as decorations on the road in front of her house to celebrate a religious festival

#### THE BAND

As every marriage should be celebrated with music, a band is hired for the wedding feast. The music is weird and penetrating, and continues with only brief pauses day and night



property, and hence the family won high honour and a place of distinction in the clan. A half of the above sum was given by farmers and traders, and may be considered as blackmail to prevent theft ; but as the Kuraver is a member of the community and must marry his son in style and with becoming pomp, the local farmers should give help on such an auspicious occasion. The other half was given by the tribesmen themselves. In this way they help each other when special expenditure has to be incurred in connection with family and social life. Money is sometimes saved, and that which is borrowed is repaid after a successful haul in an expedition which has to be made to remove the encumbrance of the debt.

A woman who has had seven successive husbands is thought to be of special sanctity among the Telugu Kuravers. She holds a place of honour among the womenfolk of the tribe, and she is called the Pedda Boyasani, which means "The Great Lady."

A woman who can captivate and lure so many men must have qualities entitling her to some respect, if not fear, and it is no surprise that women stand in awe of her. A man may marry her, and should he not please her, or should she find some defect in him, she knows how to ensnare another, and arranges to send the unwanted male about his business.

Divorce is easily obtained in the caste, though it is the cause of lifelong quarrels and much spite and bitterness. A woman may have freedom if she will pay back the amount the man has spent on the marriage ; or a would-be husband, who has fallen temporarily in love with her, can have her by agreeing to pay the sum to free her from her bond.

*Omens*

WHILST talking to a Kuraver well known in his district, he said to me that "the life of a Kuraver was full of trouble." He was a man of great experience in his tribe, and knew his people's peculiar mental outlook. His own life had been packed with adventure, and he had been one of the cleverest old rascals in his clan, but had only once been caught in the meshes of the law. He had been able to steal, plan expeditions for others to rob, commit dacoity, obtain his special share of the booty, and chuckle over the fact that the police were always watching him, yet, for all the tricks he had played on them, and all the thrills he had enjoyed when out removing other people's property, he had only spent five years in jail. This was a fine record for a Kuraver. Such a man wins the respect of the whole clan ; they listen to his advice, and are anxious to yield to his wishes and obey his behests. "The life of a Kuraver is full of trouble," said this old robber. He meant what he said, and I wanted an explanation of his statement. I could give my own, but I desired to know his own reasons, as I, a Westerner, would have given quite a different explanation. I should have said that the



Government, through the police, cause him much trouble ; society generally were watching his tribesmen and never trusted them, so life was made a burden ; but it was none of these. “ Omens,” said he, “ are the cause of great trouble in the life of a Kuraver.” The Western mind cannot perhaps fully appreciate this fact. Our forefathers could probably enter into the feelings of a Kuraver, as they believed in the existence of spirits, hobgoblins and ghosts. The planets also had a mysterious power, and could affect the action of men below ; but the march of knowledge has been so rapid and men have probed so deeply into the mystery of life and the world around that omens cease to trouble or influence the modern man of the West. Said an educated Indian to me, “ When a bad omen crosses your path, why run a risk and ignore it ? ”

Here is a dare-devil Kuraver, who will go out on a marauding expedition to steal, or to commit a highway robbery, sometimes killing an obstreperous victim, yet he will turn back if a certain omen comes in his path. Of course, it is a troublesome thing, as an unfavourable sign will prevent him having a fine adventure, or perhaps keep his family without food for days, or make them dependent on the goodwill of others.

Should a lizard chirp on his right-hand side as he plans his exploit, he has to give up the idea and abandon the trip, even though all his companions

have been called, their duties explained, their plans of operation settled, the food prepared, their instruments sharpened, and their wives and all concerned warned to be ready for what may happen. The captain of the team having to give up playing for his school in a football match on account of a crocked knee does not suffer more than the Kuraver who has been done out of some fine sport by a snake crawling across his path. A sneeze is a bad omen, as also a man leading a bullock with a rope.

When the exploit is to take place in a far corner of the district, they have to start before sunset. It may be a ten-mile sprint, but the rendezvous must be reached very early so as to enable the deed to be done and a return made possible before the rising of the sun ; but the appearance of a Brahmin widow with a shaven head on the street betokens ill-luck, and should a kite fly from left to right across the road, then the journey must be abandoned till another day. Should they have gone a considerable distance from their home, and a man who knows them is met on the road, they return at once, but this can hardly be called an omen. It might be termed a natural common-sense procedure, as they would be suspected as soon as the news of the crime was passed round the villages. It is caution, and shows the Kuraver's knowledge of psychology, and his desire to run no unnecessary risks, and also to do nothing which was likely to

draw the eye of others upon himself. This is one reason why a Kuraver keeps off the beaten track and walks along jungle paths, every one of which in his district is known to him. When on a thieving expedition or out for highway robbery his policy is to avoid all those who know him, and to keep off the trunk road till dark. When in the dusk of early evening anyone asks the Kuraver, "Who goes there?" he gives one of his many assumed names, and replies that he is going on his duties as a watchman. This might be accepted, but he knows that discretion is the better part of valour, and decides to postpone his operations till another more favourable time, and returns home. He wants no witness when he is out on private business, and, after all, waiting is not a tedious task for anyone in India. The sheep may get a little fatter and more plump by remaining a longer period in the farmer's care.

The owl is a bird which the Kuraver must never ignore. This member of the feathered tribe is, like the Kuraver, very much awake at night and very keen of vision in the dark. The owl shrieks on the approach of an intruder, and the man will then have to take much care.

The owl seems to feel that in the darkness and the stillness of the night he only has the right to be out. He reigns in the dark. The Kuraver ought to know that an owl's eyes are not made for use in the day-time, but for the night, and that if anyone

frightens and disturbs his prey he will find it difficult to catch his late supper or procure food for the morning. So out of spite or anger, or it may be just to protest, the owl screeches. The shepherd with his sheep is then awakened and he scents danger, and the Kuraver has to retrace his steps home.

Should a fox howl or whine, as the animal often does in the jungle or when on the run across the fields, the Kuraver does not proceed. This perhaps is not a supernatural omen. It is rather a natural warning to any would-be thief. The noise wakes the shepherd, and if there are any lambs in the flock he runs out to protect them, so the Kuraver goes home and has to be content with nothing for his night's adventure and labour.

The barber seems an evil genius to the Kuraver, and the sight of him will certainly bring bad luck. So no expedition is undertaken after seeing him.

Barbers move freely among the people ; they get to know the farmers ; they hear the gossip of the village bazaar and news of the countryside ; and it is probably real insight on the part of the Kuraver which leads him to make himself scarce, and not commit any crime after seeing him. The barber is a man who loves a conversation with his customer. He asks questions in a most naïve manner, and seemingly in a harmless way, but he can so put the question that it is sometimes impossible to evade

an answer which might prove awkward if a theft were committed. The barber tries to unravel the plot and fit together the answers, and so he might be able to weave a story which would show that the Kuraver he met was the man who committed the crime.

A sneeze will often prevent an expedition. If he knocks his head against the lintel of the low door-post of his house, or his right foot against a stone, he interprets those as "ill omens," and postpones his trip. Here again the Kuraver is simply showing wisdom. Thieving and breaking into houses are difficult undertakings, demanding fine control over the action of the limbs, and the fact that he strikes his head against a beam, or injures his foot on a stone, shows that his nerves are not under control and that his body is insufficiently alert to undertake the adventure.

Anyone carrying an oil pot bodes ill, and sends him home. A cat has the same effect, but as there are few of these pets in India he is not often troubled or put to great inconvenience by pussy. The mongoose is a warning to him, but as this animal is shy, he does not often suffer trouble from this source.

Should a bird called the "Karunkuruvi" (the king crow) fly across his path from right to left, or the "Sembottu" (Indian cuckoo) from right to left, nothing may be undertaken. The Indian proverb says, "Go not a step further if you

meet a Sembottu bird going from right to left, but a crown awaits him who sees the fox do this."

The crow will also cause him to go home, and can be a terror to the Kuraver. The bird is a smart thief, but a great friend to a dishonest man in any household, as the blame is put upon the head of the bird for the loss of any silver. The crow and the Kuraver are both professional thieves, and if the crow crosses the path of the Kuraver failure is certain. The crow has an uncanny influence, and it is because of this that they are fed at funerals, and care must be taken not to rouse their anger.

A telegram once came to my bungalow : " Baloo dead, don't worry." Baloo was a boy brought up on my compound, but at that time was a hundred miles away. A crow had momentarily pitched on his head, and his uncle had sent the wire to prevent the fulfilment of this ill omen. There was naturally some amount of worry in the bungalow until the reason was discovered, and a good deal of merriment afterwards ; but what was a little worry and expense compared to the evil that was warded off by sending the telegram ? The post office can now be used to dodge demons and prevent unfavourable omens having disastrous effects in the family.

Omens are therefore a cause of much trouble to the Kuraver. The mentality of people who have no compunction in stealing, who glory in their crimes, can hardly be measured by ordinary standards,

and it is difficult to find a psychological law under which they will act. The mind of the Kuraver is mixed, not necessarily confused. He lives in a world different from other people, with a psychology which cannot be reduced to fixed laws and with a mind which works with subtle variety.

It is very difficult to explain why the passage of a particular bird across his path should prevent his going on with his task.

There is a story told in the *Trichinopoly Gazetteer* of a band of Kuravers who went on an expedition, and it shows how determined they can be when once they have made up their minds to steal. Whilst the party was crossing the Cauvery, a big, broad river in South India, one of the gang was drowned. Nothing daunted, the others pressed on and reached the shore, and marched off to carry out their intention. The Kuravers are not supposed to set out for a serious burglary on a new moon night, nor when the moon is at the full, but in spite of the moon they attempted to get into the house and failed, and it was not until they had made three attempts and failed in each that they gave up their quest and returned home. The omens were against them. They knew it, and they ought not to have proceeded on their journey.

I am inclined to think that this party pressed forward on such a day, and after such a calamity

befalling them in the river, because they had primed themselves with too much liquor, and they were desperate because of the alcohol they had taken before setting out.

A Kuraver told me that they often drink toddy so as not to see the evil omens or hear the unfavourable sounds which would prevent the expedition. It is only when the omen is seen and heard that ill effects can accrue, so liquor when taken in certain quantities numbs the senses, but before reaching the scene of action the effect will have worn off, and the men can attain their object and get their loot.

It is therefore a question whether the Kuraver is not a heavy drinker because it helps him to be unconscious of evil omens. His logic will not bear scrutiny, but will it be worse than much we have in the West? One fact is very interesting. I am told that if the Kuraver turns back because of ill omens seen on the way, and the same omens are seen while he is returning, the ill omens become good omens, and it is safe for him to return and carry out his purpose and commit his crime. The sight of a hare is a sign of success.

A daring old Kuraver, whilst showing me the mark of a spear-wound on his body, told me that if they met a funeral and saw the corpse, which is generally exposed in India, they had to give up the expedition, and any dead object was an unpropitious sign, though a man carrying a piece of flesh was a good omen.



In addition to bad omens which become favourable omens when they happen on a return journey there are other signs which assure success and make it certain that he will succeed in any undertaking he has planned. Some or all of those who are to take part in a robbery repair to the temple and there meditate and pray to their god, and wait for the chirping of a lizard, and when the sound comes from the left, this is a sure indication that their god is going to give success. This is the deity's method of reply. Any chirping in front, or behind, and, as was pointed out earlier in the chapter, on the right, prohibits the expedition and they go home.

In order to find out the probabilities of success or not there are many processes adopted. One is as follows : The gang meets together ; makes four or five heaps of earth, in one of which a rupee will be placed. One of the men will have been sent to a distance before the coin was hidden, and he will be called back and told to show the mound with the rupee. If he fails in the first attempt he is sent out and the heaps changed. He is allowed three chances, and if he does not discover the rupee the expedition is put off.

Another method is to take a stone, suspending it with a string between the fingers. If it swings as the pendulum of the clock all will go well ; if not, the trip is abandoned.

Sometimes flowers are brought and divided into

four or five bunches, and the men, after sending out one of the company, will agree to concentrate their thoughts on one particular bunch, and if the man when called back shows the bunch they have chosen success will be achieved.

Rama's wheel is a favourite process among some gangs. A wheel is drawn on paper or on the ground, and any number of spokes is inserted, and the operator chooses one spoke and begins chanting the names of three deities, " Rama, Latchmi, Sita ; Rama, Latchmi, Sita," touching each spoke in turn whilst repeating the names, and should the last spoke end with the name Sita failure is certain. Rama augurs success.

Another method of finding out whether they will have success is the following. A number of stones, about the size of marbles, is brought, and one of the chief men takes a handful, calls upon his god, and throws them down on the floor. Then another handful is taken. If the first handful is an odd number, and the second an even number, success is certain and they start forthwith on their expedition.

They make great efforts to discover the attitude of their god, as they know their occupation is dangerous, and certain signs seem to assure them that they are acting in concert with the deity. They therefore omit no ceremony in order to find out whether he is ready to give them success. Sometimes they take red and white flowers to the temple, and

tie them into little balls, each colour separate. A cocoanut is broken and offered at the shrine, incense and camphor are burnt before the idol, prayers chanted, and one of the lads accompanying the men is asked to take up a ball of petals. The lad is, of course, a novice, and knows nothing of the private decision of the men, and if he takes up a ball containing the white flowers it is a good omen, and the expedition can be carried out with certainty of the god's favour.

After these good omens have been observed, should an owl hoot, a jackal howl, a cat or a snake cross their path, they give up their expedition and return home, and wait for a more favourable time.

Another method of discovering whether their expedition will succeed is by taking a sheep to the temple and offering it as a sacrifice. Before slaying the animal at the altar clean water is sprinkled upon it, and should the sheep attempt to shake off the water it is a certain sign that the offering is accepted and that there will be success in the operation they propose to undertake. The head of the sheep is then cut off at a stroke, the blood poured over the idol, and a gift made to the temple authorities.

I saw a sacrifice where one hundred and fifty sheep were offered by the people of many castes, and the idol could not be seen owing to the thickness of congealed blood of many thousands of animals which had been slain at this temple.

*The Kavalgar or Watchman*

“Set a thief to catch a thief.”

TRAVELLERS in rural India have noticed that at eventide all cattle are driven from the grazing grounds into the village, or securely fastened in some fold where they are watched during the night. The road to every hamlet at sundown is filled with dust raised by the cattle on their way from the field and mountain side, and this time is known in some places as the “time of the cow dust.” No cattle can be left out in the fields at night, and it is an interesting time to visit a hamlet. Boys are glad the hot day is over and they come home with their cattle, whistling, or perhaps singing some lines of a song. The animals are generally thin, like Pharaoh’s lean kine, as grass is scarce.

I remember once asking a boy in a jocular manner what it was we were following, when we were creeping behind a drove of cattle nearing a village, and he replied quite unconsciously, “Village bullocks, sir.” “What?” I said with a twinkle in my eye, “they are village bones,” and he saw the humour and truth of the remark. Whatever their

quality or worth, they cannot be left out at night. I hope the time will come when cattle in India may be left in the fields safe from all marauders. This is not likely to be possible near the great jungles where wild beasts still roam ; but far from the haunts of the tiger and leopard it ought to be possible for the sheep and oxen to be safe from robbers. At the present time, as in the past, everything must be watched and guarded. The corn ripening in the fields, the cocoanuts growing on the palms, mangoes in the tope, chillies, tobacco and the hundred and one things growing in the gardens, must be vigilantly protected, and some one should always be within earshot to defend the cattle or crop from the thief. It has been the custom from time immemorial for the Kuraver to be the Kavalgar or watchman in his village. Where there has been no member of this tribe then a member of a similar tribe whose profession is stealing is placed in this onerous position. " Set a thief to catch a thief " is the principle adopted and also acted upon in social life as well as in the religious sphere in India. The help of a devil is sought to protect a village rather than the aid of a holy god, and hence the hamlet has a huge, terrible-looking hobgoblin or giant, whose business it is to drive away the demons who come to prey upon the flocks or to bring evil upon the people.

Similarly the Kuraver, a hereditary thief, is



#### THE SHEPHERD

A Kuraver boy driving his sheep into the fold to protect them from wild animals at night

#### KURAVLRS CARRYING CURRY LEAVES

Indian curry is world famous and these Kuravers search the jungle for spice leaves to flavour the curry which finds its way into London hotels



appointed as the guardian of the property of the village. The Kuraver has been a necessary evil and must be employed in order to prevent greater trouble coming. Where there are Kuravers a guard is needed.

As a rule only a few families are allowed to reside in a village, and only one in many hamlets, and in a large number of villages no Kuraver lives. His hereditary profession does not make him *persona grata* with the respectable ryots, but he has to have a niche in the village social economy. It is not every village which can support a member of the thieving profession, and it is then arranged that the Kavalgar shall be the watchman for a number of villages, so that the burden of his maintenance may fall on a larger number, and the task be made easier for the individual farmer. Every landowner of any position must arrange to pay the levy due to the Kavalgar for immunity from theft which the Kuraver will guarantee. He may live four or five miles away and practically the only thing he does is to collect his levy. The amount varies a good deal, but where there is a flock of sheep then at least one sheep a year has to be given, and perhaps another sheep at a wedding in the watcher's family. If there is a cocoanut tope (grove), Rs.6 per acre is sometimes paid and an annual grant of grain at the time of harvest is always given. If a Kuraver has a number of villages under his care he can make



a goodly income. This system is really pure blackmail, but let this be said for the Kuraver—he is supposed to return any lost sheep or the amount of stolen grain or give the value in hard cash. In one case a man told me he had received in one year ten sheep for his services, but had to pay for twenty which had been lost or stolen.

The agreement is more often honoured in the breach than in the observance. But the loss has to be made good sometimes when one Kuraver has quarrelled with a tribesman and he makes a raid upon the other's territory in order to get him into trouble with his master and force him to pay for what has disappeared.

It is a Kuraver method of paying back an old grudge. The watchmen who are on good terms with each other, and it is advisable for them always to be so, enter into an agreement not to come into the others' jurisdiction, so they settle boundaries and have a working agreement not to interfere or steal from those farmers who pay the annual levy.

If a Kuraver finds that property has been stolen in his jurisdiction by another Kuraver, out of a grudge or for any other reason, the chieftain is at once informed and the suspected person is named, or an effort is at once made to discover the culprit. There must be honour among thieves, else the whole caste system breaks down, and serious trouble is likely to ensue among the tribesmen. No effort is

spared to find out the guilty person. Men, women and children join in the hunt, and especially is this so if the Kavalgar in whose circle the theft has been committed is a man of position in the caste. It is a personal affront to him, and a direct insult, that another tribesman should come into his jurisdiction and make evident his inability to protect the property he has been appointed to guard. If it is a sheep which has been stolen, questions are asked, such as these: "Has any Kuraver in the village had mutton?" "Has any skin been sold to the Mahomedan merchant?" "Has either of the women-folk been careful in her speech and anxious to conceal her cooking operations?" "Has any member of the caste been lavish in expenditure during the past few days, or has anyone purchased a new cloth?" Tracking down the culprit is great sport as well as a serious business to those affected. Tribal law states that there must be no theft amongst themselves, and this law has to be vindicated and the search continues till the betrayer is discovered.

The headman calls a meeting of the senior members of the gang, and in secret they discuss the problem and decide on their course of action. Should they suspect a person, he is called and given a chance to prove his innocence. If he admits the crime, then he is ordered to produce the property, and should it be possible he is made to throw the article at a convenient time into the courtyard of

the owner. Should it be oxen or sheep, he has to tether them at a spot to which the farmer is directed to go and obtain possession of them. This will be some unfrequented corner of the forest or a place not often visited by anyone in the district, and it will be done in the very early hours of the morning before the rising of the sun.

If the property cannot be returned he has to pay money down, and the cash is handed to the owner, it being kept a secret who committed the theft, and the culprit then has to provide a feast for the tribesmen. If he refuses to confess, or maintains his innocence, he is tried by ordeal, and should he object to undergo this test he is outcasted and sent to Coventry, but rather than have this punishment he generally acknowledges his guilt, and he is then again considered as a true member of the tribe after paying a fine which will be levied by the Panchayat, or the tribal court of law.

The origin of the system goes back into the distant past when the country was under native rule. There was no organised police force, and so men of position, with great landed interests, were compelled to arrange a system whereby their property could be watched and guarded. They adopted the principle that it would be best to set a thief to catch a thief, and so they chose men of criminal bent to perform the duties of watchmen. He would know all the tricks of the fraternity, and knowing that dog

will not eat dog, and thief will not rob thief, the system became recognised as a proper form of protection wherever the robber tribes were found. Alongside of this Kaval system of paying the watchmen there grew up another system closely connected with it by which farmers who had not employed a Kavalgar had to pay Tupbukuli or "detection money," when they lost their property and wished to get it returned.

The necessity for this arose because all farmers did not pay the watchmen and there was no guarantee for the safety of the flocks and fields of those who were outside the ring. The Kavalgar had responsibility only for those who paid the levy and who joined the system. It did not matter much to the Kavalgar whether a farmer paid a levy or not, as if he did he went and fetched his tax in broad daylight, and if he did not he took it at the first convenient opportunity, or arranged for a man of his tribe to come and do it for him in the night.

In the case of the villagers having to pay Tupbukuli or "detection money," the agent of the thief comes to the distressed farmer and agrees to produce the property at a definite place and at a certain time, provided the sum is paid cash down, and the bargain is struck to be carried out in dead secrecy.

In some districts this money is known as "Mulladi Kuli," or "wages for walking on thorns," and it has sometimes proved to be such. It involves night

work and a thorny path to the jungle. Some amount of care is needed, and secrecy is essential between those engaged in giving and receiving the money. There must be no calling in of the police. There is a case on record where a farmer lost two bulls, and he agreed to give the "Tuppukuli" in order to get them brought back; but he informed the police, and, unknown to the culprits, it was arranged for the inspector and a posse of police to be at the spot where the bulls were to be produced. The thieves brought the animals in good faith, and the police rushed out of hiding and arrested two of them with great glee, and seized the bulls. The other thieves escaped, called the members of the clan, and, returning, fought with the police, recaptured the bulls, and liberated their companions who were in custody. The farmer knows it is little use going to the police for redress, as no police could prevent or detect every theft in the district occupied by a robber tribe so adept and clever and so thoroughly well organised as the Kuravers and other sects trained by them.

The "Tuppukuli" often amounted to only half the value of the property lost, but it was better to get back half than lose the whole, so the farmer pays up and makes the best of a bad business. This has been the custom in the villages for centuries, and so the people have borne with the system of blackmail, seldom thinking that anything better might be inaugurated.

Some attempts have been made to break up this system, and there is no doubt that it is weakening in many places, but it is still practised over wide areas where the Kuravers and the criminal caste known as Kallars reside.

In 1896 an attempt was made by the people in some parts of the Madura District to drive out all Kavalgars—in this case the Kallars—from their villages, and so break up the system, but the confusion and distress became so serious that the Government had to interfere and stop them. It disorganised the whole of society. It might be well to drive out racsals from one's own village, but what is going to happen when the rogue goes and lives in the next hamlet over the border? It only shifted the evil to another place; but good resulted, as the police were much more strict afterwards in their supervision.

An attempt was also made by the people to drive out the Kuravers from Karur Town some years ago, and the Aravankurichi Division of the old Coimbatore District. In other places villagers have also refused to pay the Kaval fees, but in the struggle which ensued the Kuraver has won. It was a case of paying the levy or losing your property, and the Kuraver has a habit of collecting not only the proper amount of the levy, but also charging for the cost of collecting the same. These charges are generally more than the levy itself when the Kuraver

is put to the inconvenience of having to steal it. The Kavalgar may have to employ a brother tribesman to make the collection, and this man has to have a share, and the villager finds it cheaper to pay the blackmail and save the cost of collection, which may be high.

Europeans have sometimes tried to break down the system, but not with much success. The story is told of a district judge who declined to engage a Kavalgar among his household staff in Trichinopoly. As a result he lost all his plate, and not until he had employed three Kavalgars was the silver returned. There is another story of a commanding officer of the troops in the cantonment who refused to have a Kavalgar. He changed his mind after waking up one morning to find himself on his cot out in the middle of his compound, with all his bedroom furniture arranged in order round him. It is sometimes added that the mattress and sheets had also been taken from underneath him whilst he slept.

With the growth of education in the villages, and the pressure now being more regularly applied by the police, the system is weakening. It is pure blackmail, but custom dies hard and the Kavalgar, thief though he is, must live ; but the system should be discontinued.

*Robber Methods*

“We are Kings of the Forest,  
Let them subdue us who can.”

*Kuraver Song.*

THE life-history of the bandit is generally a fascinating story, and though he is dreaded and feared, yet a kind of halo encircles his head. The bandit conducts his operations on certain definite principles. He does not carry on his profession in a haphazard manner, but takes into consideration human weakness, and allows certain rights to those he is going to rob, kidnap or kill. He will not often murder, though it is easily possible to do so, and it would be much the simpler method for him to adopt. From set purpose he deliberately refrains from many acts, and attempts to play a sporting game. Hence there is a certain amount of respect and awe for the real highwayman. One such extraordinary man was shot in South India not long ago, and I had an interesting story from a confederate in his gang, who told me how and why he himself killed a fellow-brigand who had betrayed the company. The leader was known as the Robin Hood of South India, and was a hero as



well as a terror to the people. The bandit is a daring but a quiet, calculating robber. One sees him with flashing eyes and red cheeks, with the winds of the high mountains blowing round him ; there is dash and style in his movements, and glamour in many of his actions, even though they are cruel and often lead to death.

Among the Kuravers very few have reached the stage when they might be termed brigands or bandits. It has often proved impossible to catch many well-known robbers among them, and they have had to be tracked down, surrounded and finally shot. A Kuraver was thus brought down a short time ago in my district.

The Kuraver, Kallar and Maraver of South India are made in a less startling fashion, and only a few are of the swashbuckler type. The majority are slow and steady in their movements, but every organised expedition is thought out, well planned and arranged to the last detail. There is more slyness than boldness in a Kuraver, and more secret devilry than dash in his actions. What he does appeals to the imagination and strikes fear, but one feels he is a sneak, and there is always much of the coward in the sneak, and seldom can a laurel be placed on his head. In olden days, before the advent of the British, he had a glorious time, and because of the peace-loving nature of the people inhabiting the peninsula he could make a living

without using much personal violence to get what his heart desired.

In this twentieth century he still goes out on his foraging expeditions, and he has a high time, often keeping the police superintendent awake at nights, and giving the constables a full chance to show their dexterity in recovering the booty he has stolen. In 1924 thirty-six thousand four hundred and ten cases of grave crime were reported to the police in the Madras Presidency, and property valued at Rs.25,98,665 was stolen, and of this only Rs.5,42,338 were recovered. To obtain the actual number of crimes committed the above figures would need to be multiplied by five or more, but our Kuravers cannot be blamed for the whole of this.

The peculiar type of robber known as a brigand is developed where there is a specially high and fearless type of manhood living in the countryside, and where he has been compelled to suit his action and life to the highly developed system the inhabitants have organised to capture him, and this he must by all means circumvent to make his escape. In South India the villagers allow a certain amount of robbery as natural and human, and seem to accept it as a necessary part of life, sent by Providence to test their patience, and so they yield to the hard facts, and keep on with their work, and allow the thief quietly to enjoy his share of that which they

have toiled to produce. "Live and let live" is the principle adopted by most classes in South India, and the Kuraver is often unmolested provided there is a reasonable limit to his greed. He may steal, but not too much.

The Kuraver clans have an infinite variety of methods for removing other people's property and of concealing it when stolen. They sometimes use drugs to produce unconsciousness. They have been known to play the part of beggars, going down the street after dark calling for night alms, and the unsuspecting housewife, wishing to earn merit and help a poor man, goes out with rice, when the thief quickly snatches off her jewel and disappears in the darkness. On other occasions they are out early in the morning, and knowing that it is the custom for the women to be up earlier than the men, and outside at their work before dawn, the Kuraver will come and snatch off a neck jewel, and before an alarm can be raised will have escaped. Some sections carry scissors with them, and are known as the "Scissor Thieves." They use scissors to snip off the jewels, and will cut chains or purses or rip open bags on their depredations.

Madras City Kuravers have been known to offer gold for sale at a cheap rate to an unsuspecting customer, and on this account the transaction must be carried out in secret. The bargain is struck, the purchaser takes his money to an unfrequented spot

where he is to meet the men who have the gold. He is waylaid by Kuravers who are parties to the arrangement, and who steal his money while on the journey, or is met by a gang at the rendezvous and forced to give up his cash.

One method of relieving the simple villager of his money is by selling him brass as gold at a cheap rate. This takes a good deal of dexterity. Nimble fingers are a necessity, as well as the art of controlling the conversation. The capacity for joking and a ready wit to work upon the mind of the persons are also needed to produce the right atmosphere, and they then purchase the metal. The Kuraver sometimes sells real gold, which the buyer tests, and others anxious for a bargain purchase cheap gold for their daughter's marriage, and the Kuraver gives them the base metal.

He will tell them to bury the metal he has sold them, and on no account to show it to anyone for some months, as if it were known that he was selling gold below the Government rates he would be prosecuted and put in prison, and the people, believing this story, are duped. They buy the gold, hide it in the ground, and when the time comes for it to be made into jewellery discover it to be brass. They do not report it to the police, but keep quiet over the transaction, as they would become the butt of the village wag and the laughing-stock of the countryside.

Dacoity was one of the old favourite methods of robbery. Five or more men formed themselves into a company, organised under a leader sometimes called a Naik, and to him implicit obedience was given. He was chosen, or would naturally hold the position, because of his superior skill in thieving, or because of his ability in dealing with the police or village officials who are always watching them. He would know the Indian Penal Code, the limits of the jurisdiction of the local police, and though perhaps not always stealing himself, would be the "black hand" controlling the movements of the gang and directing their activities in the district. Sometimes they organise a torchlight dacoity, the torch being carried in a pot to suppress the flame on the way. The men come with bodies smeared with castor oil, and armed with spears and staves for a real battle, and in the past firearms have been used if the opposition was great. The attacking party would sometimes be thirty or forty strong. Such a gang could be formidable, but happily such dacoities are now more rare. During the last ten or twelve years police pressure has been increased, and become so strong that such gang robbery cannot be so easily attempted. There is a story about a gang who went one night to a small hamlet in my district. They locked the houses on the outside, whilst the people were taking their meal, and dared anyone to come out. Some were sent

to watch the street while, according to prearranged plan, others went to the house which it had been decided to loot, bound the owner, and took what jewels and movable property were available and left in a body, going back to their various villages and dividing the booty according to the rule of the clan.

The headman usually gets two shares and the other participants in the expedition one share. Women in the gang, whose husbands are in prison, half a share ; pensioners in the gang, who have done good service in the past, but who are old and cannot go out on a long night journey, are given one-eighth of a share, and sometimes others have a grant ; and one-eighth is served for an offering to their god. There is no hard and fast rule which forces all gangs to act alike in the distribution of the gains, and so a considerable difference may be found in various districts, but it is shared according to set principles and a fair amount given to each person, and it can easily be imagined that quarrels would arise if this practice was not observed. There is a code of honour among thieves, and honesty must be practised in the clan. When there is no loot and nothing to divide, special contributions are often made by members of the gang towards the support of the Naik or leader.

The gangs organised for burglary carry on their depredations over large tracts of country, going often a hundred miles away from their homes.

Kuravers in the Salem District have gone as far as the Kistna, Guntur and Nellore Districts, four hundred miles distant. The leader of the expedition makes a detailed study of the places to be raided, and then thoroughly instructs his men as to their part in the looting. On the night chosen they will imbibe a sufficient quantity of country beer to make them light-hearted and happy, but never enough to make them lose control of themselves ; and then they will start off, singly and by different routes, to the place decided upon for the robbery. Some of the older men are deputed to watch in order to warn active participants of the approach of any defenders from the outside. Others stand with staves to protect the operator who is trying to open the door with his jemmy. One will assist the man, who with a small steel-tipped stave will be making a hole through the wall, and he catches the earth or brick falling to the ground, which might cause a noise and wake the inmates sleeping within. Some criminal gangs, knowing that the police have considered a case false when a hole was larger on the inside than on the outside, now make their holes accordingly.

Before opening the door, which they generally do by making a hole through the wall near the bolt or under the lintel, they always make sure that the inmates are asleep. This they do by throwing sand and small stones on the roof prior to commencing



#### MARKET DAY

The roads on market day are over crowded, and the dacoit has a fine opportunity to steal after sundown, but the police are circumventing this kind of robbery and making the roads more safe. Cartmen generally travel in companies.

#### RESTING BY THE ROADSIDE

A typical country bandy at midday. Thorns are often tied at the back of the rice cart to





operations, and when there is no movement within, and they are certain that all are asleep, they begin their task. Sometimes a small boy is brought and pushed through the small hole. The lad at once opens the door, so that the men may easily enter, and quickly escape should the inmates awake. Where it is not easy to open the door the boy picks up all articles of value, and passes them through the aperture to the men outside. As a rule they never wake the sleeping people unless they have valuable jewellery on them, and this they do only after all else has been removed, and as a final act they wrench off the ear-ring or nose jewel and tear off the necklace, and disappear without delay. I saw one woman who had her ears ripped up by a wrench on such an occasion. As soon as this is done a hue and cry is raised, and the whole hamlet is up and out to see what is happening ; but by the time that a coherent story is told by the excited inmates of the looted house the Kuravers are far away and scattered in all directions, north, south, east and west, and a follow-up or chase is out of the question. Moreover, the villagers as a rule calculate very carefully and quietly the risks to be incurred in running after a gang of dacoits. The latter are likely to be more fleet of foot and are probably smeared with oil, and if caught could not be held, and in the darkness of the night clues as to direction cannot be found ; moreover, they are desperate when rounded up.

They are meek as lambs on an ordinary occasion, but when the excitement of plunder is upon them they are beyond control, and are not going to be handed over to the police without a great effort to make their escape, and if a knife must be used they will not hesitate to cut a way through. Whilst writing this chapter a Kuraver has been hanged opposite my bungalow for acting on this principle and fatally stabbing a man who tried to capture him. The villager therefore generally stays where he is. That is safer than to hunt for freebooters now out on the hills, dividing their spoil at their usual place in the forest, known only to themselves ; long before dawn the robbers will be back in their huts. When there has been no opposition encountered and the people have not been roused, the gang may return in a body to their rendezvous. They go in single file, the man or men carrying the booty always walking in the middle of the file. They and the loot are thus protected from attack in the front or from a rearguard action by those who might dare to chase them.

When there is insufficient time to divide the booty, or a doubt about anyone being near, the stolen articles are buried somewhere in the jungle, and they then hurry home, and before dawn they make it their special business to report their presence to the headman of their village to put him off the scent. The buried articles will be recovered at a convenient

time when the excitement in the village has died down, and the police have ceased to make special inquiries as to the whereabouts of the stolen goods, and efforts to track down the thieves have been abandoned. The crime may have been committed by the members of a gang now camping twenty miles in the opposite direction, so what possibility is there of catching the culprits? Omniscient policemen and a perfect arrangement of man-traps would be necessary, but where are such to be found?

Road dacoity is a favourite method with the criminal tribesmen, and I know one place where special guards carrying loaded rifles have been stationed. Market days provide great opportunities for the thief. After the market is over arrangements are made by the cart drivers to start after dark to do their twenty or thirty miles back to the village. This is a full night's journey, as the bulls seldom travel more than two or two and a half miles per hour. The drivers are generally tired after a strenuous day, and their power of resistance is at a low ebb. The cartmen travel together in a long file, often sleeping whilst the bulls go steadily on. The thieves have also been to the market, and they have been watching the purchases made by the merchant or farmer, and they mark the carts with the most valuable items of silk cloth and brass vessels for use in the home. They inform their comrades, who at a convenient time and in a lonely place loot

the cart. Then the criminals make off with the goods, and it is impossible to identify the stolen articles, as if there are identification marks they are removed and the thief is safe from detection.

Some criminal gangs have been known to steal the bulls while the cart is being driven along the road, and their method is worthy of record. The driver is discovered fast asleep, and the faithful animals are making their way slowly along in the dark ; the dacoits come and, without stopping the cart, cut the rope tying the bullock to the yoke, and another man, or perhaps two men, will at once take the place of the bull and continue to drag the cart. The same process is adopted on the other side, and the four men continue pulling the cart ; confederates meanwhile are driving the bulls across country, along devious paths to a place over the border. After going a sufficient distance, and giving ample time for the bullocks to be well on their way to a safe place, the men drop the shaft and make a bee-line for their companions ; and the cartman wakes up to find his animals have been stolen, two fine bullocks which he is not likely to see again, and he himself is stranded on the roadway some fifteen miles from his home. The cattle are handed over to men who know what to do with stolen animals, and the gang have been well rewarded for the loss of a night's sleep.

I have been told that some will take the sheet off

the bed upon which a man is sleeping and not wake him in the process. They carefully roll up that part of the sheet upon which he is not lying and then proceed to tickle him with a feather, which makes him turn over to the other side and off the sheet ; they then withdraw the sheet and leave the man asleep.

An Englishman when in camp once had his clothes stolen during the night, and he had to cycle sixteen miles to his bungalow dressed only in his pyjamas. On another occasion Kuravers stole a bottle of whisky and other articles belonging to a friend of mine, a superintendent of police.

A very daring and clever case of sheep-stealing was reported from the Anantapur District. The village is at a distance from the railway, but it has good grazing ground, as there are forests on two sides. Boys in charge of the sheep took their animals to the usual grazing ground some distance from the village. It is their custom to be away the whole day and return at sundown. Some Kuravers, pretending to be Forest Guards, came up, gagged the boys and tied them to a tree, and drove off the sheep to the railway station, where they had previously ordered a truck to be in readiness to take the animals to the city. They had arranged for certain butchers to take the animals, and had been paid cash down for the sheep. The stationmaster despatched the sheep, but the boys were not discovered till late

at night, and so the police could not get on the path of the culprits till the next morning, when they had made good their escape. There is real humour and romance in life with the robber clans of South India.

The equipment of a Kuraver for road theft is as follows, according to the list given by a police inspector. It consists of a small knife or a piece of glass, a pair of scissors, a nail, and some rupees to bribe the police constable to let him off if caught. For burglary, a small iron crowbar is essential in order to make a hole through the wall or for forcing the door. They are good at disguising themselves, before carrying out a robbery. One old Kuraver I know tells the following story. They wanted money and sport, and so he disguised himself as a Guru or High Priest, and, like other men in such high office, he had his disciples to travel with him. He went with his followers to a large town a hundred and thirty miles distant from his home, worshipped at all temples and performed ceremonies for those who came to him and received their homage and their gifts. After thus collecting a large sum he went to a local jeweller to have some special ornaments made to add beauty and dignity to his dress. He found the most affluent craftsman, who stocked a large quantity of precious metals and valuable stones, and asked him to make the ornaments. This was a great honour, and the Guru came daily with

his disciples and watched the progress of the work. Being a holy man he was treated with great respect and allowed into the shop and workroom; and, whilst the priest discussed religion and jewellery with the owner, his disciples made a careful study and examination of the jewel cases and chests, the locks, and the keys necessary to open them. Keys were soon specially made in his village and sent to him. The ornaments were finished and handed to the Guru and paid for. During the night arrangements were made to break into the shop, and the cases were opened and the jewel boxes emptied of their contents, and the next morning the priest and his retinue went off to the next town without arousing any suspicion, and they carried off booty worth several hundred pounds.

One Kuraver I know is reported to have travelled second class on the railway dressed as a lawyer, taking his despatch box and other luggage with him. He booked his seat in a large compartment with other passengers. During the night, whilst they were asleep, he threw all their luggage out of the window at points where he had placed his men on the line, and after throwing his own luggage out in the same way, lay down and went to sleep himself.

When the travellers woke they found their luggage had gone; the Kuraver was in the same plight as themselves, as he had lost all his possessions. He



had a good haul on that occasion, and was never suspected, as he was such a plausible gentleman.

Exciting tales of exploits are passed on from father to son, and the boy's blood warms and his nerves tingle as he hears about the famous men in his tribe and what they have done. They all chuckle and have great satisfaction in telling how they have escaped from the police and tricked the representatives of law.

A gang went for robbery at a village, and the house which they wanted to rob was as difficult to enter as a fort. There were forty men under a clever leader, but they could not get in. The leader dropped down dead, and there went up a wail from the men around him as they shouted the news of the tragic event. The women in the house opened the doors and came out to see what had happened, and were glad to hear that the notorious robber had at last gone, and would trouble the district no more. This was their chance. The leader had only feigned death, and his men went in and took away hoards of gold and jewellery, and they were never punished, as it was not possible to detect the men who had entered the house and committed the crime. It is said that the authorities of the native state in which the leader took refuge arranged for two Brahmins to poison him, and he thus disappeared from the road.



#### AN INDIAN MILL

A Kuraver woman grinding corn. No new labour saving device here, but just the primitive mill which has come down through the ages.

#### KURAVI HUI

The residence of a well to do Kuraver. There is no display of wealth or possessions as suspicion might be aroused.



*The Woman at Home*

INDIAN women as a class are very attractive, and the Kuraver woman is no exception. In some of the wandering gangs there are beautiful girls who can dance in a most graceful manner, and even those who do not practise this art have much charm of personality.

In the strict sense of the meaning we cannot say that the Kuraver woman has a home. There is no word in the language to express the idea connoted by the term. The more settled sections of the tribe have huts made of mud walls with a thatch roof, and the house of the well-to-do man would generally not be worth more than two five-pound notes, and few have spent more than a couple of pounds on their residence, whilst the majority would have spent in actual cash ten shillings or less. The wandering section carry their tents with them, and these consist of split cane, or bamboos, strung together, which are made to roll up, and can be carried with ease on their journeys to and fro through the district. These have no settled place to call home, and they can never give their address. Their home is the district, which might be as large as an English county. They peregrinate like gypsies, and are

followed by a police constable to keep watch over their actions and mark the route they travel. The Kuraver woman in this case is never at home. She has no privacy and desires none, and when freed from the attentions of the policeman she gets as near as possible to a state of happiness and contentment.

She has an important place in the life of the tribe because she is essential to it, not only as mother, but also as guardian of all property. The man is frequently in jail, and when free often has to sleep at the police station, so the woman has to care for his children. When her lord is out on an expedition she has to keep guard over his possessions and act as decoy to the police, generally assisting to deceive those who want to catch the menfolk in their crimes. This gypsy life relieves the woman of much that has to be done in the house. They have no furniture and little brass to polish, no plates to wash, for they often use leaves instead, which are afterwards thrown away ; their cooking vessels are of the fewest, and the various families use much in common. The old people, together with their cattle and fowls which accompany them, make their camp a mixed medley, difficult to sort out, yet life is extremely simple and very unlike the civilised existence of the ordinary citizen. They light a fire by the ancient method of the tinder box, and are not bothered with matches. It is on the whole a life free from worry, that bugbear to so many in

Western countries. They need little clothing as the climate is tropical ; their urgent and daily need is food, and they can get that in various ways. The nomad women are pilferers, and do not cost their husbands much to maintain when they are away in hiding or on the prowl. A pilferer is always difficult to catch. Such a person steals only small articles and is generally sly, slyness being highly developed in the Kuraver woman. She can look as if butter would not melt in her mouth, and she has an insidious smile, and poses in such a way that she disarms suspicion. She is a travelled woman, and often gives her experience of distant places, and the village women lend a ready ear to her stories and become confiding to their communicative visitor. Suspicions are not aroused, and a way is soon found to make off with commodities which the Kuraver woman and her family need.

Fowls are a favourite article of diet with the Kuraver, and are easily obtained. They keep their own stock even though they are members of a travelling gang. The children carry the chickens when on the march, or they are put in one of the baskets they make and carried on the head of one of the elder girls. The bullock too has them strapped on the top of his load, and when the family meal consists of chicken it need cause no comment, as it must be assumed to be a bird out of their own travelling farmyard.

The women as they leave the village throw grain to the fowls they wish to steal, and when they have attracted them far enough away from their owner they catch them, twist their necks, and take them to the camp and cook them for the evening repast. Vegetables, grain and other articles are stolen, and it is almost impossible to prove theft unless the culprit is caught in the act. A fowl can never be branded with the owner's name. One basket of grain is like another, and who can prove ownership except the person in whose actual possession it is at the time of examination. The villagers know that it is useless to complain, and the theft is accepted as part of their fate and only what is to be expected on this side of the grave. Their loss is the Kuraver's gain, so why should they worry? They must bow to the inevitable, as all must live, even the robber Kuraver.

The Kuraver woman is therefore a very useful helpmeet to her husband. Like her lord she has no particular use for any moral maxims, especially the Eighth Commandment. The Decalogue is not in her philosophy of life, and she can heartily assist her husband in whatever he attempts to do to make a living.

I have been told that one promise extracted from a woman at her marriage is that she will never make known any crime her husband may commit. She not only loves and obeys him, but she promises to

tell any lie to shield him, should the cruel upholder of the law pounce upon her spouse on his day of bad luck.

Among the more settled Kuravers the women are not often thieves, and surprisingly few are in jail. It is a tacit understanding among the tribesmen that the woman's place is at home. She has to take care of the property and cook the food whilst the husband carries on his profession. She has often to manage the family when her husband is in prison or in hiding, and the woman shows fine grit and character in looking after the fields and the cattle. It goes without saying that her husband never committed the crime for which he was being punished, and she fights to the last in defence of him ; and when he is committed to prison she accepts her lot without much murmuring, as she will get assistance from the castemen, or she may become the temporary wife of another man till her real husband returns, when he will often take her back with any children born to her during his absence.

The woman has many duties, and her special care is the family, and the first task here is the food. The Indian woman has hard work in cooking for a large household. There is no machinery to grind the corn, nor even to husk it, and so the Indian woman is a reaping machine, a threshing machine and a flour mill all rolled into one.



The food of the Kuraver varies with the district in which he lives. It consists of ragi, a small black grain ; cholam, which is sometimes given to canaries in England ; and rice, but the latter is expensive, hence the cheaper grains are more often used among the robber tribes.

These grains, whilst seemingly simple to prepare, do not make palatable food without condiments or a good deal of manipulation. Ragi for dinner, ragi for supper, ragi day by day, year by year, is rather monotonous. The Englishman would soon revolt at bread and potatoes for breakfast and potatoes and bread for dinner, with no other staple food or change of diet. Yet with the ordinary villager such is the monotonous diet, and hence the necessity for condiments and vegetables to make the food digestible and enticing. The house-mother has therefore to know the leaves and roots and "curry stuffs" which will give flavour : some should be pungent ; others add colour ; some will sharpen and others sweeten it. Seeds have to be ground, so the curry stone must be used ; flour is needed for patties and cakes on festival days, and a mill is therefore a necessity, and two stones are placed one above the other, and it is a strenuous task to turn out fine flour by this process. It is done, and the Indian woman can be congratulated on carrying through her task, but she should have the chance of getting her flour without hard labour, and

machines should be used to lighten her burden and make her life less of a drudgery.

The Kuraver, not being a vegetarian, has developed a taste for mutton. He gets up in the night to steal it because he craves for a flesh diet.

They will eat a sheep though it has died of disease, but not a bullock. Indian pig, a very savoury but unwholesome morsel, is a treat to many of them. Some will eat the flesh of the jackal and others will eat cats, but these are sometimes considered to be outside polite Kuraver society. The cook, therefore, can give variety in her daily menu, and needs to know the culinary art to perfection.

The woman in certain sects has sometimes to assist her husband in his work of thieving, as well as to do her own in the camp or in the village hut. Many are experts in tattooing, and, in fact, only Kuraver women do this in many parts of South India, and so whilst going out to ply her profession she acts the spy and finds out what is available for easy removal when darkness approaches, and on her return information is given to the men and preparation made for a visit to obtain the coveted articles, or to lift the fowls which will make a fine feast for relatives who are on a visit, and must be well entertained before their return home.

The women not only practise the art of tattooing, but many also sell spice leaves used in cooking, called Karuvepallei (Bergiria Konigi). These leaves are

obtained in the forest and jungles, and they have a ready sale among the people. The woman selling her leaves looks a most harmless creature, and will, of herself, perhaps steal nothing of much value. Her object is not theft, but to get information of what is available for theft. The thief must be quick in his movements and must not loiter about in a village or on the road. He should be in a hurry to show to those near that he is a busy man. The woman, on the other hand, must take her time and be in no haste, so she dare not steal. It is against her interest, as she would not obtain the information needed by her husband or elder brother, and she would perhaps be caught. Her work has to be done in the daytime, but it is always safer to steal at night.

The life of the Kuraver woman is full of adventure. As an instance of this, in Salem District a gang of Kuravers were once ordered by the police to remove their camp, but they were anxious not to leave this particular camping ground. When the superintendent of police visited them they brought out from a tent a woman about to give birth to a child, in order to show their inability to move on. Long before dawn on the following day, it is reported, the gang was found fifteen miles away, and, when asked where the woman was, a tent was pointed out somewhat away from others, and there was the mother suckling her new-born babe. The journey had been made partly on foot and partly

on a donkey immediately after the child had been born on the previous evening.

The chief duty of the Kuraver mother is with the child, and, like every normal woman, she is devoted to her offspring. The ideal family consists of nine children, five sons and four daughters. She is generally prepared to make a sacrifice for the sake of her son, and it is often very beautiful to see the love and devotion of the son to his mother. It is expressed in a Tamil proverb: "My father was born in a mountain of silver, but my mother in a mountain of gold." This is probably applicable to all castes in India. There is sometimes little or no love between husband and wife, but love exists between mother and child. I have heard men say that they could easily get another wife, but not another mother, and so there is real affection between mother and child. It is often an ignorant love, as the mother shows her affection in a way that is not good for the child. She yields to his wishes and becomes over-indulgent and there is little discipline. But affection, passionate and deep, is created, and the family is bound together with the instinct of self-preservation, and the tribal bond becomes very strong.

The Kuraver woman has no education in the ordinary sense of the word, but she has to train her child for the life he will have to live when he reaches the state of manhood. Straightforward dealing, honesty, truthfulness are therefore no part

of the curriculum in the education of the Kuraver boy. The lad finds it natural to be dishonest, and he is aided by his mother when he shows any inclination for smartness in deceiving his fellows, and it is part of a woman's duty to train her sons for the hereditary profession of the clan.

No woman is too old to be of use to the tribe, as she can always watch and guard their goods, and can also mislead the police by putting them off the scent when the men-folk are away.

In one of the Madras Census Reports it is stated that the Kuravers of North Arcot mortgage their unmarried daughters, and they become the property of the mortgagee till the debt is discharged. In some places their system of bargaining for a wife and giving money over the transaction really makes the matter one of buying and selling, and in the census of 1901 a case is reported from the records of the Madras High Court that a Kuraver sold one of his three wives for Rs.21, about thirty shillings.

Thurston quotes a story of a district magistrate who was out in camp and had his despatch box stolen, and it came out in the course of the trial that the Kuraver who was head of the gang had acquired a wife with his share of the money found in it.

The English magistrate humorously claimed that the woman having been obtained by his money became his property according to a section in the Criminal Procedure Code.

*The Kuraver's Religion*

**S**PEAKING generally it can be said that every Indian is religious. Many are profoundly so, and the Kuraver is no exception. It may strike Western minds as strange that a man recognised and registered as a born criminal and daily under the supervision of the police should profess to hold any religion, but such is the case. In Western countries religion and conduct are seldom considered apart. Goodness and honesty are indispensable parts of a man's religion, and one could no more think of calling an incorrigible thief a Christian than of considering him fit to be put in charge of the Bank of England. It is not thus in the East, where conduct and religion are separate, in the sense that to the majority of men religion is non-ethical. It consists in certain ceremonies, the meaning of which is often unknown, but which must be performed on pain of the most terrible punishment or disaster following. Mystery, and India overflows with it, baffles him. Yama, the god of death, comes and mows people down with his ruthless scythe, and he cannot understand it. Plague, cholera and fever play such terrible havoc in tropical lands that he is struck with terror by them,

and the Kuraver cannot but be moved by all the seemingly uncontrolled forces at work around him ; and so he is religious. He cannot help it, and he asks the question : What does it all mean ?

The Kuraver is often unable to define his faith, but his mind has been filled with stories told him in his childhood of gods at war in the upper world, devils quarrelling in the lower regions, and spirits frolicking in a land between. He has heard that his caste deity flew through mid-air on the back of a peacock, and that Siva goes on his journey riding on the back of a big bull. The atmosphere has been peopled by winged Asuras, and the centre of the earth by bodiless giants who can work magic and grind to powder any who dare to neglect giving them their due. Religious? Who would not be religious? Who would dare stand aside and refuse to obey the orders of a mighty demon-hearted god claiming his rights and a share in man's possessions? The material world is divided from the world of the spirits by a thin partition ; both exist—there is no uncertainty about it—and they of the astral plane have an interest in those living in the material world, and life must be shared and gifts set aside for those in the upper and lower realms.

Hence the Kuraver shows great regard for his religious ceremonies when he is going on a marauding expedition. It is here we see a peculiarity in the religious belief of the East. There are gods whose

business it is to help the rogues, as well as gods who help the saints. There is a hill at Tiruchengode, and on it are one thousand and eight gods, and a priest said to me, "You can have any god you want here." The thief can obtain help to accomplish his purpose. The sick may have the assistance of a god who will give health, and the saint may have the privilege of meeting with a deity who can create holiness and joy in the heart. This temple supplies the need of the highway robber, the burglar, the pickpocket, and the simple-hearted saint intent on serving God.

The Kuraver worships at his temple or his shrine before he goes to steal, and after his return a part of the booty is offered to the idol, and the priests of the temple partake of the results of the exploit. All Kuravers do not worship the same god, and the gods of the various gangs differ, but religion plays an important part in the life of all. In the Telugu country the chief deity worshipped is Venkateswara. Perumal also is popular. Southern Kuravers worship specially Subramania. He is the patron of the thieves, and there are special reasons why he should be chosen as the god of a criminal tribe. Others worship him ; but in India, where gods are many, a choice can be made by each caste or each person, and the Kuraver gives his special devotion to this particular deity. He has many names. He is known as Arumugam, the six-faced, or as Murugesa ;



in the north he is called Kartikei, and in other parts Vadivel or Kandan.

The following story was told me by a Kuraver. Kasiper Rishi, son of Brahma, had sixty-two wives, and lived in the heavenly world. Some of them bore Asuras, giants, and some of them begot only small godlings. There was a quarrel between the two parties, and it led to a battle. The struggle was fierce. The giants had power because of their size and weight. The godlings had quickness and alacrity because of their small stature, and, after watching the struggle with sadness and grief, Brahma went to Iswarah and asked his help to settle the trouble and bring peace. Iswarah considered what should be done, and decided to create Subramania, who came among the parties at war, and, like David of old, destroyed the giants and brought peace to the heavenly world. Subramania thus became a ruler in Devalogam. After his exploits among the giants Subramania came to earth and saw Valli Ammal, a heroine among the Kuravers, and stealthily carried her off unknown to her parents and married her, and soon he became the idol of the fierce hillmen, who always had great regard and respect for a warrior god and one who could win such a great victory over his foes.

One of the special temples dedicated to Subramania is at Palni, in the Madura District, and thither many Kuravers go to worship. The place

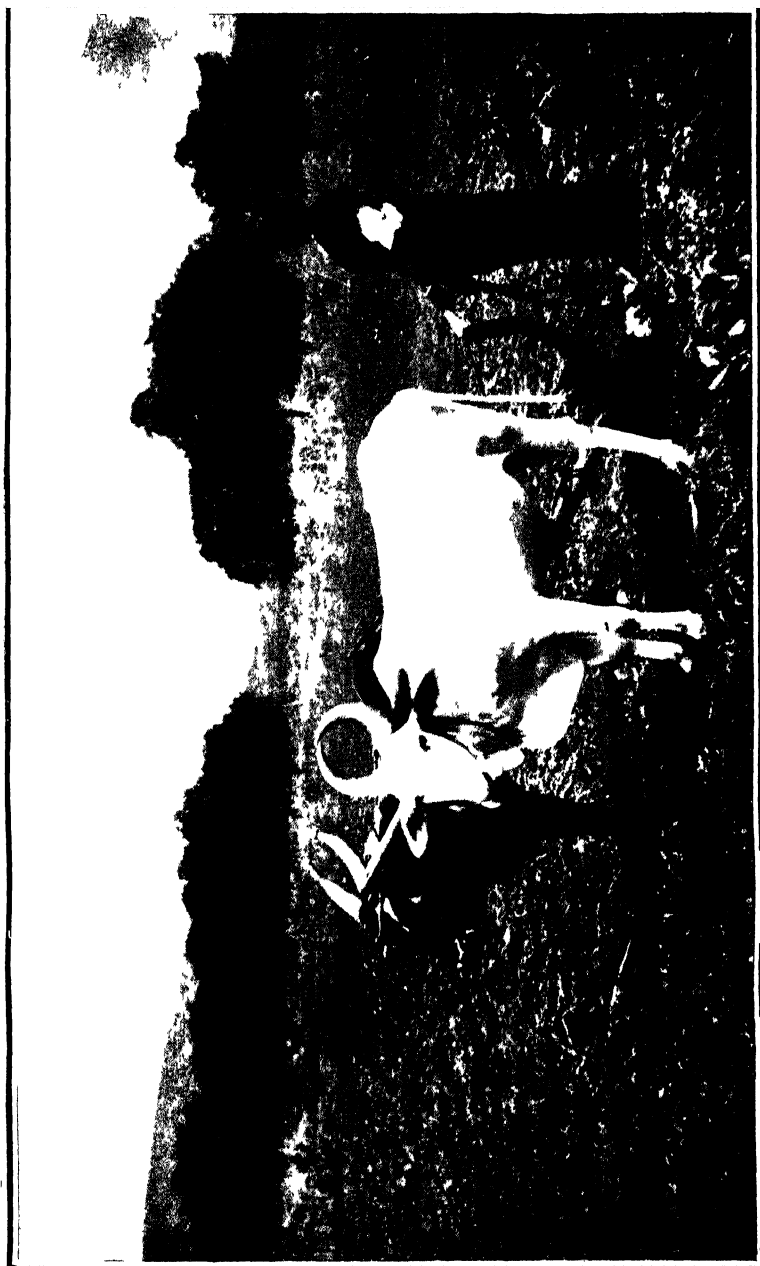
is typical of many up-country towns, but it has a fine setting with the great Palni mountain range rising seven thousand feet at the back. There are hillocks, like huge sugar cones, dotted here and there in the district around, and temples dedicated to various gods on the summits. Pilgrims attend the festival by thousands, and the recognised rule is to utter no sound on the journey except the name of the god ; hence many tie a Mounam—a silencer or a mouth-lock—over their chin and walk to the temple, sometimes one hundred or one hundred and fifty miles from their villages. I have known of cases where men have died of exhaustion on the way. Many are the stories told by Kuravers of the miracles worked there, and I was assured by a member of the tribe that they take place even to-day. The pilgrim going to worship carries a “Kavadi,” which is a little half-circular construction fixed on a pole and carried on the shoulders. It is decorated with tinsel and various carvings of gods, and inside is a niche where gifts can be placed for offering at the temple. The devout pilgrim will cook fish before leaving his village, and, after taking two or three days on the journey, will go to the temple at Palni, make his offering to Subramania, implore the priest to pray, and after depositing his money throw the cooked fish into the sacred tank. It is said that the fish at once come to life. Cooked fowls are offered at the shrine and a mantram

is chanted, after which the birds are believed to come to life and walk round the temple. Milk carried from a distant hamlet and placed in front of the god begins to boil whilst the priest is chanting his prayer.

To show the extraordinary power of Subramania, a keen devotee will cut off half of his tongue while prostrating himself before the idol, and a prayer will make the tongue grow to its original size, and he will rise with his organ of speech in its ordinary condition. Such, it is said, are the wonders performed for the adoring devotee, be he a criminal Kuraver or a man searching for sainthood.

There are other sacred temples in South India which the Kuraver patronises if he possibly can, and many in the prisons of the Presidency could tell interesting stories of their journeys to these places of worship and the great hauls of jewellery they have been able to obtain.

Chidambaram, in South Arcot, is a very sacred place, and all castes obtain merit by worshipping at the shrine there. A view of the deity, even if it be at a distance, brings remission of sin and a blessing for the pilgrim. In visiting such a place the Kuraver generally chooses the road in preference to the railway. The trains are too closely watched by the police, and, moreover, a ticket has to be purchased and paid for. There is a chance of getting back the cost of the ticket by stealing from passengers,





but it is not easy to gather the expenses of the journey in this way. It is, of course, possible and is often accomplished, and I myself was relieved of £2 on one occasion. If the road is chosen, it is never difficult to accomplish some thefts, and there is little risk. Many Kuravers have gone to Chidambaram and have been able to steal quite enough to meet all their liabilities on the way and also the needs of the authorities at the shrine, who, imagining him to be a pious farmer, receive his gifts with gratitude and pleasure.

Tirupathi, in North Arcot, is another place which it is specially desirable to visit. The bigger the criminal and the larger the number of thefts the greater need there is to go to the temple, not necessarily to request and obtain pardon (that does not trouble the Kuraver), but to take an offering and share the proceeds of his exploits with the god who has given success in his undertaking.

His god enjoys the sport of thieving quite as much as himself, and so there is no need or thought of pardon for any sin committed. He goes to the shrine to share the spoils ; otherwise there will be no success on the next expedition. The Kuraver has a conscience, and knows that he must not forget his god or withhold the share due to him.

Maduraveeran has a considerable influence in the religious life of the Kuraver. It is not easy to define his position in the ranks of the gods, goddesses,

godlings, demons, and their numerous satellites, but he has been called the "Inspector of devils." Perhaps that is the most suitable title for him, and he has won the position of honour among the demons because, when Madura was being ruled by Tirumal Naicker, he killed all the thieves who were robbing the king's palace and dominions. It was not his righteous wrath which drove him to slay the thieves, but the hope that it would give him the chance of having all to himself after they were gone.

Maduraveeran will help anyone if he is paid to do so. His image or picture is always kept in the toddy shop, and men get drunk gazing at his form, as native beer must always be offered to him before and after all exploits which are premeditated or accomplished. He acts like a bloodhound to those who do not drink with him or refuse to offer liquor and spirits at his shrine. His image is in the form of a giant with a drawn sword, and he means business if his requests and demands are not met by the Kuraver when out for robbery on the King's highway. He demands a share in gang robbery, and if he gets it all is well.

Fowls and sheep are offered in sacrifice to Maduraveeran, who gets more of such offerings than Subramania, his immediate superior in the world of gods. He acts as the intermediary between the Kuraver and the chief tribal deity, and his favour must be obtained. The thought seems to be that

the chief god is not in touch with the world and does not know what is happening. No one can go direct to him. But Maduraveeran is conversant with all that is taking place in the world below as well as in the world above. He watches the people at work, meets them in the market, is able to go with them on their journeys, and so can give a recommendation to the deity when they want special help for their tasks. As in all Indian households, every one must keep on good terms with the head butler, who has the privilege of direct approach to the master, so every one must obtain the favour and goodwill of Maduraveeran.

¶ Ganesh is another god worshipped by the tribe, and at all marriages he has the supreme place. He can counteract ill-luck and he helps people on a journey. If he were alive he would certainly frighten most people, as he is represented to be a man with the head of an elephant. He has four arms, one of which grasps a club. He is found everywhere in India and worshipped by all castes, and the Kuravers dare not forget him, but a special place and worship for Ganesh on the marriage day is often enough to satisfy god and people for a long period.

There are many stories explaining the extraordinary conception and origin of this god.

He is the elder son of Siva and Parvati, but he came into existence in a wonderful way. Parvati,



being unable to get a son by Siva, made a toy with material obtained from her body, and gave life to him, placing him at the entrance of her private apartments to prevent intruders coming to worry her. Siva came and wanted to enter, and Ganesh, not knowing who Siva was, refused permission. Siva became angry, and, not knowing Ganesh, tore off his head. The grief of Parvati was very great, and Siva, to assuage her sorrow, sent messengers to obtain the head of any living being sleeping with its head toward the north, and the first creature seen happened to be an elephant. They cut off its head, brought it to the palace, and fixed it on to the body of Ganesh.

Another story is given in the Skanda Purana. All pilgrims who worshipped Someswara at Somanath entered heaven. The pilgrims, finding this an easy way of getting into bliss, came in such large numbers that heaven became too crowded and could not contain the enormous crowds which desired admission. Indra sought the help of Siva. He could not revoke the permission he had given to Someswara that his devotees should all enter the celestial world, but Siva directed them to ask Parvati for a solution of the difficulty of accommodation. She rubbed her body, and by magic and incantations produced this peculiar-looking creature, who went down to the earth world and by his presence soon frightened off pilgrims from Somanath,

and heaven was relieved of the pressure of those who found the worship of Soma a simple way to heaven.

Ganesh and Subramania are brothers, and, no one knowing who was the younger or the elder, it was decided that the matter should be settled by a race. He who circled the world first should be declared the elder brother. Subramania forthwith jumped on the back of his peacock, his emblem, and proceeded to fly round the universe. Ganesh simply went and walked round Siva and Parvati, his father and mother, saying that they were his world, and so was declared the elder. Among the other gods to whom the Kuraver must pay his respects and perform puja and worship in order to prevent jealousy among the celestial beings is Mariamman, who has a shrine in every village. As she is the goddess of smallpox and can work much evil among the children, she must never be forgotten. The women believe that this goddess can do much harm, so they allay her anger by suitable offerings of milk and cocoanuts at the proper time. When there is an epidemic of smallpox a procession is formed to perambulate the village, a fire is lighted and carried in a pot with due solemnity along the streets and placed before the sacred altar, and on such occasions the Kuraver joins with others to help appease the deity and rid the village of the scourge.

There is an annual festival of Mariamman which often lasts ten days, but animal sacrifices are not offered at these times. In some villages on special occasions goats are offered as a sacrifice, and the entrails are placed around the neck, and I have seen a man perambulating the village clothed only in atmosphere and this garland. At the festival the idol is carried shoulder high by men who are generally willing to show their piety in this way, and gifts are made by the villagers. Offerings of rice, fruit, flowers and incense are made each day. The Kuraver has his share in these festivals, but he is only one of the crowd in this united worship.

He is a watchman and thief, and plays the rôle of protector to some whilst he is busy stealing from others. The Kaval Kuraver lives a double life, and from what we have said it will be seen that he is religious ; but in tracing out his thought it will be found that he has a mixed medley of ideas and a variety of gods, any one of whom he can worship, as suits the day's needs or the task in hand.

Besides the gods already mentioned, he worships Iyenar. This god is seen all over South India, and round his temple will be found large clay horses, and sometimes clay elephants, upon which he rides on his rounds to protect the fields of those who worship him. This god has a large number of attendants in the shape of huge demons. They are called Veerer or Munies, and are fierce-looking

giants often represented in a sitting posture and frequently ten feet high. They hold a sharp knife or sword, and when these images have glass eyes fixed in their faces they look very ferocious and strike terror into the minds of those who love peace. The Munies are often represented treading on the necks of the persons they have slain. These accompany Iyenar when on his nightly rounds, and they are his instruments for slaughtering the enemies of his devotees. The Kuraver must worship this god. His image is often a small one, two or three feet high, but his attendants are overpowering and strike terror by their size and weight. The pictures will give a better idea than any description.

Iyenar is protector of the fields and crops, and so will naturally be the enemy of all thieves. The Kuraver, as a watchman, needs his help. Iyenar can save him a great deal of trouble, often making it unnecessary for him to go out at night, especially if the property he is supposed to watch is far from his home.

The Kuraver, as a thief, needs the help of Subramania and Maduraveeran, hence he worships them, offering gifts and sacrifices at their shrines. His principle is to keep on good terms with all gods and demons, so that each will help him at the proper time. No attention need be paid to a good god, as he will never do him any harm.

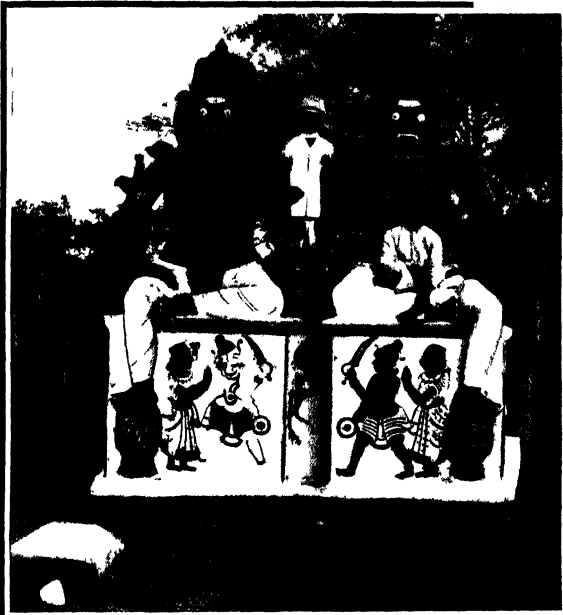
Mudevi is a goddess which the Kuraver does not

forget. She loves darkness and dwells in dark corners and dark forests and caves. She is the goddess of sleep. The coming of Sedevi, the goddess of light, always drives Mudevi away, but, as the Kuraver favours darkness, he is not very much attached to Sedevi and is doubtful of any help from her, so Mudevi is worshipped by him. Mudevi is very alert at night, and can help the Kuraver to keep awake and give him success.

The goddess Kali is not forgotten, and the sacrifice offered to her must be of blood. I met an old priest, a great blood-drinker, among the Nari Kuravers, one of whose duties was to slay a buffalo with the help of his compatriots, and then drink the blood as it flowed from the dying beast.

Large quantities were consumed, yet his body did not become swollen, and he suffered no ill effects, as on such occasion the spirits possessing him roused him to frenzy and prevented any physical harm. He was a Pujari, and drawing his finger, as if it were a knife, beneath his chin, said he would not steal or do anything against Government, even though his enemies should threaten to cut his throat.

From the foregoing it will be seen that religion is conceived not as a solace to the soul, or as a beautiful relation existing between God and His child. There is no idea of a holy God Who interests Himself in the affairs of the world, and seeks



#### HOBGOBLINS

Set up to protect the village from wandering demons. Note the foot on a slain enemy.

#### CLAY HORSES

The kindly farmer supplies horses for the gods to ride out on to protect his fields at night.



to help men in their struggle for a higher and holier life. To the Christian, religion is something which gives him comfort in times of sorrow, and enables him to stand fast when troubles seem to well-nigh overwhelm him. The fact that there is a holy and righteous God above all, and in all, helps him to walk with head erect and steady tread to meet life's ills, and when the world does not give him all he had expected, he then can rest in the knowledge that God will see that justice is done in the end. No such feeling pulsates through the soul of a Kuraver, and no such idea has ever entered his mind. He knows of spirits, and is certain of the existence of devils, whose aid must be obtained, and whose lust for blood must be satisfied if he is to have success in his undertakings. Hence he worships any god who is likely to be of service to him, or who has any power to prevent him having success in his crime.

There are men in the tribe who have advanced much further in religious thought and experience. These sometimes realise that behind all the phenomena they see, and the gods they ordinarily worship, there is Another, the Supreme Spirit through Whom and by Whom they live. He, however, is beyond man's grasp and He can be trusted to do them no harm, and they are content to carry out the ceremonies which will satisfy the local godling whose residence is in the village shrine.



*Child Life among the Robber Clans*

IF it were possible for children to choose their parents they would hardly choose a couple of Kuravers to be their father and mother. Kuraver children start with a great handicap, and there can be no doubt that they begin life with a definite bias towards evil. It is in such conditions that we see the great law of nature exemplified, viz. adaptation to environment. It is a wonderful law, but it certainly has undesirable effects in some cases. This law, which is always insisting on our living in harmony with our environment and punishing us if we do not, is at work in the case of the Kuraver child, and its effect is to make him live the evil life of his clan unless some stronger influence from the outside is brought to bear upon him. There is nothing to help him towards goodness, and nothing less than a miracle would save him from the life of a professional thief.

The Kuraver children, through force of circumstance, adapt themselves to the life and thought of the clan. As is the father so is the son. "What was good enough for father is good enough for me." This is filial affection, and therefore family law, and no higher moral principle can be observed in daily

life. Can children born of such parents and brought up under such conditions bring a charge of unfair treatment against the laws of nature under which they came into existence? Whether that is possible or not I do not know. Kuraver children of tender age are very attractive and seem to differ little from those of other castes, but individuality soon begins to develop, and then the difference is seen. Mix the various little children of the village together and it will be very difficult to single out the Kuraver. Let the test be regarding physique, fondness for fun, quickness of perception, delight in games, ability to learn, coyness in movement, or the winsomeness of his smile, the Kuraver child is like his fellows in other castes. That is when he is very young. Afterwards another tale has to be told.

Fortunately children cannot remember what takes place in early life. They certainly feel pain and sorrow, joy and gladness, but they have no record of the impressions in their mind, and they cannot tell others what they have felt. It is just as well that it should be so in the case of the Kuraver. Perhaps the child was born by the roadside or in a jungle hut. There was no preparation made for his coming, and no doctor to see that his arrival took place in accordance with the best hygienic and physical law. An astrologer was probably consulted in the more well-to-do families and a note made of the planets under which he was born,

and certain ceremonies may have been performed, though not for the comfort of the new-born babe so much as to satisfy the Manes in the upper and lower worlds. This is all that is done for the coming of the young Kuraver. Should it be a girl there is but little, if any, rejoicing, but if a boy there is unlimited joy. Many of the children in the caste die at a tender age, and only the fittest survive, owing to the severe conditions and the rough and tumble of the camp life. When on their journeys they are sometimes strapped on their mothers' backs, carried on an elder sister's hip, or fixed in a basket and tied to a bullock ; or they have to make the best of life on a donkey's back, and they often sleep lying across their mother's shoulder whilst she is marching to the next camping place. The infants often are entirely unclothed, and during the day they are baked in the sun, and at night covered with a gunny bag or wrapped in a rag to keep them from getting too cold. The more settled sections have less travelling and discomfort, but all the children are left to themselves very soon after they are born. Complaints? Could they not make them were they but conscious of their condition? The Kuraver seems to have no regard for comfort, and one is surprised at the capacity of human nature for being able to be happy and content anywhere. This law of adaptation to environment is very wonderful.

I have tried to find out what is the happiest period in the life of a Kuraver. Has he any specially happy period? Boyhood in England is a happy time. Up to fifteen the lad is at school, and his holidays are great experiences in his life. They are long remembered, but the Kuraver boy has no such period. His parents have not arranged anything to develop his moral and intellectual nature, and nothing has been done to make his childhood happy.

I know a Kuraver woman who lost her boy, aged eight, whilst on a journey, and he was never found, and her grief is still great. The Kuraver mother loves her child, and instinct and the desire to protect the child are very strong; but beyond this she does not go, and the children sprawl and crawl about the camp as chickens run about a farm-yard, and are as happy as if they were born in a palace. At eight years of age the real child life ends, and they have to begin to take part in the hard work of the clan. The child will be given definite lessons in lying and deception, and taught to say "I don't know" to the questions of any stranger on any subject. It is always safer for a Kuraver child to be outwardly ignorant. If there is a police inquiry the case is never given away by an injudicious answer, and the parents are not compromised or put into difficulty by the thoughtlessness of their children's remarks.

The Kuraver father is often away from his home,

and what more natural question is there for the police to ask them regarding the whereabouts of the parent than when he went away, or when he will return? They might be able to unravel a theft case if they could get answers from the children to such questions. The child is taught therefore to pretend ignorance when such questions are asked. When manhood is reached such caution is not necessary, as a deliberate and clever lie might be more useful, but it is only a person of age and experience who can be trusted to adopt that course.

In the case of the nomad members of the tribe children cannot attend school, and where the people are more settled there is little desire for education. The other caste people do not want any close association with their own children in a school. Schools are open to all classes, but public opinion does not often favour the children of the robber caste being admitted with other children. There is no special school period in the life of a Kuraver boy, and of course a girl needs no education to fit her for her services in the clan. It is only in places where Government and missions compel children to attend school that they receive an education, and this can only be in settlements which have been started for the tribe in various parts of the country. I think it may be said that children of the caste earn their living from the age of eight onwards, and part of their living even from the age of six. The smaller

children look after the babies and watch the fowls and the hut. The bigger children attend to the cattle and graze the sheep in the jungle, protect the crops in cases where the parents cultivate land, in addition to their caste occupation.

They are never too young to pilfer, and so all of them become adepts at this. The precocious boys are taken with their fathers at an early age and help in the actual work of thieving. They are specially useful at fairs and religious festivals where large crowds assemble for worship, and where there is a good deal of cash at hand for the ceremonies in the temples. A quick and clever boy or girl is of much use on such an occasion. The father will engage the people to be robbed in conversation, and they will take no notice of the little, innocent-looking child standing near the cart where their property is placed, and who at a favourable moment makes off with the coveted articles. The father, if still present when the loss is discovered, knows nothing about the boy who stood looking on, and expresses his sorrow and sympathy with the man in his loss, and perhaps calls a policeman to see what can be done to catch the thief. Should the boy be caught, the father, who pretends to be a stranger to the lad, begs for leniency, and the lad is let off with a thump or two from the woman or a slap in the face from the man, and everybody is satisfied with the amicable ending of the attempt at theft

except the father of the boy. A threat of punishment makes the boy more nimble on the next occasion. When the boy steals it is generally arranged for his mother or an aunt or some accomplice to be near by, to whom he passes the articles for safe keeping ; and he with the father goes to another part of the market or another temple where people have congregated, and proceeds in the same manner to steal from them.

One boy I know was taken by his father to steal corn from the field just as it was ready for reaping. It was arranged that they should act at some distance apart, as the farmer might have men on the watch. In case of bad luck it was planned for the boy only to be caught rather than both of them, and when caught the lad was to act in such a way that the father might have the best chance of getting away. When they found that the watchman had been aroused and knew of their presence in the field the man made off, but the boy was caught and kept. The lad was asked his name and caste and every kind of question to discover who he was, but of course he did not tell the truth. He said he was a Goundan boy, and he had come alone to steal as he was hungry. Meanwhile the father had arrived at his home some miles away. The boy was taken to the police station, and the father, knowing what would happen, arranged for a Mahomedan friend to go to the station and give a bribe to the



A TUTKA OR GO QUICK AND KURAVIERS OLD AND YOUNG

#### A KURAVI HOMESTEAD

The head of the house sits on a cot and the wife is ready to pound grain. The boy is holding an Indian plough. The grandmother is the mud of all work.





police, with the result that the lad was let off on account of his tender age, the farmer not knowing that he belonged to a robber caste.

A little girl who had been in a settlement school went to her parents' hut for the holidays, and the mother sent her to the bazaar to steal. The girl went, but had not the courage to take anything and returned with empty hands. The Kuraver mother threw pepper into her eyes and sent her back again to bring something, threatening her with more punishment if she did not do it.

Small girls are sometimes trained to dance and sing, and they can augment the family income through the exercise of this talent, which is considerably developed in some families. Their dancing, though limited in range, is very graceful. It lacks swing and dash, but there is good form, and the attitude they strike makes a pleasing posture and is very interesting to watch.

The children of the Kuraver tribe cannot be said to have many opportunities for playing organised games. Children love play, and the Kuraver child is no exception, but their life is such that the time for games is very limited. They get their exercise in other ways. Whilst on the march their strength is used up in walking and carrying the household effects—pots, baskets, fowls—and I have seen a small girl with the family residence on her head.

Where there is a group of children and some

one able to organise a game, they love to play, and one favourite game with boys and girls is the "Kollatum." Any number from six to a dozen can join. They form a circle, and each child has two sticks about fifteen inches long, and with a chorus they begin to jump and dance, striking their sticks to mark the rhythm of the tune. They then join in pairs and, still singing, strike each other's sticks, keeping perfect time, whirling round and round till they are almost giddy and delirious with excitement over their song.

"There are flowers to be gathered to-day,  
Let us go and run to the garden,  
They with beauty and scent are laden.  
Let us not miss the chance : So away."

Boys play marbles, but in quite a different way from lads in England. They make two holes in the ground, and fire the marble into or near the holes, and their object is to knock away their opponents' marbles as far as possible and get their score before they have a chance of coming in. It is on the croquet principle of sending your opponent's ball away from the hoop and preventing him scoring.

Another game, known as "Ballichi Gudu Gudu," is very popular. Eight or ten boys join up and form two sides, and stand thirty feet away from each other. A mark is drawn across the middle, and one from each side comes and toes the line, and the

boy to be caught has to hold his breath and keep saying "Gudu, Gudu ; Gudu, Gudu." As soon as he is compelled to inhale air he runs back to his base line with the other trying to catch him. If he is touched he has to join the other party.

Kuraver children also play a game called "The robber comes, close the door." A large number of small children may join, forming two groups with equal numbers on each side. A robber steals a ring or jewel and hides it in the hand of one of the children, whose hands are held behind the back. They then stretch their arms forward with closed fists, and the opponents have to discover in whose hand the article is hidden.

There is another game that is interesting to watch, known as "The Chekku" or the "Oil Mill." Eight or nine boys will sit on the ground with extended legs, and, forming a circle thus, they leave a place at their feet sufficient for a boy to stand in the centre. This lad has to stand erect, and with muscles taut and body stiff he topples over on to the boys seated round him, and they throw him off and whizz him round and round the ring till he falls upon one of those seated ; this boy then has to stand in the centre and take his place. When playing they all make a squeaking noise in imitation of the creaking oil mill. It is strenuous work and splendid exercise, and is frequently very exciting.

There is a set season for each game. Marbles in

January, kite-flying in June at the approach of the monsoon, and they spin the top in August, and have other periods for other games, and it is interesting to note that the children of the East and the West are unconsciously one in having a regular rotation of their games, each coming round in order throughout the year.

*Rivals among the Clans*

RIVALRY adds interest to life and a certain amount of it is good for society. When carried too far it becomes a menace to good feeling, and then only is its effect on character undesirable. Tradesmen and merchants carry on their business in the atmosphere of rivalry, and it is not unknown among the higher professions, and the Kuraver has this spirit and often attempts to surpass his fellow-clansmen. Rivalry is at times very powerful among them. Women have their due share in producing this spirit. They want husbands who have done exploits and whom others fear. They love men in whom they can have a just pride because of their cleverness. Rivalry also often exists because of some quarrel over the division of booty. When Greek meets Greek to settle the value of the loot, a fair division must be made, else hard words follow, and when both men are keen on their profession as well as clever at it, and have a considerable following behind them, rivalry is sure to be the result. The parties separate, forming new gangs, and the leaders endeavour to outdo each other. A successful haul by the one gang breeds jealousy in the other, and, in order to keep

the honour of being considered the chieftain, a great attempt has to be made to excel the exploits of the other contending gang. I have known such rivals in my district, and many have made great names for themselves among the clans. Raman was a great hero a few years ago. He was the terror of the whole Taluk, and his son's face always shone, his eyes flashed, and a new tone would be in his voice as he spoke to me of the great deeds his father did when he was a boy.

Raman was known as a lion amongst his people. Obstreperous children in the district were kept quiet by the mention of his name. The farmers went to market, and feared to return unless they knew where he and his followers were at the time. No one was a match for him. No one dare charge him with robbery, as there was never any proof, and should some one venture to witness against him, or be heard to say that he was the culprit, woe betide him, as his property would certainly be carried off and he would be compelled to pay dearly for venturing to speak what was probably the truth.

This notorious criminal was the incarnation of duplicity, but it was very difficult to prove his guilt, and seldom was it possible to punish him. He helped the Government in the detection of crime, and whilst doing this committed theft himself, or arranged for his men to do it. He assisted

the police, and when so doing studied their methods, discovered their rules, and found out all the tricks for escaping detection when he himself or the members of his gang should be out for loot. He had a happy manner, was very kind to his friends who trusted him, and was ever ready to help with money as well as advice, and, always having the where-withal for the purpose, was a man of honoured position among his people. No one sought help in vain, and even the police never left him without feeling they had found new clues in any inquiry they had in hand. In the case of the police they were duped, but the poor who came received real assistance and help. It was the anxious desire of the farmers to be on good terms with him and his gang, as otherwise nothing was safe from their rapacious hands.

He was a Kavalgar or watchman, and his income was considerable, but like most men in such a position he wanted more ; and being feared and knowing his power over the people, he dominated the district. He was a medicine man and practised sorcery, and so a threat would make a man fall at his feet and grant him whatever he asked. He was the sort of man who always obtained whatever he wanted, and those around him were ready to obey him and fight on his behalf. During the heyday of his fame there was growing up in the gang a young lad, Perumal by name, the son of a younger brother



of Raman, but few at first took much notice of him. He was a precocious boy, very skilful in the use of his fingers, quick in learning anything shown to him, and from the age of twelve upwards developed with much rapidity and began to show extraordinary ability in arranging robberies and planning expeditions for his fellow-tribesmen. In fact, he became almost equal to the chieftain of the clan. He, however, bided his time, obeyed his chief, did the work allotted to him, accompanied the gang on their marauding expeditions, and did much to bring notoriety to Raman's company. Such a youth would not for ever be satisfied with an inferior position in the clan. He was ambitious, and wanted to lead a gang himself. Just then the position of Kavalgar became vacant in an adjoining village, and Perumal wanted the Kavalship made over to him. Raman knew the power of his subordinate, and he saw clearly that if the youth were given this position it might be against his own interest and affect his authority, and so opposed his having it, and forced the villagers to make himself the Kavalgar of their village in addition to those he already had. Raman being such a terror and the recognised chieftain of the clan, was given the position through sheer fear on the part of the villagers.

From this time Raman and Perumal became bitter enemies, and, though members of the same gang, yet eyed one another with suspicion. Each of them

tried to attract fellow-tribesmen to his side, and young Perumal gained the confidence of the more daring lads among them, and these attached themselves to him and looked up to him as their leader, though they had to obey the orders of the chief. The gulf between the chieftain and the young charlatan grew wider, and rivalry began to show itself. Raman, with a view to keeping his authority and showing his skill to the whole clan, decided on a great robbery, and went out one night with his men without the knowledge of the other party and had a haul of jewellery worth Rs.3,000. Raman thought that this splendid achievement would certainly reinstate him in the affection of the whole gang and make the supporters of Perumal waver in their allegiance, and lead them to drop him and join their old captain.

It angered Perumal to find that his chief had such a piece of good luck. The women would certainly think Raman the better man, and the public opinion of the clan would naturally veer round to the support of the elder man as the head of the clan ; and they would look upon Perumal as a young upstart having done nothing really to win the laurels of leadership or a position of power in the tribe. Perumal called his friends together and was bent on outdoing Raman. If Raman had stolen Rs.3,000 he would go and get Rs.5,000 ; but his followers held him back and maintained that it was

no use making an open breach with the old leader, and after much heart-burning and many bitter thoughts Perumal decided to leave the gang and go to another place some miles distant, where he might have a chance of showing his prowess. Raman therefore kept his position. His gang was charged with the robbery, and he had to spend large sums of money to get his men out of custody. So what they gained in the robbery they lost in court expenses, but no one was convicted, and he gained prestige in the tribe and fear of him increased among the people.

Perumal was not long in finding a gang to which he might attach himself. He had already made a name for himself, and therefore no gang would object to have him. Meanwhile he had been married, and decided to ally himself with the company to which his father-in-law belonged. They were living in a good centre for robbery, not far from a large city, and in a district where the land was good and very near the mountains, where on the foothills cattle grazed in large numbers. This was an ideal place for a robber clan. There were hills and mountains all around, and when necessary they could easily go away into hiding. Robber bands and dacoits had often defied the police on those uninhabited mountains, for, while they could see them from above, they themselves could not be seen. They could move about on the hillside,

and the forces of law and order were always below them. Here Perumal was soon made Kavalgar, and this provided a fair income for himself and his wife, even though nothing was obtained by theft or from income through his membership of the gang. For his work of Kaval he drew seventeen Kandagams of paddy, which were worth Rs.170 per annum. From ten to fifteen sheep were presented to him yearly ; two hundred cocoanuts would come as his share from the palms, and in addition there would be grants for watching a sugar plantation or special crops, and on festival days clothes would be given for himself and perhaps his family.

This was sufficient to enable him to live in royal state in his village, and other income could be kept for defending himself or his people in court cases, or could be saved to purchase land and cattle which would give him a position among the landlords of the taluk.

The chief man in this gang was Kuppan, father-in-law of Perumal. His speciality was sheep-lifting and stealing goats. This may seem rather a simple thing, but it is not so, as sheep have a habit of making a noise, and if there is one thing more than another which interferes with the thief it is noise. He must work in absolute quiet. Noise attracts attention and wakes the watchman. There are two principles in the Kuraver code, both of equal importance, namely (1) "Thou shalt steal," and

(2) "Thou must not be discovered," and so sheep-stealing must be carried out as a fine art. Moreover, alongside a sheepfold, besides the watchman, there will certainly be dogs, miserable bony creatures, but they can set up a growl and a howl which will wake up a whole countryside. These have to be kept from barking or making the slightest noise at all costs. He brings savoury viands for them, perhaps drugged, and when he has settled with the dogs he can proceed with the business of the night. To be successful in sheep-stealing a whole network of communications must be kept up, and a company limited as to numbers but unlimited in ability to deceive is required. Agents must be arranged for purchasing the skins and passing them on at a proper price to the merchants. The Kuraver should have a flock of sheep himself, or the gang should possess a flock between them, as often the stolen sheep is not needed for immediate consumption in the family and can be put with the robber's own flock. There is little real risk in this, as sheep are so much alike, and if it should be discovered a simple explanation is at once forthcoming to the effect that this additional sheep must have broken away from its own pen through the carelessness of the shepherd, and attached itself to his flock. How can he be blamed for that? Under these circumstances he sends it back with alacrity and with many apologies, advising the farmer to instruct his shepherd to be much more

attentive to his work and not let his sheep wander again. When a sheep is needed for immediate use, and the Kuraver is not far from his house, he strangles the animal, and there is no possibility of noise ; but I have heard of cases where he is very cruel. When he wants to take a sheep a long distance, and it is too heavy to carry, he will put a thorn through its tongue, and the sheep will be able to walk, but unable to bleat, and thus he takes it home.

Kuppan and Perumal were thus a powerful pair. There was nothing for either of them to learn in roguery, and they worked together in harmony, and had an obedient following of the younger hot-bloods of the clan. They had a fine time always trying to outstrip their rivals in the amount of their depredations, and they became landowners in the taluk as a result of their robberies.

But "the way of the transgressor is hard," and Kuppan discovered the truth of this scripture. One dark night it was decided to go and steal some sheep from a village five miles distant. Kuppan arranged for five lusty young men to accompany him, and they reached the village, going direct to the place where they knew the sheep were kept. Everything went like clockwork : the dogs were kept quiet, the watchmen were not disturbed, the sheep were caught in a way which prevented them making a sound, and the robbers went off with four fine sheep. This was splendid. They had done it so quietly in the cool

air of the night, with only a few stars shining here and there between the monsoon clouds, and they felt thrilled as they recalled how they had dodged the farmer and all the men he had placed to look after his flock.

Without delay they decided to go back and have another haul, and so, placing the stolen sheep in a spot where they would be quite safe, they returned to the fold to re-enact a similar theft. Kuppan ordered Nondi to jump the fence, and he forthwith cleared it in a bound, but as he came to the ground on the other side a man on the watch landed him a blow with a club. In a twinkling Kuppan was by his side, and there was a *mêlée*. Others came to the rescue, and Kuppan received a spear-thrust in his side, causing his internal organs to protrude because of the depth of the stab. With his left hand he pushed back the protruding parts, fought with the right, and then got out to the road and made his way back to the village. His people bound up the wound, but, even though he was weak with the loss of blood, he decided to go back and have revenge on the man who had thus dealt him a mortal blow ; but it was impossible. His strength kept ebbing away, and at the rising of the sun the robber leader—the terror of the countryside—passed to his reckoning. Perumal had meanwhile blundered, and was caught by the police and sent to prison for five years. I like the old man, but he has retired from

the profession now, and he is no longer young and has learnt a better way of life.

There was another rival to these men in leadership among the robber bands—Raman No. 2. He was quite a small boy when the first Raman was ruling in his taluk and terrorising the people of his village. He was the son of a cousin of Raman No. 1, and was naturally in a most favourable position to know and learn all about the art of thieving. He was a beautiful lad, according to Kuraver standards, and when I first met him I was impressed with his good appearance and fine muscular frame. He had a wonderful disposition, but very complex. Some people feared him as if he were the very devil, and others who knew his kindness loved him as a dear friend. It is one of the strange characteristics of the Kuraver that he has all the natural instincts of a good man, and nearly all the evil qualities of a demon. He chooses those to whom he will show his good nature, so he has a devoted band of admirers in the inner circle ; but those who are without are terrorised and have to suffer much at his hands. Raman No. 2 could not bear to see any of his friends in trouble or suffering in any way, and he was always endeavouring to help them. He never, I suppose, did an honest day's work in his life, but he was ever ready to assist those in distress.

He began the real study of his profession at



twelve years of age, when an uncle, an expert in the art, and his father, who knew all there was to be known about thieving, instructed the lad and gave him a thorough training for his career. Thieving became as natural to him as breathing and it caused him no qualms, and conscience became dormant, ceasing to function in his normal and everyday life. He was good-looking, and could easily pass himself off as a woman, and his special line was going to weddings dressed in a woman's *saree*, and, everyone thinking him to be a woman, he was allowed to sit among them and enjoy the festivities. He had a very engaging and attractive manner, and the women at marriage feasts would be only too pleased to show their ornaments and jewels, and have conversations as to the position of their husbands and the wealth they possessed. He obtained in this way very valuable information for future use. An Indian wedding is often a tiresome performance, and sleep settles on the guests before the function is over. He would sit with the women, and when they slept he would remove their jewels and be off before they had missed them. The wedding booth is always crowded, so it would not be difficult for a man, light of touch and quick in movement, to remove the gold ornaments.

For natural reasons this was a method of theft which he could not long continue. He could not retain the beauty of his youth. After hair began to



#### DRAMATISTS

Travelling actors are always welcomed in a village. The drama in front of the temple continues until the early hours of the morning.



appear on his cheek it would be risky to disguise himself. The voice, too, changed, and it became less easy to imitate the woman in his speech, and at twenty-five this course of action had to be abandoned for others. This caused him no real difficulty, though it was with some regret that he had to relinquish such a fruitful source of income. It is said that between the age of twelve and twenty-five he stole in this way Rs.7,000 worth of jewellery, or as much as an Indian farm labourer would earn in eighty years' continuous service on the land. At this time he was anxious to have the daughter of a cousin as his wife, and so he gave the mother this sum of money in pledge of his affection for the maiden, but the cousin played him false, and he was compelled to marry another girl in a village twenty-five miles away. This girl was a sister of Perumal.

After his marriage he settled down in a place where he could have a free hand, not only among the farmers and well-to-do people of the district, but also among his own tribesmen. He knew his capabilities, and he would not serve under any chieftain of an ordinary gang. He was formed for leadership, and his training had fitted him to rule. So he started out on a new path, and soon attracted fellow-clansmen to his side. He was able to support whole families through his gains, and they always had in store enough for days when luck did not favour them or their hauls were small. He became

not only the leader in a gang, but he became the generalissimo of other gangs in the district, and was considered by them a hero, and feared by the people as if he were a demon always out for plunder. House-breaking became his chief concern, and the income gained in this way was supplemented by liberal helpings from the sheepfolds of all the farmers round about. He had ill-luck in one case, where he was convicted and sent to jail ; but after three years he came back like a giant refreshed, and treated his stay in His Majesty's institution as a holiday, and forthwith proceeded to make up for lost opportunities and continued his operations in a new sphere.

He now decided that a change of residence would be desirable, and he made a journey to Cuddalore and Chidambaram, the latter being a specially sacred place in South India ; and there he made his offerings to his god. He obtained money for his expenses on the way by robbery, and then went to Kumbakonam, carrying on his profession all the time. He visited the temples of Tanjore, stealing money and jewellery, and offering some of the proceeds to the gods of the temples. He returned and was again sent to prison, and, having done his term, came out and found that his old district had been well worked for some years, and, thinking that perhaps there was not room enough for himself and his other clansmen, he decided to go to the

Madura District. There he allied himself with the Kallar robber bands, and they soon discovered his value. He was cool-headed in difficult places, a bland hypocrite when meeting the police, and a villain of the deepest dye when loot was to be obtained ; and they welcomed him into one of their chief gangs, and he led them in a great torch-light dacoity and won much fame. He made a small fortune and came back to his own people.

As he spent three periods in jail and was now not so physically capable of making a long journey, he had to allow the younger men to take the lead, but he never lost his passion for theft, and, like the pure bred race-horse, he was always ready for a run, and he never feared to take a risk. I saw him a few days before he died, limping along the road some miles away from home. I asked him what was the matter and why he was lame. He was bare-footed, of course, and he said that he had hurt his foot through a thorn having pierced it—nothing unusual in such an experience—and both he and I made light of it. After a few days his foot became worse, and, unknown to anyone, he went to the hospital and there died ; and it was some ten days before his people discovered he was gone. He had been shot in the foot whilst attempting a burglary, and blood poison set in and had carried him off. The teacher who lived in his village said to me, with a sparkle in his eyes,

that there would be less trouble now that the clever rascal had gone.

Another clansman named Koothan made a great name for himself through sheep-stealing, and he was so smart that he, when blindfolded, could remove the skins of twenty sheep in one night, and never so much as make a hole in the hide ; and another old criminal could enter into a house even though he had to break open fourteen doors to do so.

Rivalry naturally takes places among such people, and each leader strives to outdo the other. Public opinion is of great influence even in a criminal tribe, and each man of energy and conscious of his ability wants to secure a position of leadership in his clan.

*An Expedition*

**E**LABORATE preparations had been made for the expedition, and the men, sixteen in number, had been anxiously and gleefully looking forward to one of the big events of the year. The leader was ready for anything and prepared to risk everything if he could successfully carry out the plot and get the booty. The lure of the loot had become a mania in the gang, and the younger Kuravers were going to outdo the older men this time, and show their capacity for any devilry.

The house to be robbed belonged to a banker, and was situated in a small village which had one main street with lanes branching off at many angles, and the houses were built in varied styles and placed in every conceivable position. The keen business Chettiar kept a bazaar in this street, and his trade flourished so that he never needed to borrow money from the Sowcar whom our Kuraver gang had arranged to attack. Not far from the Chettiar's bazaar the wealthy banker and broker, who was of the Reddi caste, had built his house. It was large, with an extensive courtyard in the centre, and rooms all round. The front entrance was low with carved and grooved lintels, and the door itself was made of



thick wood with iron spikes projecting, giving the appearance of great strength.

The door was no doubt strong, and an elephant might hesitate to make a charge at the spikes.

The roof was of thatch, making the house cool, though not conducive to safety in case of fire. Layer upon layer of jungle grass has been put on, and a thief would have difficulty in making an opening, and it would be impossible to obtain an entrance that way.

The windows were small, like those of most Indian houses, and all closely barred, and it would be futile to try this way. The walls were of clay, well set, and sometimes such a wall can become hard like concrete, a pickaxe being needed to make an impression on it. The house was old, and therefore the walls were set and very hard.

For weeks the plans were being laid. One man was sent to watch the movements of the master and the purchases he made, and to ascertain the debts he had collected and the sales of grain which he had effected in the adjoining market towns.

They were to attack when the house was likely to contain the largest amount of money. At such times some wealthy men fire off bombs during the night to frighten off thieves as well as ghosts, but our Kuraver, the professor of burglary, is not much moved by this device. It only necessitates catching the bomber and silencing him after he has made a few explosions.

Kuraver women had gone to the village and had been telling the fortunes of the females in the house, and whilst so doing had carefully noted the probable places where jewels and money were kept. The exact position of the locks and bolts, the number of men usually sleeping on the premises, and the kind of dogs likely to be near were all observed. Special note was made of the room where the women would sleep, as a large haul of gold could be obtained from the jewels worn in their ears and noses and around their necks, arms and ankles.

Wearing jewellery is thought to be the safest way of keeping it, and because of this practice many murders take place in India.

Nothing escaped the notice of these sharp-eyed and keen-witted Kuraver witches, with their palmistry and very plausible stories of the children the women were soon going to bear and who would become the pride of this Hindu house.

The sixteen men often met in secret, generally going out to the adjoining forest by different routes to avoid rousing suspicion. They were always on the move and never in one hamlet for long, as it was necessary for them to hide their identity, and no farmer should see them twice. They had to get their food during the days of waiting, and one man was set apart for this task. A sheep was easily caught, strangled and cooked in the night. This one cooking was sufficient for a full day's rations.

The leader had been waiting for a favourable omen, and it came. He had found that Rama's wheel indicated success. He had chanted the names of the deities :

“ Rama, Latchimi, Sita,  
Rama, Latchimi, Sita,  
Rama, Latchimi, Sita,”

and the last spoke had finished with Rama, and without doubt there would be success.

On the darkest night of the Krishnakalam, when no moon would appear in the sky, off they went in high spirits, but with serious intent, to the village of the wealthy Sowcar. The village had a police station with a head constable, guns, swords, lock-up and all the paraphernalia of the law, but they were not to be deterred by such considerations as these. What does the Kuraver care for the policeman or his guns? He considers that guns are kept to frighten people, not to kill them, for he knows that even if the village policeman had the courage to fire he would almost surely miss his aim.

They had gone by separate paths, and had entered the village at the appointed time from different directions, and then each began to perform the task which had been allotted to him. Certain paths were blocked with thorns and prickly pear. At selected spots stones were collected into heaps in readiness to make a fusillade should there be an attack from the villagers. The younger men were

to throw stones and hold the villagers back till the older men were at a distance, and then the lithe, athletic youths would take to their heels and escape. These were precautions in case of attack from the inside. The defence therefore being complete according to plan, they all went to the police station, and, finding, as they expected, all the constables asleep, gagged and bound them, took their guns and other weapons, and started for the house they intended to rob.

Quietly and carefully they worked at the wall, and after an hour or an hour and a half they succeeded in making a hole near the door, and the bolts were drawn and the men entered. They had been correctly informed by their women where the jewel and cash box was kept, and this they seized and carried out into the road. Meanwhile the rich Reddi had awakened, but the fear of death was upon him, and he never so much as moved a muscle, but pretended to sleep, and the robbers had a free field. They took out all they wanted, and were about to make off with their loot when there was a noise in the dark street. Men were hurrying from all directions, and the crack of a gun was heard, and the Kuravers found themselves surrounded on all sides. There was nothing left but to drop the booty and try to escape.

News of their visit had somehow leaked out, and the villagers with the police had come with old

rifles, blunderbusses and staves, and a real struggle ensued, and they were compelled to fight their way through the village. It was pitch dark, but guns were fired and spears used freely, and afterwards I saw the stabs on the body of the naik. Four of the sixteen were killed, and the other twelve managed to escape to the jungle some miles away just after midnight. There they remained seated disconsolately, but, being hungry, they stole a sheep, and two men began to cook a meal for the morning. It had been very exciting. Four of their companions were dead in the village, and they had brought nothing away.

Their expedition had been a fiasco. As they sat pondering over the night's experience they heard the noise of an approaching company in the road not far from where they were resting, and thinking there might after all be an opportunity of a haul from stray travellers and some reward for such an expedition, ten of them went down to see what the chances were. They found that they were villagers who had come after them. The men on the road had heard the Kuravers in the jungle, and at once formed up in a line pointing their guns straight at the jungle men. The robbers were as calm as men who had just awakened from sleep. They were surprised in more senses than one, and pretended to know nothing of what had happened in the night ; but the villagers were in some doubt whether these were culprits or men just out hunting in the forest.

It was a tense moment, but the Kuravers had no intention of being caught, so, speaking in the peculiar language known only among themselves, they arranged their plan of procedure. They were very thirsty, and the sun was just about to rise, and they asked the villagers to tell them where they could get a little water to slake their thirst. It being the bounden duty of every religious Hindu to do this, they pointed out a well not far off. Away the Kuravers went, casually but cautiously, and getting in front of the villagers, who were watching them, made a dash for the open country.

One of the villagers, seeing them run, fired and shot one of the robbers, who fell dead in the field. The remainder of the story is soon told. The wife of the dead man appealed for justice, and twelve of the villagers were sent to prison for shooting a harmless man in the jungle.

*Superstitions*

THERE is no absolute law defining how man's mind will respond to his environment. The mind belongs to the infinite and is seldom under conscious control, and though there are laws which it obeys, and certain principles upon which it will act, yet it can never be laid down that, given certain conditions, particular results will follow. Put a man in a precise and defined environment with all the forces under control, yet his thoughts can never be predicted, and it is never certain what he will think.

Every man, primitive and modern, jungle wallah or town-dweller, lives in two worlds. There is the actual material world in which both classes of men live. In this material world a stone to the one is a stone to the other, and both feel the effects of fire in the same way, the physical world being much the same to both men. There is also the spiritual or mental world in which they live, but here in this sphere little or nothing is the same to them. The mental world of the one is quite different from that of the other. The primitive man has a mind filled with hobgoblins and other impossible creatures, and he fears them, but the modern man only knows

about them through reading what others have said, and he laughs as he hears their history ; but demons, devils and ghosts are real objects in the spiritual life of the primitive man and he is terrorised by them, whereas the other believes that even though they might exist they are yet subordinate to a still higher power which he calls God, and they do not worry him. The mental world of the two men is thus filled by an absolutely different creation, and where the one will smile the other will tremble or stand in awe and fear.

It was General Gordon who, when in China, said that he would like to get inside the mind of the Chinese, and if we can project ourselves into the mind of the Kuraver we shall enter a realm of strange spectres, and see the wonderful variety of mental processes which are at work creating his spiritual world and giving him a peculiar mental outlook.

A Kuraver will put a knife in the ground at the entrance to his hut, with the sharp edge upwards, firmly believing that no demon can then enter his house to harm him. Sometimes above the door he will tie a bunch of thorns, and this is done with the object of keeping away an evil spirit. Some demons walk on the ground and others fly in the air, so in the case of the pedestrian visitor he will cut his feet should he try to enter, and in the case of the winged spirit he will damage his forehead or prick his eyes

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whilst flying through the narrow doorway. They have a sense of safety when these measures are adopted to protect their homes. In building a new hut various customs must be observed and ceremonies performed to ensure prosperity. A forked pole is procured, and on this is tied a cocoanut with mango and plantain leaves as decorations, and in a piece of yellow cloth various kinds of grain are placed, the whole being fastened to the pole, which is fixed in the ground where the house is to be built ; there the owner worships it with his kinsfolk surrounding him to support him in his requests to their family god. The pole with the offerings is then put in position, generally in what will be a corner of the house, and the wall built round it so as to completely cover it. Prosperity and safety to the dwellers are thus assured.

The life of the Kuraver is very largely influenced by fear of evil spirits, and one method of preventing their entering the house is by strewing ashes round the building. Spirits, being simpletons, will not attempt to cross a line of charcoal or ash. Another efficacious method to prevent a hobgoblin coming inside is to tie a sandal and also a piece of aloe plant to a post in the house. It scares off evil spirits. This mascot may have a truly useful purpose in frightening off any intruder bent on mischief, as when he sees the sandal he concludes the husband is at home, and he is afraid of opposition and perhaps a struggle.

Is this not on a higher plane than the cult of the mascot which has such a rage in the West, and which has no reason whatever for its use ?

Many have a peculiar superstition regarding their photograph, and object strongly to sit before a camera. In some cases it has only been possible to take a photo by the aid of the police. One photographer I know had a special contraption made by which he looked in the opposite direction to where the tribesmen were standing, and took the photograph unknown to the men who were objecting to the operation. It is not the idea that the picture will be used for purposes of identification which makes them object, but they have a real fear that a part of their life goes into the print and their days are shortened, or their gods object to it. I was trying to take a photograph of an interesting group on the roadside, and they agreed to my doing it. I exposed my plate, but unfortunately after developing it I found it was not a good picture, as some had moved. A few days later I went again to take the same people, who, though a wandering company, were still in the same place ; but as soon as they saw me they were excited, and would on no account allow me to take a second picture. As a result of the first photograph their child had been taken ill and was down with fever, and the mother pointed to the infant lying on the ground. The illness was purely the result of their allowing the photograph to be

taken. Argument was of no avail. The crowd standing round, and the policemen also, reasoned and argued with them, but they were adamant. "Please go, please go," they said, and I had to leave without a picture.

Devils and demons are seemingly very limited in their range of action, and there are lines of demarcation beyond which they do not go. This is very fortunate for the people. Some time ago a gang of Kuravers settled on a piece of land at the foot of the Shevaroy Mountains. There is one portion of this land which it is said cannot be cultivated until seven cartloads of people have died on the site. Seeing that any number from six to ten may ride in an Indian bullock cart, the price to be paid for cultivating the land is high. Muneswara, the lord of the jungle, demands this sacrifice, but no one is yet willing to come and make the offering, and so the land remains idle. Hard by there is another field not cultivated. Attempts were made to grow corn, but it ended in failure. A demon was in possession, and it was useless to work the land until he could be persuaded to leave and make his residence elsewhere. The wise heads of the district were called and the help of the priest was sought. Three hundred rupees were spent on ceremonies, incantations and mantrams, and offerings were made to the devil. The god Hanuman was brought, and his image placed in position and worshipped with

a view to getting the evil removed, but it was of no avail, and the land was left uncultivated. The Kuravers are working and cultivating the adjoining jungle with no interference from the spirits of the air, but no one will come to cultivate the other field alongside where the devil holds sway.

Superstition is revealed sometimes in the names they give to their children. Kuppen is a name given to a boy and Kuppammal to a girl, and when such is the name of a man it is known that he is the third child of a mother who has lost her first two children. It is believed that some demon or evil spirit snatched away the first two, and so on arrival the third child is laid in the dust and the name Kuppen, which means "dust heap," is given. The demons consider that an object which has been laid in the dust and has such a name is of no value and go away, leaving the child with the mother. Demons are treacherous, but there are means of dodging them.

Many members of the tribe will not go out on an expedition to steal on the night of the new moon. They cannot give an explanation for this, but they are certain the expedition would end in disaster, and so they choose some other time. Such a custom may have a real reason for its observance. During new moon nights Hindus often have special religious ceremonies, and it is a night therefore when many are awake, and there would be grave risk of capture if they went on such an occasion to steal.

The nomad Kuravers hesitate to camp under a Thandri tree (*terminalia belerica*), and there is a common fear about this tree among Hindus generally. The reason for refusing the shade of the Thandri tree is said to be based on what is reported to have taken place between Nala Maharaja and the god Saneswaradu as given in the Mahabharata.

Once upon a time Bimaraju, the Terrible, ruled in the city of Vidarva, where dwelt with him his daughter named Damayanti. When the time came for her to be married the father called together all who might wish the hand of the maiden, and it was arranged that upon whomsoever Damayanti placed the garland of flowers, this one should become her husband.

On the day fixed the gods and all the princes assembled, except Saneswaradu.

Damayanti stepped into the banqueting hall bedecked in beautiful apparel and bejewelled from head to foot, carrying a garland of flowers. She was taken round to each of the princes, and came to where her lover, Nala Maharaja, was seated. She found to her dismay that four of the gods had assumed the appearance and shape of Nala, and there were five seated side by side. What could she do? She paused and noticed that the gods who had assumed the shape of Nala to baffle her cast no shadow, neither did their eyes wink, as they were the ever wakeful guardian gods, and by these

signs she was guided to her real lover, and the garland was placed upon the neck of Nala Maharaja, and he became the possessor of the most beautiful princess.

They were married and set off for the country in which Nalaraja ruled. On the way they met Saneswaradu, who, seeing them together, asked the reason for their acting thus. He heard the story, and became very angry and cursed Nalaraja for having taken the beautiful woman as his wife whom he wanted for himself. As a result of the curse Nalaraja became a gambler, lost his wealth and kingdom, and Damayanti went and lived with her father. The curse could only be continued for a definite period, and after losing his kingdom and his wealth Nalaraja lived in poverty for many years. Not being able to bear the separation from his wife any longer, he decided to go to Bhimarajapuram to search for her, and on the way, whilst he sat sorrowing under the shade of the Thandri tree, Saneswaradu met him and confessed that he had been the cause of all his misfortune and ill-luck, and begged his forgiveness. Nala Maharaja would not overlook his crime, and cursing Saneswaradu, condemned him to live in the Thandri tree for ever, where his capacity for evil would be limited to the area covered by the shade of the tree. Hence the nomad Kuraver will not remain under this tree.

The women of the section known as the Uppu

Kuraver (salt-carriers) do not wear a thali to show that they are married, and their reason for so doing is as follows : A farmer and a Kuraver who were about to get married both went to a goldsmith to purchase a thali for their respective brides, and the ornaments were duly made. The design was according to the best pattern of the jeweller's art, and in happy mood the pair started for their village, which was on the other side of the Cauvery River. They reached mid-stream, and getting beyond their depth, were in great distress as to how they were to get to the other side. They struggled against the rushing waters, and the farmer managed to get a footing and escaped with his life, but the Kuraver was carried downstream and seen no more. Subramania, the tribal deity, ordered Uppu Kuraver women never to wear a thali owing to this disaster.

*Kuraver Justice*

“**T**HE quarrels of a Kuraver are endless ” is a South Indian proverb, and there is another which says that they are more difficult to settle than among any other caste.

In all primitive society life is limited in its outlook, but it is very varied because of its peculiar mental quality.

The mind of the Kuraver is full of activity, his wits are developed, his power of observation is keen, he is always watching for opportunities of increasing his possessions, and is always being watched by those who know his capabilities in rascality, and a mentality is developed which produces a quarrelsome nature ; and where moral principles are not deep there is nothing to deter them from a quarrel. There are no cinemas to pass away the time. Quarrels can be carried on with a fair amount of pleasure, and sometimes even with good will, and so the dispute may become a kind of debate, and it can develop into an exciting and interesting mental pastime.

Quarrels arise about all kinds of subjects, but probably most frequently over women. The division of loot has been the cause of much heart-burning, and trouble has come to the gang when



a tribesman has broken the rules of the clan and stolen property when it was in the charge of a Kavalgar in the gang. It is a rule to settle disputes whenever possible without going to a Government court, and a Panchayat, with the headman as president, will inquire into their quarrels. Their method of deciding a case can be very simple and also very cruel, and sometimes the judgment may be very uncertain when it has to be done by ordeal. They have no elaborate system of collecting evidence, and it matters not in what way or from what source evidence is obtained. An ordinary court of law has a very complicated system for dispensing justice, and evidence must be given in a particular way, and facts have to be ignored simply because they have not been given under regularised conditions. An English judge, whilst trying a case for murder, said to me that the accused in his court were guilty, but he could not punish them because the evidence had not come in the correct way. The Kuraver has no such difficulties, and someone must be punished for every tribal crime, and it is seldom he goes astray in dealing with his case. The judges are shrewd in reading character, and their knowledge of the tribes' mental processes is so deep and certain that they seldom go wrong in their final judgment.

Here is a case which happened in my district. Property had been stolen from the house of a wealthy Ryot, and the police would not be able to

recover it. Moreover, this particular landlord had his Kuraver watchman, and he was responsible, and according to custom would have to make good the loss. It was believed that a tribesman was the culprit, but no one would admit his guilt. The chief of the clan called all his men together. Women also were collected, but one and all denied knowledge of the theft, which consisted of valuable jewels and money, easily secreted. There was much palaver. Every argument was used to show that it must have been someone outside the tribe who was the culprit, but the watchman and the chief had strong suspicion that the thief was one of their gang, and as tribal honour was at stake the rascal must be found. Everything else failing to produce the rogue, the headman decided that the matter should be settled by ordeal. It was to be thorough; no one was to escape; anyone old enough to steal had to show his or her innocence. A pot was brought and filled with ghee—clarified butter—and placed on three stones; a fire was lighted and the ghee made to boil. Fifty Kuravers stood still watching the blazing fire and gurgling ghee. The owner of the lost property, with his people, remained near to watch the trial by ordeal.

The headman ordered his men one after another to come and put the forefinger of the right hand into the pot; and into the pot each thrust his finger, and returned to rub it with raw rice to

see if the skin would peel off, and so prove his guilt.

After a dozen or more had done it the name of a suspected man was called, but he refused to come and go through the test. After pressure he yielded, put in his finger, rubbed it with the hard grains of rice, and the skin peeled off. What could be more certain than that he was guilty? It was then found that he had not been the thief, but he knew who had stolen it, and as he refused to tell, the process had to be continued.

Another man was called and still others, until the number among whom the guilty one must be found had become very small. The really suspected man was then called, and before all he resolutely refused to put his finger into the pot and declared his innocence. This did not soften the heart of the headman, who was out to see caste law upheld and justice done to his fellows, and he was about to take the culprit's hand to force it wholly into the pot, according to rule, for anyone who refused to go through the test. Rather than submit to this he admitted with downcast eyes his guilt, and he forthwith went and produced the stolen articles, and was duly punished for his faithlessness. He acted in accordance with the proverb which says, "When the stolen article is in the hand, why put the hand in the hot ghee?"

Putting the finger into the boiling butter or ghee



#### BASKET MAKERS

They roam the countryside and have no home. These refused to sit for a second picture as a child became ill through the magic in the camera when this photograph was taken.

#### ROUGH JUSTICE FROM THE COOKING POT (TRIAL BY ORDLAL)

The finger is put into boiling glue as a test of innocence. If the skin peels the suspected man



is one form of ordeal, and another, equally effectual, is to hold in the hand a red-hot piece of iron. If the iron burns the skin guilt is proven, and the man is punished. If there is no burn he is held to be innocent. A good deal of manipulation goes on when the hot iron is in the hand, as fire is no respecter of persons and will burn good and bad ; so the Kuraver rolls it, turns it over and plays with it as if it were a ball, until his judges are satisfied that the ordeal has been sufficient to prove his guilt or innocence.

A less painful way of finding out which of two persons is the guilty one is by arranging for two pots of rice to be boiled by a third party. Two pots of equal size are purchased and filled with the same quantity of rice, and an equal amount of water is poured into the vessels. Two similar amounts of wood are brought, and a fire under each pot is lit by the judge ; and the owner of the pot which boils first is declared innocent and the other guilty, and the culprit has then to feed the company. This is considered a sufficient punishment if the crime is not serious. The whole ceremony is conducted with a certain amount of decorum and takes place at a temple, and if both pots boil together a coin is thrown in, and the men are ordered to take it out. The guilty man will confess rather than put his hand into the boiling rice.

In disputes where the matter is not serious the parties will agree to meet under a tree in a particular

place, but when this method of settling a quarrel is accepted it is found that the guilty party often remains away. The other party takes a fowl, kills it, cuts off a leg and fastens it to the tree, and makes a gash in the trunk, and calls on his god for justice. The other party is declared guilty because he did not appear, and no Panchayat Court will consider a case if there should be an appeal. This is Kuraver law, and is absolute.

In a case where there is a charge of adultery against a woman of the Uppu division and she denies her guilt, the headman has a peculiar power to discover the truth. A new earthenware pot is procured, filled with water, and three betel leaves are entwined together. A tray is brought with various items on it, including saffron, soap-nut, oil and some string. This tray is placed in front of the pot, and the betel leaves are then put in an upright position and made to float on the water, and the pot is lifted and carried round the room. Should the betel leaves topple over and sink the woman is declared guilty, and if they remain in the position in which they were placed on the water she is announced to be innocent.

If found guilty she at once incriminates the man. He is seized, a cloth tied round his leg, and he is dragged into the centre of the group, and he is made to pay a sum of Rs.36 ; and if he is too poor to raise that amount he is com-

pelled to perform a loathsome rite to expiate his crime.

Another method of discovering adultery is to send the woman to a well with a new pot, and if she is guilty it will crack.

In order to find out whether a girl is a virgin she is made to sit alongside the bridegroom in the marriage booth. Rice is brought in a pot, and a piece of wick is soaked in oil, lighted and thrown into the rice, and if it burns she is a pure woman. No attempt is ever made to discover the position of the man, as he is free and beyond law in such matters.

In some disputes redress is sought by going to a temple. After burning sacred camphor before the idol the Kuraver will put the fire out with his hand, and sometimes a lamp is lighted and the light put out in the same way.

Innocence is often proved by the man making an oath over the the prostrate body of his wife or child, and it can also be done over the saree or dress of the woman. Sometimes a circle or three straight lines are drawn, and he is made to stand inside and in the name of his deity declare the truth, and his innocence is considered proved.



*Death Ceremonies*

**K**URAVERS as a rule bury their dead ; it is cheaper than burning, and they have never been particular as to the place. People who have no home and no settled life, and who are continually on the march, cannot give much time or attention to the place of sepulchre for the dead. Society always distrusted the Kuravers, and officers of Government were always on the alert to catch them in their depredations, and the desire of the tribesmen was to be rid of their dead as soon as possible, and the more private the place, the more hidden the grave, the better for all concerned. Their wanderings could not then be so easily traced.

The modern Kuraver now follows more or less the customs of the people among whom he lives. As soon as a death takes place a Pariah is called to beat the drum and announce the news to all the clansmen in the vicinity, and he is sent to distant places to call the relations to the funeral. The Kuraver, like the caste Hindu, does not beat the tom-tom on such occasions. It is beneath his dignity. It is the special duty of the outcaste Pariah, and for performing this recognised duty he is paid by the parties employing him, according to ancient custom and caste rule.

When death draws near the family and friends gather round the dying man, and each of them gives him some juice of the Tulasi plant mixed with milk. The Tulasi plant is very sacred, and its juice is supposed to satisfy all his needs on the journey to the spirit world.

As soon as possible after death three to five pots of water are brought by relatives of the deceased, and the body is washed—by a man in the case of males, by a woman when it is a female—and a new cloth is purchased and wound round the corpse. A handkerchief is tied round the mouth, rags are stuffed into the nostrils, and the two thumbs and two big toes are tied together. This may be a precaution, and is probably done to prevent the deceased returning to earth. Flowers are procured, and scents sprinkled round about ; red ochre is put on certain parts of the face, and sandalwood paste is rubbed over the body. The barber is called, whose duty is to build and decorate the Pandal or booth erected to give shade ; and Pariahs make a bier of new bamboos, upon which a mat of cocoanut leaves is placed for carrying the dead to the place of burial.

Women meanwhile gather together to weep and wail, beating their breasts, and there are sounds of moaning and groaning which are weird and depressing to those not accustomed to such proceedings. There are often real grief and sorrow in the company. Some have come out of real sympathy, others from

pure curiosity, but all join in the general howl, shrieking and increasing the lamentation. It is the custom for the women to beat their breasts, and it is expected from them. Men encourage it, as the time will come some day when *their* passing should be commemorated in a special way ; and what more effective method than by the wailing and howling of a crowd of their clanswomen ? There is no priest, and there are no prayers, though this is not because they believe that death ends all. There are ejaculations and broken sentences, and sometimes a kind of petition ; gods and demons are called upon to answer why they have taken away the husband or robbed a mother of her son. Reverence is seldom exhibited, and the family god is blamed for taking away the bread-winner, or the sister who was needed to help in the home.

Death is an awkward event in the case of young men, who are wanted in the tribe, but it is an event which need not be greatly regretted when it carries off the old, or those getting feeble, and not of much use in the rough life of the Kuraver clan. As soon as all the relatives and friends have come from the distant places the wife of the dead man is dressed in the best garments obtainable, and decked with jewels belonging to others if she has none of her own. She is garlanded with flowers, like her dead husband. This is her last day with her lord, and it behoves her to be like him in dress and decorations.

So they lavish their gifts upon her, as she and they know it will be the last day when respect and honour such as is shown among a primitive race, will be hers.

When all is ready a start is made for the burial ground, often a veritable place of skulls, where sometimes a visitor has to step over bleached bones, and one is led to expect a visit from the late possessor for intruding into his sanctuary. It is the most dreary spot near any village.

Four relatives or clansmen carry the bier, while the eldest son and friends walk alongside and behind, throwing rice over the body. Rice is put into the mouth, and is known as "Vaikarasi," the last mouthful, and it indicates the wish to supply the dead man with any food he may require.

If the death has taken place on a Saturday, a live chicken is tied to the bier with the corpse, as there is a proverb "Saturday's corpse seeks help," and the chicken by some occult means gives that assistance needed on the journey to Hades.

The body is carried head forward until the boundary stone fixed near every Indian hamlet is reached, and there a halt is made. The Pariah makes a mark on the ground, a coin is thrown—a quarter of an anna (one farthing)—and the Pariah gives the dead man some kindly advice while the people stand in silence. He says: "You have had a good character among us. You have been brought here with your face towards the house in which you

have sojourned, and now we turn you round, and you will look towards the grave to which you will be carried. Come back no more in ghostly form to trouble us, but betake yourself to some abode in a distant place where you will cause us no anxiety or pain or nightmare. Adieu, adieu." The women then go back to their houses, the bier is lifted and turned round, the feet being first and the face looking towards the place of burial. The band plays, the performers dance, swinging round and round, whilst the procession wends its way slowly to the cemetery or burning ground, incantations being chanted all along the route.

The body is laid on the ground by the graveside, and a new earthen pot full of water is brought, when the son, or the nearest relative, takes the pot of water, marches round the body three times, and smashes the pot on the ground near the head of the dead man. Cocoanuts, camphor and food are then offered and placed alongside the deceased ; and he is requested to accept them, and not return to trouble his friends again. They seem always to have a haunting fear that he has a grudge against them, and that he will have more power to hurt and harm them in the sphere to which he is going. Hence they request him not to return. If he came he would come as a ghost, and they could not meet him on equal terms. It would be spirit against flesh. He could see, but could not be seen. So one and

all request him not to come back to his old abode, but to go and seek a new dwelling place.

The body is then lowered in the grave, and a "Wodder" who has dug the grave fills it with earth.

In the case of a well-to-do Kuraver the body may be cremated. Firewood is brought and the corpse is placed upon it. More wood is put on the body, till it is covered, and the eldest son, or the nearest male relative, takes a pot of fire which has been brought for the purpose from the dead man's hut, and the pyre is set alight. This ends the ceremony for the day as far as the dead man is concerned, and the outcaste Pariah is expected to see that the body is entirely consumed by the fire before he leaves the burning ground, or is completely and satisfactorily buried in the grave.

Not far from the grave or place of burning there will be a tree, and the mourners straightway make for the shade.

The Dhobie or washerman spreads a clean cloth on the ground, and at once, according to historic custom, gifts of money are thrown upon it by all who have come to pay their last respects and make their last request to the dead. Gifts are not large, but they vary in amount according to the season and the wealth of the giver. Silver coins from the value of one-and-sixpence down to threepence are thrown in ; and when all have made their offerings, the money is counted, and each man who has acted in

any official capacity is presented with a gift. First in order is the temple servant who has provided flowers, but offered no prayers ; he may have one-and-sixpence or half-a-crown. Then comes the washerman who has lent a dress for the dead man's wife to wear at the funeral, and who has supplied a cloth for the roof of the Pandal erected in front of the hut. He may have a shilling. The barber comes next, for he has supplied tinsel and glass to decorate the hut, and perhaps the bier. The village Totti—the Pariah who announced the news of the death, and who has summoned the relatives, and who gave the corpse some good advice at the boundary stone when leaving the village—gets his share. He may have one shilling and sixpence. And lastly comes the grave-digger. Four panams—that is eightpence—will be his share for the toil of using pick and shovel. Altogether, a big funeral of a well-to-do robber may cost Rs.50, or four pounds, but the ordinary tribesman would not spend more than five shillings on the event. This business being settled, the relatives decide the date when they will perform the final death ceremony, and then depart to their homes. In many divisions of the tribe the feeding of crows is an important item in the ceremonies, as the crow is considered to have influence in their expeditions, and, being often a bad omen, must be propitiated.

The final ceremony, known as “Karumandaram,”

is held either on the third day or eleventh day after death. It must be on a date with an odd number. This is a time of jollification and carousal, and anything might happen on that day. Dancing, quarrelling, fighting, drinking, any or all of these may take place at the same time on this special day.

A calculation as to the number of men likely to be present is made beforehand, and sufficient toddy or native beer is purchased and stored in pots, and the quantity should be enough to make everybody happy and drunk. A sheep is killed and a great feast prepared. Money is found for this, and relatives must beg, borrow or steal to provide the food necessary for the last ceremony.

A Brahmin priest is sometimes called in for the "Karumandaram," and he chants mantrams and offers prayers, but his duties are soon finished, and he leaves, taking gifts of cocoanuts, rice, fruit, flowers and perhaps some money. When he is gone the eating and drinking begin. The first function is for the brothers to present a cloth to the widow, and one to the son who lit the funeral pyre or who superintended the burial of the deceased, and they then proceed to remove from the neck of the widow the thali, corresponding to the English wedding ring, and the poor woman howls and weeps as her marriage token is taken from her neck and she faces the prospect of going out into the world a lonely and despised widow. The eldest son is given



the father's ear-ring, which he wears till his death, when it is passed on to his offspring. It is the sign of his headship and authority in the family.

To show appropriate grief and respect no cakes may be made and no oil bath taken in the dead man's hut for one year.

A division of the property is then made. Sheep, bullocks and the other possessions are divided in accordance with custom, the eldest son getting the largest share, and the others in their order of birth. A marriage may also be negotiated for the eldest son, and property set apart for the occasion to be given at the time of the wedding to meet the cost of the ceremonies and the feasts.

It is not easy to classify and clarify the tribal ideas concerning death and the future life. One thing is certain : death is not the end of a man. One and all believe in eternal life, though it must not be imagined that the term " eternal life " means the same thing as it does among Christians, where the idea is of quality, rather than quantity or mere duration of time. Among the Kuravers life is endless, and through the ages which have gone and through the ages which are to come life will be undergoing change and decay and renewal. It will be rising in the scale of existence or falling into a lower level of being according to the deeds done and the character formed in each successive birth. There is no connected consciousness of these varied successive

lives. Transmigration, though believed to be a fact, is not supported by any argument from personal experience, nor is there any memory, however dim, to prove it. The life now being lived is not the first life, and it is believed that there will be many another life to follow, but "When?" and "Where?" are questions not to be answered, and it will be equally useless to expect detailed knowledge of the place where the soul will spend its days in the period during which preparation must be made for the re-birth into the world-life again.

There are numerous places where the soul can go when it leaves the body. According to some Hindu Shastras there are seven higher worlds, approaching somewhat the nature of the Western idea of heaven, though much more materialistic; and seven lower worlds, something after the idea of a paradise, where devils, men and gods meet and enjoy themselves; and below these are twenty-one hells, some of which are red hot, and others icy cold, and where the most wonderful forms of punishment are given to those who disobey the orders of the demons who control the destiny of those who go there.

The prospects for the soul are not rosy in any of these worlds, and so no one wishes to stay there for ever, and transmigration is a way of escape. There is a coming and going from one world to another until the soul has fulfilled its weary task of finding rest, which is only possible in the bosom of Brahma,

the goal of all Indian religion, where the soul loses its identity and ceases to be a personality.

The Kuraver does not think deeply in the realm of theology, and never attempts to formulate a theory on these subjects. His thoughts have been on the more mundane things of life, but as he travels on to that bourne from whence no traveller returns he sometimes feels a strange sensation and wonders what the land to which he is drawing near is like, and as Yama, the god of death, approaches to bear him away he cannot but feel that he is on the borderland of a wonderful world, and he braces himself up and tries to hold his head erect as he makes the great adventure into the unknown.

*Breaking away from the Old Life*

**W**HEN the patron deity of the tribe—Subramania—was asked what occupation the Kuraver should follow, it is said that the god showed them a house-breaking instrument. Had they a coat of arms, a jemmy, an augur or a tool for cutting would certainly find a place on their escutcheon.

The Kuraver is not fond of hard work. The pick-axe and the plough have no attraction for him, and if we find a member of the tribe trying to make an honest living by hard toil it should be recorded when a history of the clan is being written. All Kuravers pretend to work, and if they cannot show the means by which they are making an honest livelihood they are liable to be prosecuted under the Indian Criminal Procedure Code, and are compelled to find a surety, or go to prison until someone is forthcoming who will be responsible for their good behaviour. He often therefore has a piece of land, the proverbial three acres and a cow, and though he is a real rogue, he assumes the position of a cultivator, and the farm is looked after by others—perhaps his wife or young son—whilst he follows his hereditary calling.

The really honest Kuraver, and some exist, does cultivate his land, and it is a special pleasure to see him at his task. He has been brought up from childhood to think that the business of life for such as he is to earn a living by theft, and when he knows that he has the wits and the ability to make a success in that profession but deliberately refuses to do so, deciding to take up the hard life of an Indian farmer, he deserves our respect and admiration.

The Kuraver trying to make an honest living has a difficult time. (1) He has his own nature and inclination to combat. He has been formed in the thief mould, and was born in an environment where theft was considered the be-all and end-all of life, where the hero is the man who is always stealing and is clever enough never to be caught. This is a great handicap to a man trying to raise himself in the moral sphere. If heredity counts for anything, and most of us believe that it does, the Kuraver starts with a great disadvantage. His character has been formed after a different pattern from others, the blood of the brigand flows through his veins, and the desire for loot which was in his grandfather is strong within him, and therefore he is not under the control of the ordinary laws governing his fellow-men, and he hardly has a fair chance in the difficult race. (2) What is equally against his making good is the public opinion of his clansmen. The tribal conscience not only raises no opposition

to robbery and theft, but it inculcates the desirability of thus making a living. It attaches dignity and honour to the clever thief. The women are proud of a dare devil who can, whilst stealing, evade capture, and they often despise the man who is afraid to venture on the highway, or who cannot increase the family wealth by plunder and loot.

It is difficult for any man to live apart from his fellow-men, and as the whole Kuraver community life is one, and is made up of deception, there is a moral perverseness and a mental twist in their reasoning and thought ; hence the honest Kuraver has to make a clean break from all that has been taught him, and must act and live in opposition to the whole ideal and opinion of his clansmen. Is it not then something of an achievement for a man, with much of the nature of a bandit in him, to keep at a task which enables him to live an honest life and make an honourable livelihood for himself and his family ? This is being done, though many fail in the severe test. In India, owing largely to the iron rules of the caste system, the law is : Each man to his task ; what the father has done before him, the son must continue to do.

General Hervey records a case where the wife of a dacoit came to the office and was informed that her husband, who was a notorious dacoit, had died of cholera. She was a woman of fine presence and masculine manner, and standing with her two sons

and the one daughter by her side, tore off her necklace, the sign of her married state, and exclaimed, "There, I am a widow. I may go now where I please." Then, falling on her knees, she placed her right hand on the heads of her sons in turn, a form of solemn oath in India, and swore they should follow their father's profession, and added that, if necessary, the girl herself should lead them.

The Kuravers' method of earning a living is now very varied, as modern civilisation is forcing the tribesmen to alter their ancient caste occupations.

In olden days one branch of the tribe was engaged as carriers, keeping droves of donkeys or bullocks, upon which they used to bring merchandise from the coast up to the inland towns, and when returning they would take back the produce of the village, such as rice, pulse, pepper and chillies. Salt was one of the special items carried from the coast, and this section was therefore called "Uppu Kuravers." The advent of the railways has now completely destroyed this carrying trade, and the Uppu Kuraver has had to seek other ways to make a livelihood. The Abbé Du Bois, who wrote of them a hundred years ago, says that the Kuravers were sometimes employed in battalions by native Indian rulers and were given regular pay. They followed their armies when going to battle in order to raid the camp of the opposing forces, stealing horses, food and any

military equipment they could lay hands on and bring away. The last Mussulman prince who ruled in Mysore is reported to have used these men, and when the wars were over and the armies disbanded, the state of the country can better be imagined than recorded with these marauding bands let loose to work their own will. In addition to salary they received a commission in accordance with the dexterity they showed in the expedition and the amount of loot they brought back.

Modern conditions of life have therefore compelled this large section of the tribe to leave the carrying trade and live a different life, and many, if not the majority, have had to take to agriculture, these not having learnt any special trade or handicraft such as other divisions of the caste have done. The lot of the Indian agriculturist is never an easy one, and the Kuraver, though now in many cases brought up and trained in agriculture, finds it irksome, and will often neglect his land and obtain an income by the old methods of the robber clan.

The farmers, as a class, are very conservative in all parts of the world, and in India the Kuraver, as well as the Goundan, the hereditary tiller of the soil, has the same mental outlook, being often impervious to new ideas, and the more up-to-date methods of making the land yield its fullest quota. There are Kuravers making an honest attempt to get the best out of their holdings, and some of them



are doing well with their land. Where they have a well they can adopt intensive cultivation and grow cocoanuts, as, in addition to the local needs, there is a great demand in the commercial world for Cocogem, nut butter and margarine. Thus a cocoanut plantation becomes a paying proposition, as the price of the nut has more than doubled during the past ten years. Tapioca is another product for which there is a good sale, and with care this crop will yield a good profit. Chillies are always in demand, and there is always a market in India for this condiment, which is used in the preparation of curries. In many districts tobacco is grown, and it is generally a valuable crop. The Kuraver agriculturist, however, has not always land good enough to grow either of these crops, or rice, which is equally profitable. For a crop of rice a regular supply of water is needed, else all his labour comes to naught. If he is fortunate enough to dwell by a river, or to live near a canal or big Government irrigation channel, he can depend upon his crop, being sure of making a fair living, and he cannot possibly have an excuse, except that he was born for thieving, to lapse into the old way of life.

It is the experience of those who know the Kuravers well that they are impecunious, and should they have been able to purchase a good piece of land through the proceeds of their robberies, they will often, through debt or litigation, be compelled to

sell it, and go out to work as coolies, or return to the way in which their fathers earned their livelihood. The land mostly cultivated by them is what is known as "Punjay" in the Tamil country—that is, land which is not irrigated by a river or a tank, and the crops on this are dependent upon the monsoon rains. Crops from such land are thus uncertain, and the coming of the monsoon is an anxiously awaited event. The date of its arrival is often predicted with fair accuracy, but unfortunately, though it should reach the country at the right time, yet it does not always come to the right place, or to all the places where it is needed ; and whilst the heavens are black with rain clouds over the mountains, and the flood gates are opened, yet the plains below are left dry in some places, while in others they are devastated by the rains which have fallen on the high altitudes, as the rivers cannot carry off the excessive volume of water.

The Kuraver farmer has to take his chance, and his life is full of anxiety concerning the question of an adequate supply of water for his fields. Their lands are sometimes uncultivated for a year or more through a deficient monsoon, and then the test comes. Will the old nature in him break out and drive him on to the highway ?

His implements are most primitive. He uses the same kind of plough that Abraham used in Mesopotamia when the world was young. Two bullocks

or buffalos drag it, whilst a man or a big boy holds the handle which keeps it in position. It really only scratches the surface of the ground, but his friends around plough their fields in this way, his ancestors also have cultivated their lands after this manner, so "Why run the risk of a change?" he asks.

The Kuraver has to hire animals for ploughing when he does not possess any of his own, but every man with a pretence to a position of influence in his caste endeavours to possess at least a pair of bullocks. The cost per day for hire varies from eightpence to one shilling for a pair, and the price, if he has purchased his animals, would be little over £3 each, as they are generally old and poor. The stock, therefore, on a Kuraver farm would be of little value, and a man who has ten acres of land, a flock of sheep and half a dozen bullocks would be a well-to-do member of society. A very few have such possessions, and they frequently fail to keep them for more than a few years, as neglect of the farm, debt, drink, marriage feasts, burials in the family, litigation charges and bribery to get off a prosecution absorb his profits, and finally eat up his capital so that he is reduced to penury. The fact that he is always suspected of crime makes life costly, as he must be prepared to bribe the men who are able to bring him under the clutch of the law, and the poor Kuraver, whether he has committed a crime or not, will be considered a culprit, and must take steps to

escape somehow or other. Hence he must be ready to bribe, and this applies to the man who is trying to be honest as well as the rogue. It is said that a Kuraver must always have money to give the police who may happen to have caught him or intend to bring a charge against him. He is treated as a rogue till he has proved himself honest, thus reversing English law, where a man must be treated as honest until the opposite is proved.

The Kuraver engaged in agriculture has to work very hard to obtain a livelihood. In order to get a good crop out of the dry, hard soil of an Indian upland much attention is needed night and day. There is the uncertainty of the rain, with the certainty of insects and pests of every description, and these will destroy the crops if not watched. The caterpillars known to children as "woolley bears" will sometimes destroy everything in a field. There are wild pigs near the foot of the mountains, as well as cheetahs, which often trouble him when he has a flock of sheep. In camp they have brought to me the skin of a sheep pierced by the teeth of a leopard, the beast having left the victim because he was disturbed. And so the farmer has to work and live in the faith that seed time and harvest will not fail, and that a kind Providence hath decreed that after the sowing the reaping shall follow. When this faith is not rewarded he has to revive and renew his trust, and begin again to dig and plough and

to sow with the hope of better luck in the next season.

The terror of the farming Kuraver is the money-lender. The latter gets much abuse and his name is held up to obloquy and derision, and one is sometimes tempted to take up the cudgels in his defence, but the Sowcar, when not a grasping scoundrel, is at best a necessary evil. While there are men who have money to spare, and others who will and must borrow, the system of money-lending will be continued. Government tries to curb the greed of the lender by encircling him with all sorts of barbed-wire entanglements, but he gets outside them, or the borrower will reach over them, getting his loan at an exorbitant rate of interest, often running up to fifty, sixty or even one hundred per cent. The Kuraver borrows, and is then shackled and probably bound for life, or he is compelled to sell his property to clear the debt, and has to make a start in another place as a penniless man. The tribesmen often assist each other in cases of loans, and one man helps the other by standing as surety or by allowing his own property to be mortgaged for the benefit of his friend.

The feeling of brotherhood is very strong, and clannishness is a marked characteristic among them everywhere. This spirit has been deepened and strengthened because of the attitude of other caste people towards them. They have bitter feuds

amongst themselves, but should a third party come to attack them or their rights, they rise like one man against the intruder. They will not forgive theft amongst themselves, and will make the culprit pay up to the uttermost. But against the outsider they are united and will stand together till the end.

*Handicrafts and Professions*

THE gypsy Kuraver is often a basket-maker. It is a task not needing any apparatus or implements except a hook to split the bamboos, and it is thus possible to carry on such handiwork even when there is no settled abode. This section is known as Thappai Kuraver, or the "Bamboo-splitting" Kuraver, and many of them have no home, and carry their possessions on their heads when on the march. They are found all over the southern peninsula, and work at their craft by the wayside and at all their halting places. Their plan is to go to a centre and stay for some days or weeks, living under the trees or in light booths which they erect, or in one of the old vacant buildings which are found in all Indian villages. On their arrival they purchase bamboos, split them, and are soon at work making baskets and supplying the villagers among whom they are encamped. After they have supplied the needs of the hamlets, they move off to another centre some six or eight miles away, and adopt the same methods there. This seems a simple way of making a living, but all such gangs are criminal in purpose and intent. They make baskets of various sorts, some very strong and

fit for hard wear, and others of the common kind used everywhere in India, but this is only to hide their real object. Such gangs have to be watched, so a police constable remains with them when they are in their camp, following them to their next camping ground when they make a move, and does not leave them till he hands them over to the police of the next circle. The route they take is noted, their names recorded, and their actions chronicled in the Police Diary.

The advent of the gang in any centre is the signal for every one to be wary, to watch the poultry yard, and put everything possible under lock and key ; yet even with the policemen on the spot and the exercise of great care over all property, articles disappear and the guilt cannot be brought home to the culprit. This class may be termed pilferers. They are not of the Bill Sykes type, but are kind-hearted, bargaining and selling, making a quite useful basket for two or three annas. In their conversation with a stranger they are like the ordinary villagers, polite, affable and well disposed, and they would not take the proverbial penny out of a blind man's hat ; they would rather add their mite to his collection. They are suave when carrying on a conversation, but people must beware when they pack up and leave, as no doubt they will have added to their possessions since they entered the encampment. There is always a sigh of relief when the



gang moves on. In addition to baskets they also make the marappu, or basket-sieve, used by Indian women for separating the corn from the husks, and they also make the simple broom used by every housewife for keeping her home and courtyard clean. This is made of split cane or fibre of the cocoanut frond, and tied together at one end. In some places they also make rope, the material for which is obtained from the palm or the aloe plant, which grows profusely all over South India. Tatties or sun-blinds, which are hung on the verandahs of bungalows to keep the houses of the well-to-do cool, are made by them. They also make a kind of matting from the date palm, which is used for packing and protecting articles sent by rail to the seaports for export. It finds its way to England on bales of merchandise.

Very few have taken to weaving, though it is being taught to some who have served a period in jail, or who have been kept in a settlement for robber tribes. There are few carpenters in the tribe, apart from those who have learnt the trade in a jail. It has not been the custom to do such work, but efforts have been made to give work to those who are prepared to strike out on new lines. Some have taken to jutka-driving; *jutka* means "The go quick." It is a vehicle on two wheels covered with a mat and canvas to protect the passengers from sun and rain, and is drawn by a country pony

known as a "Tat," and, compared with the speed of the bullock cart, the *jutka* is indeed an express method of travel ; but here again the Kuraver is likely to be hard hit, as the motor-buses are now being introduced all over the country, and the *jutka* is being driven off the road by the electrical "go quick," the motor-bus. In Madras City, Kuravers have become rickshaw-wallahs, and in this way earn a living by taking people to all parts of the city.

Some few have been appointed, strangely enough, to the police force, but I do not know whether they have been tested for a sufficiently long time to pronounce the experiment a success. "Set a thief to catch a thief" has been the principle acted upon, but I am inclined to be sceptical as to whether any large number could be employed in such important work as that committed into the hands of the police.

A batch was appointed as warders in one of the most important South Indian prisons, and the governor showed a deep interest in the men, but, though they were picked Kuravers and had been under special supervision for years in their village, and could be trusted in many things, yet the venture was not a success. They gave no trouble to the prison authorities, but during one night early in the experiment there was much thunder and lightning with heavy monsoon rain, and some desperate prisoners determined to escape. They made a hole

through the masonry of their cells, scaled a twelve-foot wall by making a human ladder, and got off. This was a bad omen, and the Kuraver warder who was on duty decided to leave at once, though he was not in any way to blame for what had happened. The others still kept at their posts, but the punctuality and the discipline necessary in such a position were not to their liking, and they all resigned after a few months' trial.

The wander-lust is strong upon them, and thus the sense of responsibility is still undeveloped. Regular work which must be commenced punctually and done accurately is irksome, and they cannot yet make themselves fit into such a mechanically organised scheme of things. They are children of the open air, desiring the freedom of the jungle, and the blood of the younger men among them tingles when they hear the call of the huntsman in the forest. The prison bell is depressing, the jungle horn much more alluring, time tables are taboo, and punctuality their *bête noire*.

A few men are now teachers, but this, too, is a new development in the tribe, and there has not been sufficient time to have them tested to see how they are going to face the demands of such a high profession. They have brains and the intellect, but character is required, and we shall have to be patient and wait for the results of this experiment. Here and there among the tribe there is a medicine-man,

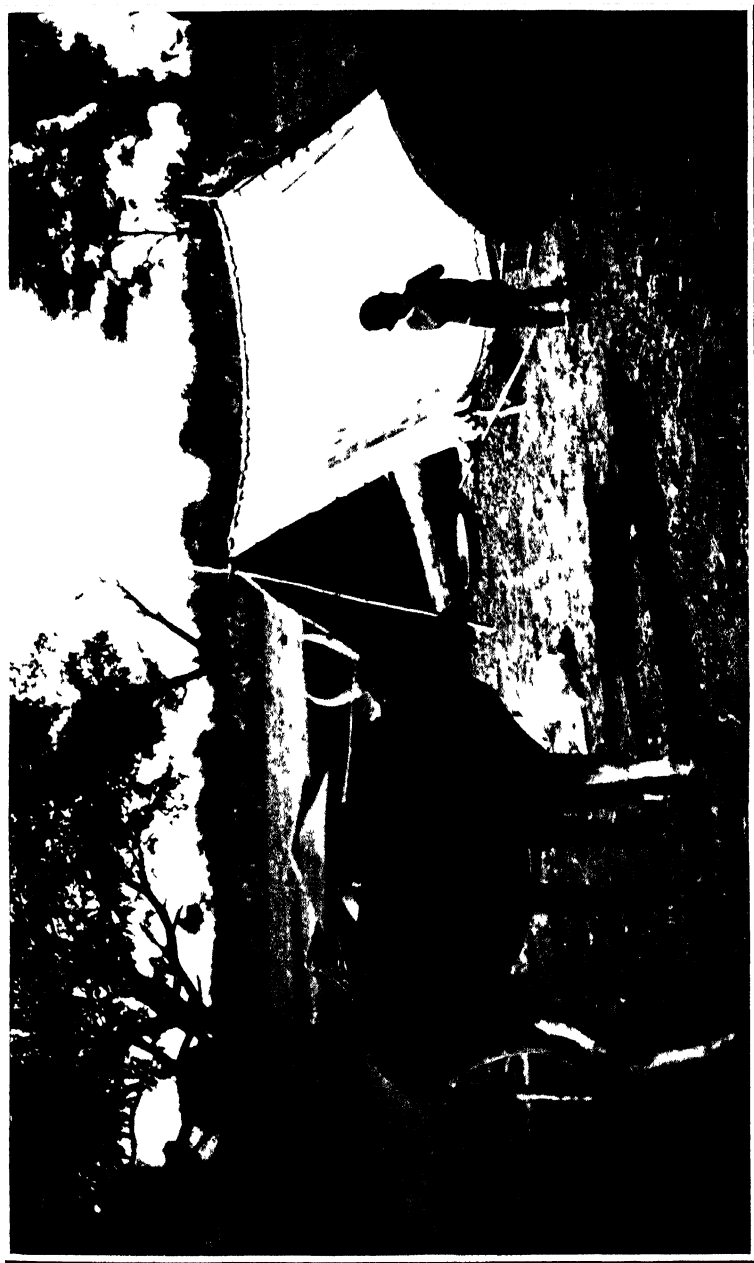
and his drugs are powerful, but very few could earn a living from the practice of this great science. There was one man whose fame has spread beyond his clan, and many cases were treated by him. One day whilst I was with him, a woman who had been bitten by a snake was brought to the village on a stretcher. Whether it was the fear of death or whether it was the poison acting upon her, I do not know, but she was certainly ill and in a precarious condition. The medicine-man treated her and she recovered. Such men make a study of herbs and medicinal plants which abound in India, and there is no doubt that they have discovered valuable drugs, which bring relief when properly used ; and with the knowledge, which they keep secret, and which they have had handed down to them, they are able to assist their people in their sickness to a limited extent. Certain families in the tribe have gone to North India, and their men have practised as quack doctors. They have assumed new names so as to hide their identity, but crimes have been committed by them, and they have been afterwards caught and their history unravelled. In this case the practice of medicine has been pure camouflage. It is reported that they have gone as far as Cuttack, Calcutta and Midnapur.

There is a fairly large sub-division among them known as the Nari Kuravers, or the Jackal Kuravers. This name explains itself. They are men who hunt the jackal, eat the flesh, tan the skins, and thus make

a livelihood. They snare birds, and some are hunters pure and simple. I have heard it said that this section of the caste will not eat poultry. They will certainly steal them, and sell them, and when the latter is not possible will probably not object to curried chicken. If the fox and jackal are a delicacy, then surely a young cockerel would be appreciated, and would be a tasty morsel in the hunter's menu. They not only hunt the jackal, but also antelope, deer, jungle-sheep. These are caught and put into the pot, and the skins sold to the merchants, and clothes purchased with the money thus obtained.

Some are adepts at stalking deer. They cover themselves with forest leaves so as to appear as a natural object or a shrub in the jungle, and gradually creep up behind a bullock trained for this work, and catch the animal marked down. They set nooses which are made of thongs obtained from hare's legs ; these they fasten to a long rope which they place across a fairly open jungle, and then drive the animals towards it. Some hunters send out tame deer with nooses fastened to their horns. A fight soon ensues with the wild deer, and the animals are caught without much difficulty, as they become entangled in the rope and cannot free themselves.

Birds are caught in quicklime, a tame bird often being kept in a cage to attract the other game to the snare, and in this way they manage to catch large numbers and make a living by selling them.





There is another section known as the Pachikutti Kuravers or Gadde Kuravers. The women are soothsayers and earn a living by tattooing people in the villages. They go into the village, and often take a trained monkey to attract attention. They are experts in the art of tattooing, and the patterns are drawn quickly and are fairly accurate. The design generally consists of a scorpion, a fortress or a fish, and is drawn with a stick dipped in a mixture of lampblack, oil and other ingredients. The actual pricking is done with a number of needles tied together, which they keep and carry about in a hollow bamboo. Some medicine is afterwards painted over the place in order to assuage any swelling which may arise. Turmeric and leaves of the Avarai plant are used for this purpose. The mixture used in tattooing is obtained from the fruit of the bael (*Aegle Marnelos*) tree and palmyra palm, and their charge for the operation varies from eight annas to a rupee (one shilling and sixpence), according to patterns and the number of sittings to complete the tattoo.

I once had a very interesting experience watching a Kuraver catching monkeys. It was his profession. The monkey is frequently doing something to tantalise man ; he seems to have a grudge against the human species altogether, and is determined to annoy them as much as possible wherever and whenever he can. The monkey will sometimes



stand in the roadway and dare a motor vehicle to come on, and only when he sees the driver intends to go straight ahead, and over him if necessary, will he deign to move aside, and the expression on his face as slowly and proudly he steps off the road is one of withering scorn for the motorist's unbecoming behaviour on the King's highway.

The Indian farmer has little use for the monkey. He is generally treacherous even as a pet, and he is always an enemy in the fields, and surpasses the Kuraver in his cleverness at theft. He comes into the house if not watched, and enters our local hospital and steals the bread beside the bed of the helpless patient. What can be done with such a pest? When the ground nut season arrives there is a glorious time for the monkeys, and they come in battalions to raid the fields and rob the farmer of his crop.

The Indian will not kill the monkey. Is it not doubtful whether the monkey is man or beast? He will not strike or harm him, but he will employ a man to catch the animal and send him away to a distant jungle. It is generally a futile proceeding, but it is done, and is an interesting experience, as it is a tussle between man's astuteness and the monkey's cuteness. There is no certainty whether it will be the man or monkey who will win. A large wicker-work cage is made with a partition in the middle. It has a door opening to the first division, and a

second door leading to the inner room. This large cage or crate is placed under a tree in or near the fields where the ground nuts are growing, and a string is affixed to the outer door, which is made to slide up and down. The door is so made that whenever the string is pulled it closes. The Kuraver out to catch the animals makes various sounds, imitating their calls, and strews the nuts, a very few, all along the road up to and inside the cage. The monkeys soon come, and pick up the nuts in the road, but they look with suspicion at the cage as the man stands fifty yards away holding the string. It is then the human qualities of the monkey appear. All the nuts on the road have been gathered, shelled and eaten, and only those in the cage are available for any further consumption, and the monkey stands there gravely considering the risks which will have to be run to get them. An examination of the cage is made. The old monkey looks in at the door, but he is never in a hurry to put in his paw to reach even those near the entrance. He keeps on considering the matter and delays action. After a time he makes up his mind, keeps one eye on the man with the string, the other on the nut, puts in his paw with the quickness of lightning, and gets his nut ; runs back to a tree, climbs up to the first branch, and gleefully eats the kernel. His face has the expression of one who thinks, " Well, that is good. I've done the old man." Down he comes again, makes another

inspection, but sees that all the other nuts are further in. The astute old Kuraver has put them too far in, and to get them he must go clean into the trap. That is not the intention of this monkey, animal though he be. He stands there again, and seems to know that the man is waiting to catch him should he make a miscalculation. There is one nut an inch beyond arm's length, and this he determines to get. He puts in his arm, but not far enough to touch the nut ; he places his face right up against the entrance, but not inside by a hair's breadth, and still he cannot reach it, and he draws back, not knowing quite what to do. He has another try. He is still an inch away from the nut. He leans this way and puts in his paw : no success. He turns round and tries : still no nut. He then places his body alongside the entrance, not inside, and, straining muscle and every nerve, his paw grasps the nut, and the prize is his, and off he goes again to his bough and enjoys a feast. The monkey knows he has caught his catcher, and grins at his failure to entrap him. Whilst this is proceeding other monkeys come up wanting a nut, and a youngster appears, looks round and sees that there is nothing for him on the road, and just walks straight in for his share ; the string is pulled, and down drops the door, and he is caught. This is the inexperienced monkey, a mere stripling, and it is no credit to the Kuraver for enticing him into the trap.

*Proverbs*

IT is said that proverbs give a deep insight into a people's mind ; and they reveal the thought of a primitive race and the trend of their thinking. India is a country possessing many proverbs, and they are used by all sections of the community and apply to all avocations of life. Proverbs sum up truth in few words : they are phrases containing the essence of thought in brief form. There is one used in all parts of the Tamil country. " Pen Buthi, Pin Buthi." The Western woman will perhaps not want the translation. Literally, it is " Woman's advice is after advice "—that is, it is always given too late. It would take a chapter to give the full content of this proverb, and though not true, it is accepted and acted upon in the East.

Another says that " He who has killed a thousand patients is half a doctor." A physician must have prescribed for and killed a large number before he can claim to be an expert healer. The Kuravers do not dabble much in medicine, and so none of them can boast a large practice or clientele, and are not famous medicine-men.

When a Kuraver Panchayat has to sit and settle

a dispute, liquor in large quantities must be supplied, as the proverb says, "With dry mouths nothing can be uttered." The mention of this proverb will be sufficient to produce the necessary country beer, and the difficult points of caste law are more easily considered with its help. The quotation of a proverb not only points out what is often the custom among a people, but it acts also as a mental stimulus in a serious debate, and often produces a state of humour and creates the atmosphere in which a compromise which satisfies all the parties concerned may be effected.

The wandering Kuraver cannot be very æsthetic in his ideas of what he shall eat or what he shall drink, and I have met some who eat cats. These are considered to be low bred, but, as certain individuals in the tribe eat them, there is this proverb : "Give an elephant to a Pundit and a cat to a Kuraver." To satisfy the desire of a teacher or a learned philosopher an elephant is required so that he may ride about like a lordly Maharaja, but to satisfy the desire of a Kuraver a cat will suffice. The proverb measures the pride of a pundit and the height to which he aspires, and it shows the depths to which a Kuraver has descended and his position in the social scale. It is scorn encased in thorns and wrapped in brambles, and wherever it touches the victim it pricks.

The duty of the Kuraver woman is to follow and attend upon her lord, and the proverb fitting this

aspect of life is : “ Where the dog goes the tail will follow.” Such an adage not only shows the intimate and close connection between husband and wife and the loyalty of the one to the other, but in it the position of the woman is defined with a good deal of accuracy. The proverb would not be used concerning a man. It is applicable only to a woman and wife, and shows that equality has not yet been reached in the marital relationship. The dog controls his tail and wags it when and how he likes.

The proverb associated with the trickery practised by the tribe is used to good effect when quarrels take place among other classes of society. After each side has exhausted all their ideas, and words fail to express the depth of their disgust, the final word is, “ You cheat like a Kuraver.” There is nothing to be said beyond this. It represents the lowest depth of knavery and deception.

There is another phrase in common use among the people concerning the clan : “ To cringe like a Kuraver.” The mental qualities of the ordinary Kuraver are of a peculiar nature. He has much of the dare-devil spirit in him, and if he is driven into a corner he will fight, but if he is caught, and he sees no possible way of escape, he cringes, begs for mercy as a man of no other caste would do, till it has become a byword. When an unfortunate man comes asking for help, and there is no satisfying him with word, promise or gift, the only way of dis-

missing him is by telling him that he "cringes like a Kuraver." This is the last word in getting rid of him, and it is effective if he has any self-respect remaining in him.

There is another neat phrase in the Tamil language : "*Kura Nyayam Kudi Nasam.*" It means Kuraver justice ends in the ruin of the home. Where Kuraver rule is, there is ruin. The proverb primarily refers to the endless quarrels which take place in the tribe. They last for months, or even years, and are sometimes never settled until death comes and ends it all. They are passionate people, though it often takes a great deal of provocation to rouse them, but when aroused it is never easy to settle one of their disputes. I can only partly explain this by the mental twist which certainly is revealed in their thinking. Their headmen are often engaged for weeks in unravelling a case ; truth and error are so interwoven that it is almost impossible to disentangle them. It is seldom that right is on one side only, as both parties are generally to blame, and by punishing both parties equally neither is satisfied, and the case drags on, bad feeling continues to exist and increases, the women scold, and men are sullen with one another. They do not stand together and assist each other, and, as such a community cannot continue without unity, so disaster is brought about and Kuraver justice thus ends in ruin. Another proverb says, "When going to plunder association



# NARI KURAVERS

They snare birds and hawk them round in cages. The women carry their possessions in the skin of jackals which they are holding in their hands. In the boat of the seated woman contains many birds.





is bad," hence each Kuraver starts out alone when going to commit a dacoity, meeting his associates later in some appointed place.

One of the strangest proverbs in the Tamil language concerning the Kuraver tribe is that which says: "When a Kuraver woman bears a child the husband takes medicine." In literature written about life among primitive people references are often found to such a custom. Lord Avebury refers to it in his *Origin of Civilisation and Primitive Condition of Man*. Max Müller also, in *Chips from a German Workshop*, says that the custom of the husband taking to his bed when a child is born to his wife is widely spread. Regarding the custom among the Kuravers, the Rev. J. Cain, who lived in the Telugu country during the 'seventies, and who had much experience among these people, wrote: "Directly the woman feels the birth pains she informs her husband, who immediately takes some of her clothes, puts them on, places on his forehead the mark which the women usually place on theirs, retires into a dark room where there is only a very dim lamp, and lies down on the bed, covering himself with a long cloth. When the child is born it is washed and placed on the cot beside the father. Asafœtida, jaggery and other articles are then given not to the mother, but to the father. During the days of ceremonial uncleanness the man is treated as the other Hindus treat their women on such occasions.

He is not allowed to leave his bed, but has everything needful brought to him." (See *Indian Antiquary*, Vol. III., page 151.)

I have made many inquiries into this matter, but I cannot find any proof of such being done in any section of the tribe. The proverb exists, and it is used perhaps among them, but it is, I think, a form of sarcasm or Kuraver humour of a subtle kind, and asks a question rather than states a fact, or it might suggest that the man to whom it is said is of a peculiar weak nature and easily gets excited and ill when a child is born in his family, and he takes to his bed. It is a kind of jeer at a weakling in the tribe.

This curious custom, known as *Couvade*, is reported as being practised by the criminal tribes in the Cuddappah District, and Mr. C. F. Brackenbury, I.C.S., in the *Gazette* of the district, refers to it as a fact. Kuravers whom I have questioned all deny it, but it would be interesting to know how the proverb came into existence, if never true.

This is an explanation given me by one of the tribesmen : When a child is expected the husband must not go out on any expedition, but should remain at home to assist the wife. The young bloods in the gang, who perhaps wanted his help in a robbery, might well say sarcastically of their compatriot when they find he is unable to help, " He has to take to his bed like his wife," meaning that he is unable to help in their usual avocation.

If he goes on an expedition when a child is born he is likely to be caught, and so whilst his wife suffers in the house he has to suffer in the jail. He is not playing a square game with his wife in leaving her at such a time, and he should therefore suffer. This is rather too high a moral attitude to assume for the Kuraver.

Another proverb says that "No one ever sees a dead monkey or a dead Kuraver." It is an old proverb and contains a truth. The Kuraver has been a gypsy, and the dead would soon be disposed of at some spot in the jungle, and nothing much would be left to mark the place of sepulchre. In India people quickly die, and are more quickly buried or burnt. Like all proverbs, there are exceptions to its application, and a dead monkey and a dead Kuraver are sometimes seen, but in either case it must be admitted to be of rare occurrence. When either a monkey or a nomad Kuraver meets with a violent death the public may chance upon the body. There fell from a tree a monkey and a cobra. The cobra had thrust its fangs into the body of the monkey and the monkey was gripping the snake by the throat. When they were found under the tree both were dead and dry, and the story is simply told. The snake and monkey had fought ; each had clasped the other in a mortal combat. The monkey had climbed the tree gripping the cobra, and feeling the poison rushing through

its veins, sat in the fork holding on to the cobra with a death grip, and both had died in the fatal embrace, and thus afterwards fallen to earth.

Another phrase often used is : “ Blinking like a Kuraver.” Society is against the Kuraver because of his life and profession, and he is often confronted with difficult questions. When a theft has taken place suspicions are aroused, and it is presumed that the Kuraver is guilty. The police and people generally surround him, and he is bombarded with queries and questions, and no small wonder that he is confused and stands wondering how he may escape. He blinks and looks confused, and hence “ blinking like a Kuraver ” has come to mean that a man is caught in a difficult position where it is very difficult to escape.

With regard to the women, it is said : “ Every Kuraver woman will become a widow.” The import of this adage will easily be seen. The husband may die before the woman, and if not he will be put into jail, or he will have to run away to another district to escape capture, and the wife be left alone.

Another proverb says, “ A woman’s sense is only half that of man’s.” This is often used by the men in rather a kindly way. The woman has been found guilty of misbehaviour with another man, or she has been acting unwisely, and her friends will plead for her and quote the accepted fact that the woman is

but a child and cannot be expected to be free from faults. She does not possess the wisdom of a man, and as she has only half his sense she must be forgiven. She is then perhaps pardoned and sent to her home.

Another adage throws light on the nature of the Kuraver woman. "Having stolen the fowl, she weeps with the owner on account of its loss," and another says, "The thief who has eaten the fowl walks about with the owner in search of it."

## C H A P T E R   T W E N T Y - T W O

### *The Village of the Pearl*

**A**RUMUGAM and his wife came to see me from their village, seventeen miles distant, and marched straight into the office, and as I sat at my desk they fell on their faces and wept. Whilst they moaned and lay prostrate before me I realised that here was a Kuraver, a real rascal, with his wife ; but what was I to do with them when they had finished weeping, and I had got them to stand up and speak ?

I am going to confess to my readers that I like Arumugam, rogue that he is. His wife is a different proposition, though I would not witness against her. She is no ordinary woman, and would never so much as think her lord and master capable of committing the smallest crime. She talks, shooting out words like the most modern machine-gun at the rate of sixteen hundred a minute, and never gets hot or tired. One ought not to like rascals, but here I break the rule. This is a gentleman Kuraver, and he has blue blood in his veins. I tell them to rise, and after a good deal of delay and many ejaculations they stand before me. " Sit you down," I say, and after a good deal more delay and hesitation they seat themselves on the floor.

He has a tragic story to tell. "Sir, they have killed my son by sorcery and they have turned us out of the village." That is in brief the story he blurts into my tingling ears. His son was dead, and as if that were not trouble enough to come upon any pair, at the same time the parents are cast out of the assembly by the village elders. The woman then describes in words, which come rushing like a cataract, how it was all done, and how cruel the tribesmen have been to them, and how unjust were the whole proceedings. Then comes their appeal. Can you not help us ?

Arumugam had two sons. The elder was a decent lad ; the younger, too, had his good points, and he had joined his parents in coming to live in the Village of the Pearl. This boy had learnt to read and wanted more education, but there was apparently no way, as he was too old to go to a school. He was a well-made boy, strong, athletic, and capable of bearing much strain. Were his forebears not jungle-men ? He lived with his clansmen, grazed cattle in the jungle, for his father was not a poor man, and he protected his sheep from the wild and savage red dogs of the hills, and took part in the village sports, but was often morose and taciturn. I've had many an interesting talk with him, and became fond of him. One day he disappeared from the village, and no one knew where he had gone, not even his parents ; but no Kuraver will worry over this, as he



knows the nature of his tribesmen. They are born gypsies, with the love of wandering in their blood, and the men go and return and give no explanation of their action. It is their nature so to be, and who can expound and explain Nature written with a large "N"? The jungle man is beyond explanation.

He eventually came back, and shortly after died. "Died by means of sorcery," said the old father. Why should a young man die a natural death? It was unreasonable to think so. It must have been brought about by a wizard, and they buried him and drank themselves drunk on the occasion of the funeral ceremonies.

Nothing could be done for the boy. He was beyond the reach of friend or foe; but the father had been turned out of the village, and this was a matter for inquiry, and justice should be meted out even to a highway robber. Permission of the superintendent had to be obtained before the Panchayat could cast out a man from the village, and this had not been sought or given, so there was a case for inquiry.

It takes many adjectives to describe the qualities of Arumugam. He was an astute Kuraver much beyond the average. He was a tantalising old scamp, for though all knew he was a thief, no one could bring home any proof of guilt to convict him. How was society to be protected against such a man? The police could lock him up and make inquiries,

but they would have to let him go as no evidence would be forthcoming. No law court could convict him except on false evidence. That could be obtained on payment of the regular fee, but he escaped this annoyance through his cleverness.

He was a Kavalgar, and no man engaged in guarding flocks or herds for others and receiving the levy was allowed to live in the Village of the Pearl ; but he managed to dodge all those who were trying to prevent him, and he stoutly maintained that he received no income from such a source, and continued to live with his clansmen.

One day a merchant rested on the roadside not far from the village, and whilst the bullocks were being fed a bag containing Rs.800 (£60) disappeared from the cart. The police said Arumugam had taken it. No one had seen him steal the money, but the merchant had lost his treasure. Arumugam shortly afterwards bought land, but who could say it was not by money lawfully and honestly obtained ? A cloth-vendor was staying near the toll-gate, and had gone to the stream to bathe, and his valuable silks disappeared. There was a hue and cry raised, and the police and others were out to hunt the culprit. Arumugam discovered the stolen articles, and brought them to the owner. " See how honest he is ! " Who would not have the fullest confidence in such a man ?

A woman living quite close lost her jewels,

tapioca disappeared from the fields, sheep from the adjoining flocks, and good mutton curry was enjoyed by the visitors who frequently came to see their old comrade. Who could say it was not from his own fold ?

He often got drunk, but he went away to enjoy this experience, and came back sober and in his right mind. The tribesmen, because of the missionary, adopted prohibition in the Village of the Pearl, and liquor was taboo.

There was no proof of his guilt in anything. All could say he did little work and he always had money. He generally acted with a high hand among his comrades and was seldom on good terms with his people, and so what should be done ? He was turned out. This was not law-court justice. The elders were called to explain their action, and Arumugam stood before them. They had not turned him out, they said. They were in a difficulty and had exceeded their powers, and so told a lie to shield themselves, and Arumugam returned to his house in the village. There was much heart-burning and chagrin over this episode, and the elders were indignant against the man whom they knew was guilty, but against whom they could bring no proof. What was to be done ? They waited their time, but were seemingly helpless to protect themselves.

Weeks passed and Arumugam lived in the village, though they sent him to Coventry whilst he kept

on his course, and on my first visit after the inquiry concerning his dismissal the elders met me in solemn conclave, and with downcast faces said, "Sir, you must send Arumugam away." What proof of guilt have you? They were silent. They had none which would stand in a court of law, and what could I do? "Bring me proof and I will send him away," I said. There was much palaver, arguments on the one side and answers on the other, but still there was no clear proof that could bring a conviction necessitating such a serious punishment. Anger began to rise and tempers became ruffled. "We cannot have this man in our village. He is a disgrace and must go," they said. But how can he be sent away without evidence of guilt?

By this time wrath and anger were so great that reason had gone, and they were determined upon action. They had decided what they would do, and the elders all stood before me, bending forward and making obeisance and giving a profound salaam. "Sir, if this man remains in the village we all must go. *We must go*. Give us permission to leave." And in a determined manner they turned to go. The air was electric. Their blood was up, and the old Kuraver daring was beginning to show itself. It was a tense moment, as there were fifty or more of the clan present.

I called the elders forward and said, "Well, you may all go, but before going you must make a

crown and place it upon the brow of Arumugam." It was as if magic had acted upon them. They began to think, and saw a picture of Arumugam stalking round the empty village lord of all he surveyed, whilst they themselves were out in the jungle, harried by the police. The humour had saved the situation.

Arumugam finally was sent out, and he went down to Ceylon, as it was too difficult for him to face the enmity of the village and the vigilance of the police ; but he did not remain long on a tea estate, and he has now returned to his old haunts, and lives in a hut not far from the village which has disowned him.

He calmly maintains his innocence, and remains to all outward appearance a gentleman. What will he do next ? There is fine sport in stealing, and even in being hunted, when never caught !

## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

### *Attempts at Uplift*

FROM what has been said in the foregoing chapters it is quite evident that no Government, calling itself modern or civilised, could allow such a tribe to continue its predatory habits, or to terrorise the people, without doing something to check the evil. The *Gazetteers* of the various districts in South India contain many references to this tribe and their hereditary zest for thieving, but it is also revealed that until recently no long continued efforts were made to compel them to desist from their mode of life. It is true that here and there some stand was made against the depredations of such tribes, and an attempt was made to circumscribe their field of action. We have in a former chapter said that the people themselves rose and drove the members of the robber tribes out of their borders, but these efforts were spasmodic and were carried out only in a few centres, where the inhabitants were emboldened by the fact that they could no longer bear the heavy extortions made by the members of the robber clans.

The system of keeping a Kavalgar or watchman to guard the property belonging to the village lent itself to treachery whenever dishonest men were

appointed to the task ; and it is a historic fact that, as far as we can trace back into the past, members of criminal tribes have practically always been appointed to the office, and as it was hereditary, it was kept in their clan. It was likely therefore to be abused. In the year 1816, when changes were being made by the Government to improve village life, a regulation, No. XI., 1816, was published cancelling the rule which made it necessary for the Kavalgar to make good the loss of any property stolen. This was the only safeguard the people had in the ancient system. But this new regulation removed the necessity for the Kavalgar to do this, and, instead of an improvement taking place in village conditions, matters grew worse and worse, and in some places magistrates had to ignore the regulation and reintroduce the system of compelling the Kavalgar to make good the loss.

Government—that was the old East India Company—made attempts afterwards to take a security from the Kavalgar or watchman, but, as nearly all of them were of the criminal caste and were often related to each other, it was found to be of little use, and so theft went on as before.

In order to make property more safe, the Government, in 1802, began the formation of a police force, with a solitary peon or constable for every eight or ten villages ; and these, with the Kavalgar, did duty in preventing and discovering crime. In 1861 a

great step forward was taken, and a superintendent of police was appointed to each district, and from that time on till the present great strides have been made in rounding up the criminal tribes, and making it more difficult for them to carry on their profession. In various parts of India during the past century Government have passed certain regulations to deal with the tribes, and in some cases formed a special department for this purpose. When the ordinary police have not been able to cope with such organised robbers, officers were set aside with a special force to watch the gangs. We have an instance of this already mentioned in the Thuggee and Dacoity Department, now abolished, as it had fulfilled its purpose by breaking up these particularly savage gangs of criminals. It is only during the last two decades that any real attempt has been made by the Madras Government to deal with the problem of the criminal tribes in the Presidency, and when they began to consider the question they found that the Criminal Tribes Acts of 1871, 1876 and 1897 were insufficient to deal with the people in question, and so in 1911 there was a new Act passed by the Government of India which gave greater powers to the police to round up and bring under better control the enormous numbers of Kuravers and other robber clans in South India. This Act is far-reaching in its effects, and it is doubtful whether any other Act on the Statute Book goes so far in giving



the police powers to take away a man's freedom. It not only affects the criminal tribesman himself, but also those who meet and associate in any way with him.

The Act is quite necessary, and it is not one whit too far-reaching in its scope. A desperate case demands drastic treatment, and society must be protected from the freebooter who has no regard for any moral code.

The Act gives power to the proper authority to register any or every member of a tribe or gang declared criminal and who can show no sufficient means of livelihood. A thumb impression of each person is also taken at the time.

Every man so registered has to report himself at stated periods to the police or village headman, and he has also to notify any change of residence or absence, or intended absence, from his home.

He has thus to live in a wire entanglement. I know some who have to walk three miles every night and sleep at the police station, and then three miles back in the morning to their home, do their work, have their meal, and return again to the police station. They are known as K.D.'s (known depredators) and potential criminals. Many have served a period in jail, and only in this way can they be prevented from committing another crime.

The Act also gives power to compel such registered tribesmen to live in a registered area or in a





settlement sanctioned by Government for such a purpose. There is also a clause which gives power to remove children from the care of their parents, and authority to put them in charge of some responsible person elsewhere. The general public, too, by this Act are compelled to report the movements of members of the criminal tribe, and should a registered Kuraver leave the village or visit the village, the Act lays it down that the owner and occupier of any land in the hamlet is bound to report the fact to the nearest police station, though it may be six or eight miles distant.

This latter is not often done, and the police come and find out the facts for themselves.

Many thousands of Kuravers are thus registered under the Act, and in Madras City alone four hundred and fifty are registered as K.D.'s and their movements recorded.

It will thus be seen that the police are armed with great powers, and that a real effort is made to circumvent and circumscribe the tribe in their nefarious profession, but they often outwit the police and defeat all the efforts of the public ; nevertheless, the Act has made it more difficult to steal.

In the foregoing I have been dealing with what might be called preventive measures adopted by the Government to reform the robber castes, but anyone can easily realise that these will not go far enough.

The criminal needs changing. To lock him up in a jail for six months because he cannot find a surety for good behaviour under the Act, and then let him again roam at large among the community, does little or perhaps nothing to reform the inner man. Some new way of life must be shown him, and he must be so trained that the life of the robber loses its attraction, and the public opinion of his clansmen must be so changed that, instead of glorying in crime, they shall learn to despise the profession of highwayman and robber.

Some thirty years ago a friend of mine, a police officer, made an effort to settle a notorious gang on some land in North Arcot. This was one of the first attempts made to reclaim the Kuraver in South India, and though perhaps there was not much accomplished just then, yet it showed the way along which it was possible for others to do something of real value for the uplift of these men.

The settlement was purely voluntary, and this was a great handicap to the success of the scheme, as the men had perfect freedom. The Act of 1911 was not then in existence, and only personal persuasion could be used to get the men on to the land and away from the highroad ; and whenever they wanted to leave there was no power to keep them, so when rain failed and no crops were obtained the old wanderlust began to burn within them, and out they would go for a bootlegging expedition to get some spoil and

break the monotony of settlement life. In other places police efforts have been made to reform these tribes, and in the Madura District a great work has been going on for several years among the Kallars, the robber clan of those parts, and they are making great strides forward under the personal influence of special police officers chosen because of their qualification for this peculiar task.

Government, however, are at a great disadvantage in their efforts to uplift the Kuraver or any other criminal tribesmen. In India the Government must be neutral regarding religion, and as the uplift of a man is largely dependent upon spiritual forces, they are deprived of the greatest factor in the process. The means at the disposal of Government for the reformation of the robber castes are the prison and the police. They must not encroach into the realm of religion. In a jail there may be moral teaching, but mere moral teaching is cold, and has little force when divorced from religion. It does not glow, and it lacks that something which it is difficult to define, and we know it does not result in the reformation of the ordinary robber. The Government can lock the man up in a cell, but something more than confinement is needed to change his nature. The policeman may be sent to watch him and follow him, but this does not set the mind of the Kuraver to think of the rights of his fellow-man and his duty towards God. He must be made to feel the justice of the Eighth

Commandment, and determine never again to break it, but neither the zeal of the police nor his club will frighten him into the moral path.

In very few countries is the prison a place of reformation, though in Western countries the Government is free to use the enormous power of religion for the reclamation of the convict. This is not possible in India, where religions are so many and the tenets so complex and difficult to define. The superintendents of many of the South Indian jails are anxious to do all they can within the limits of the *Jail Manual* to make prison life not so much a punishment as a deterrent from future crime ; but they are bound by many rules, and the very existence of the caste system and the indefiniteness of religious beliefs make the task one of peculiar difficulty.

Lectures are sometimes given in jails, and moral teaching is emphasised at such gatherings, and we believe that this should be arranged more often ; but this can only be effectively done when the right kind of officer is available, who looks upon the prisoner as a doctor looks upon his patient. The Kuraver suffers from a moral and spiritual disease, and moral and spiritual treatment must be given to him. It may be necessary to have physical treatment as well, but this latter will be insufficient to cure him. A combination of the three forms of treatment is necessary and should be prescribed, but the spiritual

treatment is the chief necessity, and is much more important than the others.

Life in a prison should not be made a delightful experience in the career of a criminal. It must be such that he will not want to go back to it, and yet it must be such that the moral nature is quickened and not dulled, and he should be sent out after completing his period with the determination to begin to live a new life.

That is the ideal, but it is exceedingly difficult for any Government to accomplish such a task. Officers of prisons and the police force are not chosen with such an end in view, and, unlike the doctor who is trained to deal with disease and whose object is to cure the patient, the officers of the prison and the police force take no special course with a view to transforming the character of the prisoner and curing his complex disease. They have a course of training to enable them to catch the criminal, to be a match for him in his tricks, and to be able to deal with him in his duplicity, and to circumvent him in his cunning.

They study his methods of work, and what he is likely to do in any given circumstances when surrounded by a ring of constables ; in short, they study criminology and the criminal, up to the point of finding out his actual nature and being able to lay down the principles along which he generally acts in carrying on his business. But there they seem



to finish their task. They have studied the disease, but hardly the cure. It is precisely here that society, and the Government who represents society, cannot drop the matter. The question of supreme moment for the honest citizen is : What can be done to reform and transform the hereditary criminal and make him into a decent and honest man ? The whole of society is suffering because of his depredations, and paying large sums to try and limit his activities. Change the Kuraver, and the police force may be reduced. They want him reformed. The work that the Government is doing in the prison and through the police is principally preventive, but it cannot issue in the transformation of character. When the man is out of prison and the police are absent there is no check upon his actions, and he can steal at will. While in jail the Kuraver makes a good prisoner. He usually gives little or no trouble to the officer in charge. He has to work, but not very hard, and he is certain of his food. He has no anxiety about his wife and family, as he knows they will be cared for—his wife will probably live with another man, perhaps his brother will keep her as an additional wife, and his children will have food given them—and so he makes the best of his life in the jail. He has no chance to steal, and so is bound to be honest ; but honesty which is the result of lack of opportunity to steal is of a poor grade. Whoever is to reform the Kuraver must begin by giving him

a new mental outlook and an added moral quality, which will help him and impel him to live the straight life.

During the past few years the Government, assisted by mission bodies, has made some real attempts towards this end by opening schools in selected places specially for the criminal tribes. It is perhaps too early to say what the results are likely to be. Some have said that if Kuravers are given education they will be worse criminals—more daring, more crafty, and so more successful—but I doubt this, for the reason that they simply cannot be worse than they are. They have reached rock-bottom in the matter of theft and robbery, and if there is a change, it can only be for the better. So I should support every effort of Government to give these tribes an education. The parents have never thought of giving an education to their children, and even had they considered the matter it would have been useless, as how could a gang wandering over the countryside and living a gypsy life send their children to school? Their object has been to send them, not to school, but to steal. In the more settled divisions education has scarcely ever been an object set before them for their children. According to the census of 1911, six men in a thousand could write their names and perhaps read a simple book. Of the women, only two in a thousand could read the letters of the alphabet. This they have learnt either in a prison or

because they found it necessary in order to make them more efficient leaders in their various clans. On an average one man in two thousand has a smattering of broken English, and a Kuraver prisoner in the jail will sometimes show his special intelligence by saying "That's right," with a good deal of vehemence and pleasure, when he wants to show his approbation of anything done for him. Education will open a new life to him. The man of criminal bent, and specially the born robber, craves excitement. Very often the Kuraver steals merely for the love of the excitement and the sport. He may possess cattle and lands, but he wants something more and so he plans an expedition to rob. Give him something else to think about, and he will find pleasure in that, and not be so likely to want to steal. Instead of killing time by going out for loot, he may spend it in studying a book.

Moreover, it will open up to him additional avenues for work, as while he is illiterate many positions are closed to him. If he wishes to enter the police force it is necessary to read and write, and the position of warder in a prison may be open to him if he can handle a pen, be it ever so feebly. It will be of immense advantage to those members of the caste whose lust for robbery and the road is not strong or deep, and who would settle down, if they could, to an honest life. The real highbrows in the caste—the men whose eyes sparkle and whose nerves tingle at

the thought of loot, and who would not think any expedition worth doing unless they were to get Rs.1000—these would not benefit much nor lose anything by such an education as they would get in a primary school.

Education will give the common man a confidence among his people and the surrounding community. He will be less isolated, and he will be drawn into the great stream of life among men who have learnt to read the world's literature. It will give him a new vision and will add dignity to his conduct ; and if the Government will only continue, and continue long enough their experiment, we shall see it to be one of those forces which are helping to break up these criminal gangs, transforming them into good citizens who, instead of being a liability, will become an asset to their country.

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