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# TAXI!

BY

ANTHONY ARMSTRONG

("A.A." of Punch)

Being a not too serious book about  
London Taxicabs and Drivers,  
with a few remarks on  
their foreign cousins

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To  
"GEORGE"

### *Author's Note*

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A. A.

June, 1930.

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THERE is at the time of writing no book in existence about the taxi. There have been informative articles in newspapers, and descriptive passages in books, and romantic speculations in essays, and yards of criticism or anecdote in correspondence columns ; but no book, whether informative, critical, descriptive, romantic or anecdotal has yet appeared. Perhaps it was felt that the taxi was too prosaic an object to have a book to itself ; or that people wouldn't be interested to hear about it ; or, worse still, that there was very little to say about a taxicab and its driver. Or perhaps the idea simply never occurred to anybody. Anyhow, the fact remains that the London taxicab, the ordinary ubiquitous London taximeter cab, is already some years past its twenty-first birthday, and no one gave it the obvious present.

Here then is a small and belated offering. It is not intended as a history—there are many people better qualified to write *The Origins and Development of the Taxameter Cab* (2 Vols.) and

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quite probably they will. This is simply a book which tries just to sit down and chat in a friendly way about taxis and their drivers—with a little history, a little inside information, a little information which everyone knows but which can't be left out, and a large number of stories, of all sorts, several of which are true.

What we fondly believe to be really modern inventions are nearly always found, upon investigation, to have been in use in China over a thousand years ago, a fact which seems to prove that either the Western mind is not as original as it likes to pretend, or else that your really shrewd inventor studies obscure Chinese history with much profit. The "taxi"—using the word in its widest sense—is apparently no exception. As early as 265 A.D. a vehicle called the "*giligulicba*" or, in English, the "counting-mile-drum-chariot" is reputed to have been in use in China. This "*giligulicba*" in spite of its name, was undoubtedly real, for the history of the Sung Dynasty mentions that it was still employed in both 815 and 987, and even gives sufficient details and illustrations to enable one to describe it.

The "counting-mile-drum-chariot" was a

large wooden wheeled vehicle drawn by four horses, two on either side of a single pole. It was built in two stories and the top one was always roofed in, thus showing that even at that date the Orient was a little ahead of the London General Omnibus Company. An arrangement of three or four pinion-wheels connected the front axle with a little carved figure in the fore part of the lower story, and at the end of every "li" travelled this figure struck a drum. At the end of every ten "li" another carved figure at the back of the upper story struck a gong. From all this apparatus for "telling the li" (or, if you prefer a politer but equally ambiguous expression, "telling the tale") passengers could presumably work out how far they had gone and how much they had to pay; but it's just at this point that the whole affair, hitherto fairly efficient, becomes too delightfully Oriental for words. Though the journey was measured in "li" the "li" was not a *fixed* measure of distance! Actually it was one-tenth of an hour's march, but the Chinese equivalent of a Commissioner of Police had omitted to state who was doing the marching. Various estimates made it 479 yards, 699 yards and 622 yards, and in February 1909 (when, owing to Professor L. Giles having delivered a lecture on the "counting-mile-drum-chariot," interest in the subject was

high) the Chinese Legation in London was even asked to say which of these measurements was correct. After working it all out they replied, yes, the *li* was 586 yards; and no one has had the nerve to bring the matter up since.

The "*giligulicha*", since we are on the subject, formerly held about eighteen people, but in 987 A.D. the Emperor T'ai Tsung, a notable warrior, enacted that the same vehicle should carry thirty soldiers. He evidently had the mind of a real transport officer all right, as anyone who has been one of the *Hommes 40* in a French troop train cattle-truck will appreciate. About this time, too—presumably as compensation to the soldiers—the vehicles were painted bright red with pictures of flowers and birds on the outside. This is an idea modern local authorities might consider if they really want to brighten up their streets.

Nothing more is heard of the "*giligulicha*" in history—except that in the fourteenth century a Chinese poet wrote an "Ode to a Taxicab." This must have been fun for him.

As a matter of fact, now that we go into the subject, we find that the Chinese cannot claim to be the sole originators of the taxi. Heron of Alexandria, the inventor of the

“ penny in the slot ” machine, is also credited with having evolved an instrument for measuring distance gone; while Vitruvius, writing a few years B.C. mentions very definitely a contrivance called a Hodometer, which was to be connected to chariot axles by means of cog-wheels, and so measure the journey. The revolution of the wheels allowed a small stone from a large store to drop with a tinkle into a metal cup at the completion of every so many yards travelled, and at the end of the trip the driver—and the passenger—counted the stones in the cup and then did mathematics.\*

Swooping down the centuries the next reference is not till 1656, when John Evelyn, writing in his diary, mentions a device called the “ Waywiser.” This apparently measured rods and miles and recorded them on three circles. It was for attachment to travelling coaches “ exactly measuring the miles and showing them by an index as we went along.”

Twenty-two years later, in 1678, a book called *La Nuova Architettura Civile e Militare* by Alessandro Capra was published at Cremona. In it can be found two pictures,

\* The remains of a mile-measuring apparatus were also reported to have been found on Tut-Ankh-Amen's chariot, now in the Cairo Museum.

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one a diagram of a not unfamiliar type of "distance-measurer" and the other a rough drawing showing the apparatus fitted to a coach.

These very early "taxameters" were naturally all for horse-drawn vehicles. The first apparent mention of a mechanical taxicab is contained tantalisingly in an advertisement in *The Daily Courant* for Jan. 13, 1711. It is a notice "that at the 7 Stars under the Piazzas in Covent Garden is to be seen a chariot in the which a man may travel without horses, the like never made nor seen before in England: it will go for 5 or 6 miles an hour and measure the miles as it goes." I haven't been able to find out how it went or even what it looked like, but it was "perform'd by Christopher Holtum, the first Author of the Alarum for a Pocket Watch." Whatever it was, it was successful enough to be advertised on several subsequent occasions and a "Gentleman of Quality" even ordered one, though whether he went as far as to take delivery no one knows.

From time to time in the nineteenth century the taximeter cropped up, always as the suggested and only remedy for the perpetual squabbles between driver and passenger over the fare. A pessimist signing himself

"Jehu" in a *London Magazine* of 1825, advised the fitting of a "pedometer" to every hackney coach. "It would save endless altercations . . . it would save a man's money and temper and do much towards saving the souls of hackney coachmen born, or to be born." It was, he added cynically, "the best of all possible inventions and therefore it will not be adopted." He was quite right.

Twenty-one years after this *cri-du-cœur* we hear of a patent being granted for a new kind of taximeter coach, and a picture of it, complete with a lady arguing about the fare, appeared in an *Illustrated London News* of 1847. There was also patented, in 1858, a machine called the "Kilometric Register," which showed miles travelled and fares to be paid, and in order to protect the public against extortion, strenuous efforts were made to have this attached to hackney carriages. Equally strenuous objections were raised by the cabmen, and that was the end of it.

All this, I think, just about lets me out on the subject of the early attempts at taxicabs. It is something to have got through it without being guilty of the phrase "there's nothing new under the sun." And at least it finally disposes of the theory long held by cynical New Yorkers that the oldest taxis in the

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world are those which lie in wait for inexperienced foreign visitors outside the smaller hotels in the East Twenties.



THE invention of the modern type of taximeter has, as is the usual case, been ascribed to more than one person. But though a German, Herr Grüner of Magdeburg, and a Frenchman, M. Weiller of Paris, have both disputed the honour, the real credit for its introduction, if not its actual invention as well, must go to a certain Herr W. G. Bruhn of Hamburg who, as long ago as 1891, produced a meter on the rough lines of the present type, which he tried to popularize. He had, of course, no thought of its possible use on motor taxicabs, for motor-cars themselves were only then barely in existence and motor-cabs were undreamt of. His idea (like that of poor "Jehu" of 1825) was that it should be fitted upon the horse-drawn fiacres and hackney carriages, and thus do away with the constant disputes over distance and fares. And, as before, great hostility to the suggestion was manifested by the drivers, who definitely did not want any form of arbitration by

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taximeter at the end of a ride to take the place of the direct action of verbal warfare.

After many setbacks—at Frankfort the irate cabbies chucked him in the river—he managed to get it taken up fairly widely on the Continent. By 1897, its popularity in Paris, Vienna, Stockholm and other big cities was undoubted, while in Berlin nearly three-quarters of the cabs were so fitted. But England, quite possibly because the British public is longer suffering and more easily brow-beaten, refused to have anything to do with it for a great number of years in spite of many attempts at its introduction.

The most determined of these was made by the Taximeter Syndicate Ltd., formed in autumn, 1898. It fitted a small number of “growlers” and hansom’s with the apparatus in Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds and Bradford, and on March 15, 1899 (a date in taxi history), it started off six cabs at the Hotel Cecil, London. Others soon followed. The Syndicate’s idea was slowly to educate the public up to the use of the taximeter-four-wheeler, and in order to enable these to be easily picked out from the others, the drivers all wore white top hats. This, I should say, as much as anything helped to kill the new venture. It was too overwhelming a weapon to put into the hands of sarcastic and

humorous-minded opponents, of whom there were plenty, for the powerful Cab Drivers' Union at once denounced the innovation and declared all drivers using cabs so fitted to be "black-legs." In spite of the fact, therefore, that the Taxameter Syndicate was offering £2 2s. per week and a percentage of the takings, they could not obtain the men, and so were forced to close down a couple of years later. The Cab Drivers' Union considered this a great victory, but it is quite possible that, had they then accepted "the German toy," they would not have been so hard hit by the invasion some six or seven years later of petrol-driven cabs; for when these latter did come on the streets they brought with them the despised taximeter as an added, and to the public very definite, inducement to patronage.

The earliest *horseless* cabs to ply for hire in London were twenty-five accumulator driven "growlers," the first of which was licensed by the Metropolitan Police on August 13, 1897. They were introduced by the London Electric Cab Company. They did not, of course, carry taximeters. They were followed in 1898 by fifty more of improved design, but all were unwieldy heavy vehicles, perpetually suffering from tyre trouble, and this ultimately caused their withdrawal

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in 1899. One of the originals is preserved in the Science Museum, South Kensington. They used to be painted yellow and black and were invariably referred to by the horse cabbies as "'ummin' birds."

Three years later came the first hints of petrol-driven hackney carriages, when in 1902 the London Express Motor Service was formed for the purpose of placing on the streets a fleet of fifty "motor-hansoms." In appearance, they were exactly what their name implied—hansom cabs with the horse's place taken by an extra pair of wheels supporting a single-cylinder Panhard engine, and a chauffeur on a seat like a soap-box. There were difficulties, however, in production, and so the first petrol-driven cab was not licensed till May, 1904. It was a "Prunel Hansom," and was given Plate No. 15831. Neither these nor any of the earlier mechanical cabs proved very satisfactory during the next two or three years, and it was not till 1905 that the new industry showed signs of taking even small root. During that year, the following types were at one time or another to be seen on the London streets: French "Sorex" cabs of the Automobile Cab Company, "Rational" cabs of the London Motor Cab Company, the French "Herald" cabs of the Metropolitan Motor Cab Company,

and the "Simplex" cabs of the Motor Hansom Company.

It was, however, the year 1906 which marked the real inception of the present-day taxicab. In the early spring, the City & Suburban Motor Cab Company made its bow with the first vehicle to survive the experimental stage of public hire service—a couple of dozen 10 h.p. twin cylinder "Unic" cabs. Less than ten months later it amalgamated with the United Motor Cab Company, and under the latter name set out to purchase two hundred more Unics and two hundred and fifty Darracqs, all fitted with taximeters. During the same year appeared the General Motor Cab Company with plans for five hundred two-cylinder Renault taximeter cabs, and so successful were these latter, that in February, 1907, fresh capital was issued for the purchase of another five hundred. It was at 10 a.m. on March 22, 1907 (another date in taxi history) that the first motor cab fitted with a taximeter drove out of its garage at the corner of the Brixton and Camberwell New Roads to ply for hire.

The General Company and the United (which it subsequently absorbed in autumn, 1908) were thus the two concerns primarily responsible for the development of the modern

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taxi, but during that period many other small companies were naturally hard at work with varying success. The public was evidently taking some time to become "taxi-conscious," for when in 1906, the Automobile Cab Company decided to put fifty new cabs on the streets at four definite standings, Trafalgar Square, Leicester Square, Hyde Park Corner, and Swiss Cottage, they had first to hold a special exhibition on the Embankment in October, to show the public what their new vehicles were like. Apparently people had complained that they were unable to obtain cabs because they could not distinguish them from private cars, and no doubt were too polite to hail everything on spec., as the younger generation used to do in war time. Even in these days good fun can be obtained by a commanding shout of "Taxi!" directed at expensive limousines with supercilious chauffeurs.

The Fiat Motor Cab firm was another that made its first appearance in 1907, and the first Belsize taxis were first put into commission by the Express Motor Cab Company. The real expansion during this period can best be shown by the number of cabs licensed, for whereas at December 31, 1905, there were, despite the many experiments, only 19 cabs, by the end of 1907 there were 723.

At first the drivers of horsed vehicles had remained calm and slightly scornful. Though in November, 1905, they had actually asked for taximeters to be fitted to their "growlers" and hansoms, the reason given was to enable them to meet the competition of trams and motor-buses; and motor-cabs were not mentioned as rivals. Indeed, the Cab Union at that time was even giving assistance to such go-ahead members as wished to learn automobile driving and take up the new trade. But in 1907 the first big row, motor versus horse cab, took place.

The general line of complaint of the horse cabbies was that the taxi drivers, in addition to being no gentlemen and driving them out of a job, were not competing fairly, because they all had taximeters which the horse drivers still experienced great difficulty in obtaining. Moreover, the aggrieved ones, looking round at the Unics, Darracqs and Renaults, asserted that the motor cab companies were foreign companies, and that, as so often happened in England, the alien was being favoured at the expense of the British born, that "undue preference was being given to foreign trusts."

As a result of the squabble questions were asked in Parliament, but it was shown that the cab companies, except for buying French vehicles and possessing a foreign director or

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so, were wholly English. A French monopoly of taximeter manufacture was, however, disclosed which, in face of the enormous demand, naturally favoured the motor cabs ; but once these questions had been answered very little was done. It was realized that the foreign element was entirely due to the temporary French lead in the automobile world and that, growl though the "growlers" might, motor taxicabs had come to stay. Possibly it was also felt that the horse cabbies might have displayed more enthusiasm about the taximeter in the twelve years between its invention and the arrival of the motor taxicab, instead of waiting till they saw someone else with it and then having a grievance. Now they had lost the battle almost before they knew it had begun, for, as the new taxi companies were not slow to point out, though horse cabs were already holding the strongest weapon they were ever likely to hold against a rival, that of a 6d. per mile fare against the motor cab's 8d., they yet were losing ground. This (they went on) was because the public, in spite of a lot of talk about "noble animals," frankly preferred motors, so that even the immediate fitting of taximeters to every horse cab would make no difference. A correct prophecy, for though by next February a large number of hansoms and "growlers" had



taximeters, and at their own 6d. fare too, before two years were up even big concerns like the London Improved Cab Company were advertising a large sale of horses, four-wheelers and hansoms as no longer profitable, and were concentrating on the petrol side of the business. The proportion of horse-drawn hackney carriages to mechanical cabs in 1904 was as 550 to 1: six years later it was as 37 to 50. With a swiftness that might have been moderated by commonsense, the victory, inevitable in any case, had gone to the motor.

In 1907 also, the first regulations for motor cabs, as such, appeared in the London Cab and Stage Carriage Act of that year. This Act also abolished the system of "privileged cabs," a form of contract by which certain cab owners alone had the right of admission to railway station precincts to ply for hire on condition of paying a certain annual sum and of guaranteeing to have cabs at all hours. But since this was primarily instituted for the protection of the public, the Home Secretary retained the power of suspending the abolition if at any time he saw fit. In its place the railway companies instituted a toll of 1d. for policing and maintenance charges on any cab wishing to enter their premises, and since the stations were private property they were legally

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entitled to do so. The "privileged cab" system had always been a first-class source of trouble among cab men, a strike against it being recorded as long ago as 1868, and though it had now been formally abolished, the new 1d. toll was destined to provide in the future a grievance almost as fine.

It is interesting to record that during the early days of the taxicab, the operating companies sometimes actually had to send officials out to the ranks to regulate the queues which formed up to hire the vacant cabs as they returned. To many Londoners this was the first chance they had had of riding in a motor car at all, and 8d. a mile was ludicrously small price to pay for the experience. On the other hand there were a large number who actually apparently thought the whole thing was gratuitous, because the foreign taximeter manufacturers had translated the word "*Frei*" or "*Libre*," as "Free" on the English meter flags. So many arguments took place over this that the present legend "For Hire" had to be substituted.

The year 1908 saw the number of licensed cabs in London nearly quadrupled. A company—the Provincial Motor Cab Company—was also formed with the intention of providing the big provincial towns with taxicabs, mostly Darracqs, Charrons and

Wolseleys. Various other companies were also hastily formed, some with almost impossible prospectuses, following the same unwritten law of mushroom growth which recently flooded England with Talking Film companies, and before that, with Greyhound Racing companies. In July of the same year another attempt, destined to be initiated at intervals during the following years, but not yet successful, was made at placing electrically-propelled cabs on the streets.

Towards the end of 1908, the formal acknowledgment of victory in the struggle for popular favour was at last granted to the motor cabbie by the changing of the number of whistle blasts required to summon him, from three to one, hitherto the poor old four-wheeler's number. Henceforth it was three blasts for a four-wheeled cab, two blasts for a hansom cab and one blast for a taxicab. The Irish M.P.'s well known pathetic question, "An' how many blasts if ye get *no* cab?" still remained unanswered.

THERE were 723 licensed motor taxicabs by the end of 1907 and 2,805 by the end of 1908, in which year, his numbers justifying his existence, we begin to hear of the taxi driver as a man to be reckoned with. In other words, he was experiencing that natural feeling of power which comes from being in greater demand than can be equalled by supply, and, judging from press comment at the time, which, while not often fair to the driver, is an indication of popular feeling, he had become autocratic to a degree. In short, many men were adopting that attitude of utter indifference and disdain towards the public which for some extraordinary reason is so often found in those who are dependent on the public for their livelihood; and the correspondence columns of that year's papers dripped with complaints. Nearly all of them were indignant or pathetic tales of taxi men's refusals to accept fares except to places where they wanted to go. For this, however, there was a good deal to be said in defence of drivers

employed by firms; they had, in addition to turning in 75% of their takings to the companies, also to pay them eightpence per gallon for their petrol. (Alternatively, in some cases, they were charged for the cab at so much for each mile run.) So that it followed that the then inevitable empty return journey from some distant suburb quickly ate up profits.

The month of September, 1908, saw the first strike in the motor-cab trade. It embraced the employés of the General Cab Company, and the cause was one of the company's notices being misinterpreted as an order forbidding drivers to accept tips. It lasted only four hours—an ideal strike in which everyone's honour was satisfied. May, 1909, however, was responsible for the first real strike upon any question of importance. It was, in comparison, quite a long affair—nearly three days—but the dispute (between the Quick Cab Company and its employés) was over the price of petrol. This, together with the railway station toll mentioned before, was to be a fertile source of trouble in the future; for the taxi driver could not see why he should have to pay his employer for the petrol used in his employer's cab. And even when he had been reluctantly forced to accept this fact, he somehow failed completely

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to understand why any subsequent increase in the wholesale cost of the spirit to the companies should affect the eightpence or so per gallon that he had to pay them for it. His own idea was that he should have it free, and no doubt this seemed to him a very reasonable solution of the problem of fluctuating prices.

During 1909, it was estimated that over twenty firms had cabs on the London streets. It was also estimated, probably by someone signing himself "Patriot" in the correspondence column of the *Times*, that 75% of these cabs were of foreign manufacture. The end of the year showed an increase of over a thousand taxis to a total of nearly four thousand, but the manners of a large section of taxi drivers did not improve. Perhaps this was because their ranks had now been largely swelled by ex-drivers of hansoms and "growlers"; for it must be remembered that the latter at least had not lost the reputation for grumbling surliness which had given them their name. Though, after years of comfortable four-wheeler life, several of them (as one indeed actually complained) were unable physically to adapt themselves to a driver's seat which had a steering wheel so very close to it, yet many others mechanised themselves without difficulty and unfortunately

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did their best to live up to the "growler" tradition. Indeed a correspondent to the daily press in August, 1910, put up a plaintive wail which hit off the attitude of some drivers of the period so nicely that I will quote it. "The driver (he writes pathetically) plies his cab for hire presumably for the support of himself and his family and not solely to gratify a selfish hobby. Why then should he be so angry with me when I offer to hire it?"

I have never yet found the answer to that one.

As a result perhaps of the ill-feeling between the taxi user and the taxi driver, new regulations were issued in 1910, mostly defining the conditions governing the hire of cabs by the public and the rights of taxi men on the rank. One of these regulations required the first two drivers to be ready by their cabs. Another forbade disabled cabs to stand on the rank. Another, and a much needed one too, at last allowed the driver to absent himself from his cab for half an hour for mealtimes, provided that a certain number of vehicles were already on the standing and that he placed his cab on a "reserved" place on the rank. He had also to obtain a card of permit from the constable on duty. This card, which one remembers seeing hanging round the meter-flag of the

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feeding driver, was delightfully worded:

“By virtue of the powers vested in me for preserving order at standings, permission has been given to the Driver of this cab to be absent for THIRTY MINUTES for meal time. During such period therefore the cab is

**NOT FOR HIRE.**

The Commissioner of Police  
for the Metropolis.”

So much more dignified than a grubby scrap of paper with “Gorn to dinner. Back at 2.” I wish these cards were still in use.

After the issue of these regulations the complaints died down and a more peaceful era set in. To be fair, however, one must remember that the taxi driver as well as the public had grievances, as does any worker in a new field. With this difference: the public had little or no redress beyond writing to the papers and getting questions asked in the House, both of which courses generally led to useless friction rather than remedial action; for all that happened was that the taxi-driver got a worse name than he deserved. He, on the other hand, could always attract attention to genuine troubles and probably secure definite redress by means of the strike weapon and trade organization.



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Even at this date he had two trade unions : the newly-formed Motor Cabdrivers' Protection Association and The London Cabdrivers' Trade Union which included horse cabbies as well. These were both concerned in 1910 in a strike of the Waterloo Garage employés. The ostensible trouble was "over one man," a phrase which has a familiar ring, but it soon developed into a question of the employers' recognition of the union officials as empowered to treat on behalf of the strikers. The employers were at last forced to concede this point and the strike was settled. The stage had thus been set for the big strike of January, 1913, the culmination of over twelve months' previous bickering between cab companies and their men.

Towards the end of 1911, the increasing price of petrol led the big motor-cab companies of which there were then eight, represented by the London Motor Cab Proprietors' Association, to apply for an increase of the fare, from the existing rate of 8d. per mile plus 2d. for every additional quarter mile. The Home Secretary alone could sanction an increase and this he refused to do, in spite of statements that the owning and running of taxicabs was not profitable.

Further application was made the next year; again without success; and at last the

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Association decided to even things out by putting up the price of petrol to all drivers employed by their companies from 8d. to 1/1 per gallon.

This, as can be imagined, started something. A yell of protest went up from the men, and in January, 1913, about sixty per cent. of them ceased work. It was in no sense a universal taxi strike, for the remaining forty per cent., comprising the owner-drivers and the employés of the small companies who were outside the Motor Cab Proprietors' Association and who had agreed to continue eightpenny petrol, remained at work. But these were forced to contribute from their extra earnings to the strikers, and in effect the strike was a serious one.

It persisted all through January and February, with its attendant meetings and resolutions on the part of the men and threats of discharge and replacement on the part of the employers. The men, however, won; chiefly by their leaders' astute move in guiding the dispute into a demand for *free* petrol rather than a refusal to pay an increased price. The result was that the companies, after vainly offering a 10½d. gallon rate, came to terms on a *status quo* basis, feeling rather glad that they had managed to get the drivers to continue to pay for it at all. And, as usual in a strike, the chief

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sufferers were the public and the poor fellows who, previously unemployed, had secured jobs and had reasonable grounds for hoping that they would be able to keep them. But all the old employés were reinstated, and not for the first or last time in the history of strikes, the unfortunate substitutes came out on their ear.

THE world of the taxi driver was thereafter calm up to two years or so after the outbreak of the Great War, and no wonder, for he was in demand and doing well. Little things like the prohibiting of cab-summoning by whistle meant nothing to him when officers on leave with ladies on arm swarmed at every hotel, theatre and restaurant. Petrol was short, but then so were cabs, with so few being built and so many men away, and an officer on leave did not quarrel about sixpences. Do we occasionally recall, I wonder, those hectic war days in London, when after the theatre young men went out and fought for taxis and, clinging to the wind-screen, dragged back the prize to waiting damsels—the days when hardly-won taxis were often even shared by total strangers—the days when fair young things selected companions for the evening not because they were amusing or good dancers but simply because they were good “taxi getters?” Do we recall the days when taxis were hired to wait all through a dance by

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scrupulous young men anxious not to let their partners down; and then as like as not were snapped up by *un*scrupulous young men, also anxious not to let their partners down, who didn't mind paying what was already on the clock and a bribe besides? Those were the days—for taxi drivers. For taxi drivers were luxuries, to be obtained, like other luxuries, at a price, and before 1916 was out they were sitting back in their seats selecting good rich-looking fares, as they would plums, and often refusing to take those they didn't like.

Their general attitude towards the public reached such a pass that in January, 1917, the *Evening News* ran several articles on the subject, pointing out particular cases of overbearing insolence that had come under its notice. The taxi drivers made the mistake of replying to this in a letter which occupied half a column of the *Times*. The remaining half column was filled, without comment, by reports of three convictions of taxi drivers the day before for flagrant extortion and refusal to take fares, in one case with violence. From now on to two or three years after the war the taxi driver was to become in the eyes of the public a symbol for highway robbery, grumbling offensiveness, and downright hostility. As Sir Walter Scott, writing somewhat

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earlier but none the less aptly, remarked (if memory serves me): "lightly from fare to fare he flew and loved to bleed, lament, and sue," \* and he had hit off the taxi man's wartime reputation fairly accurately. This reputation, it is only fair to emphasize, was due to the behaviour of a certain proportion whose peculiar gifts would have had more scope in the trenches, but the taxi driving trade as a whole had to live it down and, with the press naturally representing the public point of view, it took some time.

It was in August, 1917, that the then unwise *faux pas* of annoying the taxi driver was committed, and it was the big railway companies who did it. The 1d. toll paid to them by each cab for permission to enter the station and ply for hire had always rankled. In spite of the fact that station work was very profitable, that necessary penny stuck in the throat, and pocket, of the driver, but beyond grouching half a dozen times a day he had done nothing about it, till suddenly the matter was brought to a head by the railway companies themselves who launched a demand for a 2d. toll. Quite possibly they saw that the single penny was in danger and remembered how some years before the drivers had cunningly prevented the threatened rise of the price

\* *Marmion*, Canto V, stanza 9.

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of petrol over 8d. by loudly demanding that it should be free. Anyhow the taxi men first unanimously opposed any 2d. toll, maintaining that after forty years fighting by cab drivers the "privileged cab" system had been abolished in 1907, and then refused to pay even the 1d., with the result that all cabs were withdrawn from station work.

The public did not suffer unduly; it was already accustoming itself to travelling with small amounts of luggage, and now at the railway companies' suggestion, made a point of it. Moreover, arrangements were soon made by the railways with a firm of carriers to deliver heavy luggage, and as a last resource a word in the ear and a coin in the hand of an outside porter would always procure a taxi that "just happened to be passing outside." But the strike took root, for the taxi drivers, with more jobs in the London streets than they could handle, were in a strong position. Long-suffering London settled down to taxi-less stations as part of the scheme of life.

This dispute, however, was soon swallowed up in a bigger one. As early as January the cab companies had again been asking the Home Secretary for an increase in fares, this time from 8d. to 1/- on the first mile only, i.e. an initial hiring fee of 4d. This request had been turned down. Now in October both

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owners and men combined to ask for an over-all increase of 50%, i.e. 1/- the first mile and 3d. each succeeding quarter. At the same time the drivers once more raised the "free petrol" cry, whereat the owners consolidated both interests by stating that they would be willing to concede this point if they got the increased fares.

At this point the Home Secretary said that he saw no justification for a 50% increase. It would only benefit both owners and drivers at the expense of the public, and the most he could do would be to sanction a 6d. initial hiring fee, the heaviest incidence of which would be on those richer members of the community who took short taxi rides. The owners replied that taking an average of 16 hirings a day per cab the increased profit to themselves, less the driver's 25%, would be only 6/-, and they couldn't possibly give free petrol out of that. The Home Secretary was polite but firm, and the result was that when on November 1st, 1917, the 6d. hiring fee was introduced 2,500 taxis at once went on strike, pledged not to start up their cabs unless it was on free petrol. November for the taxi world was a welter of meetings at which either this or that was condemned, and unanimous resolutions calling on somebody to do something were passed. Several men



drifted back to work and owner-drivers, always a law unto themselves, did well for themselves. It was not till December that both these disputes and the accompanying railway station trouble were settled, like all war disputes, in favour of the men. The railway companies agreed not to enforce the 1d. toll for the present "in the interests of the public"; while the taxicab companies decided to allow free petrol till the end of January, 1918, at which date the Home Secretary promised to allow the all round increase of 50% if it were justified by the books. Such companies, however, as submitted their books in February got no sympathy and the old rate with the added sixpence remained in force.

Public, cab owners, and cab drivers continued for the next year so, if not in amity at least not in open revolt. This, however, one fears, was principally due to the fact that the public as such can always bark individually but never bite collectively. It has rarely been known to revolt efficaciously against overbearing treatment by public servants. Certainly it had cause enough during 1918 to rebel against the behaviour of the taxi men. (In fairness to present-day drivers, who will be the first to admit it, it must be re-stated that their ranks at that time were overloaded with an undesirable type of man, often criminally

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inclined and certainly out to extort what he could.) Unpleasant incidents followed one another daily, culminating in a taxi driver, while plying for hire in the street, abusively and unreasonably refusing to accept a fare—a wounded officer at that—and on the latter's attempting to enter the cab, dragging him twenty yards, pulling him forcibly away from the vehicle and violently assaulting him. He got six weeks' hard labour, but such a case would never have occurred if only there had been a possibility of the public organizing sufficiently to go on strike itself and do without taxis for, say, a week. A vain dream: but if the tax-paying man in the street were properly organized how pleasant life would be. Think of getting polite attendance from a post-office girl! Think of an income tax official apologizing for prying into your personal and private affairs! Think of other civil servants musing on the two words "civil" and "servant"—simply because Strube's Little Man had "found himself."

THE first months of the Great Peace showed that the shortage of taxicabs in London was very serious. By May, 1919, the public were clamouring for something to be done about it. It was pointed out that not only were there four or five hundred obsolete cabs which could be bought for £70 plus an extra £30 for putting them in running repair, but that there were at least a thousand ex-service trained drivers looking for a job. But festoons of red tape still clung round the responsible officials: these cabs even if repaired could not be put on the streets because they did not possess the minimum ten-inch clearance between chassis and roadway demanded by the new regulations. The origin, of course, of this rule—so thoughtful is the kind police department—was to allow for the passage of a human body underneath, without presumably, more mangling than had already been incurred by the initial impact. But as private cars with clearances of as little as three inches were permitted to swarm on the streets, the average mud-brained human

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found it difficult to see the point of enforcing the regulation—except as an indication that the wise pedestrian should make his dash across the road in front of taxis rather than limousines.

However, in July a Select Committee reporting on London Street Traffic made various recommendations to facilitate the obtaining by the public of what taxis there were. Chief of these were more cab-ranks, two thirds of the cabs thereon to be liable for immediate hire, an obligation on drivers to take the first fare offering, clearer indications as to whether a cab in the street was for hire or not—and the suggested removal of the restrictions on plying in railway stations. On the drivers' side of the balance was a recommendation that the 6d. extra hiring fee should be abolished in favour of the long-sought 50% increase all round.

This last was put into force in February, 1920. And so for the next seven years the meters clicked up 1/- a mile, and 3d. a quarter thereafter, with 9d. for an extra person. The Home Secretary, however, took the opportunity of warning the taxi trade that it was up to them to beware of opening their mouths too wide, or the taxi might suddenly find itself classed as "one of the luxuries we cannot afford." Their aim should rather be to make

taxi-using as near a necessity of life as possible.

During the five years or so after the war there was a movement in the taxi trade towards closer organization for protection of its interests. Its first trade paper, *The Steering Wheel*, started up in December, 1921, and is still running to-day as the oldest taxicab trade journal. This journal took a great part in the formation of the National Federation of Hackney Carriage Proprietors which was the first attempt, although very doubtfully organized, to knit together all the various overlapping associations, unions and societies of which the taxi trade possessed at least six, not counting local associations in provincial towns. This so-called Federation held its first meeting in 1923, lasted a year or so and then died on its feet from lack of trust and general support. Though justified in this case, taxi-drivers, as a class, are an independent lot—doubtless owing to the large number of owner-drivers—and they can rarely be induced to pull together all at once and in the same direction. One of the supporters of the Federation remarked at the time that it was a “great and perpetual struggle to persuade taxi men when one was wanting something out of them.” Even if it is only change from a ten bob note, as professional humorists will probably never tire of pointing out.

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Towards the end of 1923, when the shortage of cabs was not so acute, an attempt was made to get some of the very old ones off the streets—not an unreasonable suggestion when one remembers that there were still a large number of two-cylinder Renaults (called “scooters”) plying for hire. The Commissioner of Police issued a regulation, requiring that in future, vehicles coming up for renewal of licence must as a condition of fitness develop engine power such as to enable them to fulfil the reasonable requirements of the public. As a result many old Renaults were either scrapped or else put out to grass, being sold for a few pounds for “agricultural purposes.” Others which presumably could not tear themselves away from the lure of city life, were later reconditioned with four-cylinder engines and other luxuries of civilization. The feared new test, however, proved very light, only requiring the cabs to run at not less than twenty m.p.h. on the level and six m.p.h. up selected gradients, and the taxi drivers expressed themselves as not in the least inconvenienced. The demand that taxis must be able to drive at not less than 20 m.p.h. along the level was considered by the Parisian taxi driver to be the best joke of the season.

In 1924 the decree prohibiting taxis from entering Hyde Park was triumphantly rescinded

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by the first Labour Government. On 1st March Mr. Ben Smith, the ex-taxi driver M.P., hired the first public carriage to enter the Park for 228 years and headed a triumphant procession. The drive passed off without incident and an enjoyable time was had by all.

During the latter part of the year the problem of the congestion of London streets again came to the fore. By no means for the first time; regulations were being made about it even in the reign of Charles I and probably earlier. No doubt London traffic has been congested ever since the day they stopped putting knives on chariot wheels.

The solution of the traffic problem, at any rate to the bus and tram interests, was obvious. There were too many taxis; particularly "crawling" taxis—a "crawling" or "cruising" taxi being one that meanders along the road at four to five miles per hour looking for fares. On the other hand the taxi men were equally convinced that there were far too many buses being run; particularly in the slack periods when they were mostly empty. There was not unnaturally little love lost between the two interests. However, the London and Home Counties' Traffic Advisory Commission got to work in December and discussions and arguments ensued—lasting for nearly three years—in which the taxis were outvoted

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and got rather the worst of it. For though the number of buses was but slightly restricted, at the same time steps were taken to abolish several of the old-established and profitable cab ranks in busy thoroughfares and to remove others into adjoining side-streets. Some months later a proposal was actually made by the Ministry of Transport to close central London streets altogether to unhired cabs unless on a standing, but it came to nothing. And very rightly too: it would have been extraordinarily unfair. After all, even an unhired and "cruising" cab, which at any moment, too, may become a hired one, never blocks the traffic as much as three buses carrying half a dozen passengers between them, or a large horsed dray wagon incapable at any time of more than four miles per hour. Moreover, though there were nearly 8,000 cabs in London, at that time there were standings for not more than 4,000 within a three mile radius from Charing Cross and a quarter of these were so out of date as to be useless. Take, for instance, that at Brunswick Square which was appointed for forty cabs, but only got about one call a week. At long last the London Traffic (Unhired Cabs) Regulations did forbid "cruising" in a few specified streets, and this "Cruising Order" with its power to extend the number of forbidden



streets has been the driver's bugbear ever since. Certainly he had a legitimate grievance over the whole affair. Nowhere to stand and not allowed to move, he felt he had not been fairly treated. Quite possibly his lack of organizing power and absence of any reasonable plans for making his troubles known was the cause, for when in August, 1924, an enormous rally of drivers was proposed by way of pointing out to the public that taxis were not used enough and that the trade was in a bad way, the result was Gilbertian. The grand rally was a complete washout owing to ninety per cent. of the drivers being too busy working to attend!

Even more comic in a way was the next question which agitated the taxi world, namely, the proposed introduction into London of cheap two-seater cabs. This proposal, of course, was a result of the increasing public demand for lower taxi charges consequent on the fall in the price of petrol to 1/7 from the 3/6 level which had ruled when the fares were put up to 1/- per mile; for two-seater taxis (already running successfully in provincial towns) would of course operate at a cheaper rate. In April, 1925, the first definite step was taken when the Home Secretary actually appointed a Committee to consider the desirability of licensing these vehicles, and for the

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next eighteen months the taxi trade was provided with a really splendid grievance and the newspapers with a standing joke. What the London and Home Counties' Traffic Advisory Commission, still wrestling manfully at the time with crowded streets, thought of this proposal to add a few more hundred vehicles to its troubles is not recorded, and it is perhaps just as well.

During the evidence-gathering sittings of the Two-Seater Committee and the subsequent meetings of the taxicab owners and drivers among themselves and the conferences with the Home Secretary, the whole question of introducing either a cheaper type of cab or of reducing the charges for the present ones was thrashed out and discussed as few questions have been before. Out of the welter of argument certain conclusions were arrived at, of which I give the following broad outlines so that the earnest student of taxicab history can appreciate the situation at a glance.

The high cost of making two-seaters according to Scotland Yard Regulations coupled with a low fare and no chance of extra passengers, would make it impossible for two-seaters to operate profitably.

The presence of two-seaters plying at a cheaper rate would make it impossible for four-seaters to operate profitably.

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Under existing conditions taxis were only working a bare three hours out of ten and the introduction of two-seaters would reduce this even further.

The cheap two-seater would instil the taxi habit into thousands of people who had never possessed it, to the good of the whole trade.

There were not enough skilled drivers for four-seaters as it was, so that the two-seaters if they materialized would have no one to drive them.

The whole thing was only a blackmailing move on the part of the Home Secretary to reduce existing taxi fares.

With cabs charging different rates, the hiring of taxis at the railway station and cab rank would become chaotic.

The presence of cheaper rate cabs would lead to a fare-cutting war.

Two-seater cabs in 1907 had either failed, or had to grow two more seats; and history would undoubtedly repeat itself.

The public would never take a two-seater cab as long as there was a four-seater to be found.

The public would never take a four-seater cab as long as there was a two-seater to be found.

These of course are only the principal conclusions arrived at. There are many others.

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Some of them I have been told were even contradictory.

During thirteen months' discussion the taxi-trade unequivocally opposed the suggested introduction and at the same time definitely refused to reduce fares. Whereupon in April, 1926, the Home Secretary gave permission for the by then famous two-seater cabs to be licensed to ply for hire at a 9d. per mile rate. Five hundred of them, it was estimated, could be on the streets within six months. The newspapers had already christened them "Jixis" in anticipation, and the Home Secretary would in the fulness of time have taken his place alongside Mr. Hansom, Lord Brougham, the Duke of Clarence, Sir John Hackney, Mr. Omnibus, and other complainers of the London traffic—but for one small hitch.

That small hitch was that no two-seater taxis materialized.

In spite of over a year's discussion, in which every aspect of the question had been hammered out, in spite of the gallons of ink spilt in anger before the decision was arrived at, in spite even of the prompt issue of two-seater specifications, regulations, scale of fares and heaven knows what, nearly six months subsequently elapsed before even one specimen model had been submitted to

and passed by the Commissioner of Police.

The delay was variously ascribed to the industrial disorganization caused by the General Strike, the severity of the specifications demanded and the different manufacturing firms' lack of belief in the business as likely to show a profit. The best part of the whole affair was the opportunity it gave M.P.'s at question time to shoot humorous arrows at a cabinet minister who from his innumerable attempts at restricting the personal liberty of others has always been a gratifying target.

But when a further six months passed and there was still no sign of the "Jixis" a year after they had been sanctioned, the joke palled on the public, still paying the 1/- rate for its cabs. For after all a cheaper taxi was what was really wanted, whether it had one seat or eight. Something had to be done and a further reduction in the price of petrol in April, 1927, with a crop of parliamentary questions in its train, precipitated the crisis.

The Home Secretary, by promising to rescind the two-seater order, at last gained the approval of the taxi trade for a cheaper rate. This rate (the one in force to-day) was to be 6d. for the first two-thirds of a mile (or  $7\frac{1}{2}$  minutes) and 3d. for each subsequent third, (or  $3\frac{3}{4}$  minutes) with 6d. per extra person and 3d. per piece of luggage. Thus

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on May 1, 1927, there appeared for the first time the 6d. taxi. Or, to be truthful, it didn't; because until the meters could be altered the initial hiring had still to be for a full mile which cost 9d. In the interim all journeys by the old "clocks" were three-quarters of the fare shown, and rough conversion tables were pasted in each vehicle. For some months the taxi users of London who wished to take advantage of the new scale had to do intensive mathematics for the last few minutes of their journey, leaving the wretched driver to do even more intensive, and occasionally disheartening, mathematics after they had gone. The power of rapid and accurate calculation being only granted to few of us, whether chauffeur or fare, it was small wonder that drivers during this transition period became broody and care-worn and carried ready reckoners in their caps. Within ten months, however, all the meters had been altered and by September, 1928, every taxi was running under the complete revised scale. But as it was now three and a half years since the Home Secretary had made the first move in the game, it could hardly be called a record quick change.

The reduction was not effected without recrimination. A large section of drivers considered they had been, so to speak,

blackmailed into it by the threat of two-seaters, and the Home Secretary, smiling secretly to himself, alone knew whether they were right. Others who considered that on their agreeing to cheaper fares two-seaters had been forbidden altogether, found that the rescinding of the order only applied to the two-seaters at a *lower* scale, and that they could still be put on the streets at the current rate if the manufacturers liked. This they alleged was a breach of the Home Secretary's promise, and as a result the cab trade, through its Joint Conference, "withdrew its assent to the proposed reduction." This ill-advised phrase laid them open to the retort that the Home Secretary was empowered by Parliament to fix fares in the public interest without the "consent" of any other body whatever—a fact which for some years had apparently been lost sight of by taxi men—but it is clear that they had a good grievance. After much bickering (to put it mildly) in Parliament, between the Home Secretary and members representing taxi interests, it was at last agreed that the new scale should be tried for what was called an experimental period. Which period, to be accurate, still continues today, and advantage may yet be taken of this if the imposition of an increased tax on petrol results in a demand for higher fares once more.

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Thus closed the great "Jixi" joke. The discussion about the immediate appearance of fleets of these vehicles had gone on for well over a year, during the whole of which period not a single member of the public ever saw one. Month by month they grew less probable and more hypothetical, till they receded altogether into the realms of myth. My own feeling is that the London "Jixi" is the sort of thing the Snark rides in, being an up-to-date Boojum, you see. Almost certainly the few officials at Scotland Yard who maintain they really saw a "Jixi" in 1926 were simply acted upon by the power of suggestion. No doubt they repent of their rash assertions now. I for one can never believe such a thing existed.

While this "two-seat or not two-seat" controversy was at its height the General Strike occurred. Much abuse has been heaped on the taxi men's heads for their share in this, and the impression their action left in the minds of the public was one of rank treachery. This is hardly fair. Except for one small section, the taxi men did not intend to come out on strike and indeed did not cease work till Wednesday, May 5th, when the Motor Cab Trade Protection Society, the "Cab Section" of the Transport Union, and the Owner-Drivers' Association all advised their members



to come off the streets. This action had, to a large extent, been forced upon them by the small section mentioned above who, helped by other strikers, had already begun "peaceful" intimidation of working drivers. A few carried on, but the majority could not risk ill-treatment and the destruction, however "peaceful," of their sole means of livelihood, and so perforce ceased work. Certainly they had nothing to gain by striking and everything to lose—and they lost it. They lost a chance of coining money, they lost the good-will of the public and the press and they even lost their strike-pay, for the T.U.C. who, they understood, had promised it at first in return for their help, turned round afterwards and said bluntly there were no funds. Moreover, it is highly probable that that same unfortunate week in May, 1926, definitely lost to the taxi drivers the chance of winning that immediately increased clientèle which the sixpenny fare of the following year was expected to bring into being.

It may not be out of place here just to recall those days of the General Strike when London's absent taxi and bus services were taken over by private cars, at the Government's request that lifts might be given by all motorists who had empty seats. As a result nearly every car from Baby Austin to Rolls-Royce was accus-

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tomed to draw up at the bus stopping places and offer the hospitality of a seat, a tool box or even a vacant knee to pedestrians going in the same direction. Often, too, Very Special Constables stopped those few who were too aristocratic or too rich to help and gave them passengers. Destinations were placarded on wind-screens, or a friendly "signal for a lift!" One almost recaptured that spirit of communal friendliness which existed in the front-line trenches up to the end of 1917. Sometimes hospital collecting boxes were carried in order that the saved taxi or bus fare might not be lost to the world. At other times money was left, unobtrusively, as when one hard-working driver overhauling his car some months later found two hundred and thirteen pennies behind his rear cushions. Many amusing incidents naturally occurred, varying from the obvious humour of a tired sweep in working dress hailing a limousine, down to the case of the elderly gentleman who not far from his house in Maida Vale picked up in his two-seater a flashy young Jew. The latter began to make himself so objectionable by waving to and crowing over less fortunate acquaintances that the old gentleman decided he'd had enough of it, and made his passenger alight on the plea of just having seen a friend he must take instead. With which he pulled

up at the nearest waiting pedestrian and discovered, too late, as she got in, that she was a startlingly-dressed lady of an all too obvious type. Amid the sniggers of the young Jew he had to take the lady off—unfortunately also under the eyes of his own wife who was walking home and saw the whole incident. One repercussion of the General Strike lasted a very long time; he is still trying to explain. . . .

I seem to have digressed from the subject of taxis. However, with this I have reached the end of a very brief and probably inaccurate survey of the past history of the London taxi. Those who are not interested in historical facts can omit the previous chapters. Perhaps I should have mentioned that before.

to go into the matter about the only result was a reduction of the minimum allowable height of the chassis above the roadway from ten inches to seven. Either Scotland Yard officials were getting tired of having their leg perpetually pulled over the fact that their own very special police-cars had only a  $7\frac{1}{2}$  inch clearance, or else it was felt that the average London pedestrian had grown thinner of recent years. A further proposal by the committee that the diameter of the circle in which a cab must be able to turn should be increased from twenty-five feet to forty was refused ; but the long-sought permission to display advertisements inside cabs was at last obtained.

This latter, unfortunately, did not prove the financial boon that either the Home Secretary, or, to be honest, the taxi trade, had tried to make out. Many drivers were averse to it because they felt that better-class patrons would strongly resent their arrival at some social function in an otherwise smart taxi being heralded by a Turkish Bath advertisement on the inside of the opened door ; while even greater opposition was experienced from vested interests in other advertising mediums. So after first an agency and then the Cab Proprietors' representatives themselves had attempted without much encouragement

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to develop the original Conditions of Fitness was a real Dead Sea fruit. Early in 1930 when the contracts officially arranged ran out, it was left to individual men to do as they pleased, and not much was done.

Probably the average man who casually jumps into a taxi doesn't in the least realize the nature of the innumerable (or to be precise, fifty-two) Conditions of Fitness with which the cab he is using has had to comply in the interests of public safety. Probably he doesn't in the least care either; but that's not going to stop my mentioning here a few of the more interesting ones.

They cover every conceivable point from the materials of which the vehicle must be constructed down to the provision of floor mats and the specifying of the seven places inside the cab wherein the ill-fated advertisements "in such form as not to become easily soiled or detached" may be displayed. The maximum length and breadth of the chassis and the minimum clearance and wheel-track are laid down, equally with the minimum measurements of the seats. Scotland Yard, evidently remembering that in a mixed party of four, women take the back seats and men the front, has displayed a primitive recognition of comparative anatomy by requiring the back

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seat minimum to be sixteen inches by twenty but the front one only fourteen by seventeen. Or, as a witty American has put it, women are broader-shouldered across the hips.

No less than three paragraphs are devoted to the condition of the "two independent brakes, in good and efficient working order, and of such design and efficiency that the application of either will even under the most adverse conditions, cause the road wheels acted upon to be so held that they shall be prevented from revolving." Meaning, as we in our silly careless manner say, "two good brakes." Next, the cab must be able to turn without reversing within a roadway of twenty-five feet wide. All parts of the vehicle must be "so constructed that no undue noise or vibration arises," and there must be effectual means of preventing the rattling of windows. (One wishes the public carriage authorities in Italian towns would think of this one.) Four paragraphs deal with the petrol question, its carrying, storing, conducting, and its pipes and tanks; in the midst of all which is a cheerfully suggestive line to say that "suitable and approved appliances for extinguishing fire must be readily available." In this connection the word "approved," by the way, is expanded in a separate form, of three foolscap pages, containing about fifty

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paragraphs of specifications with which the fire extinguisers themselves must comply in order to win "approval" from the Yard.

Other Conditions of Fitness state that there is only to be one driver's seat in front, and an approved pattern horn with a single deep-toned note. The cushions of seats must not be stuffed with hay, straw, seaweed or whale-bone shavings—the last a thing I should never have thought of if left to myself. There must be reasonable provision for carrying luggage, no celluloid fittings anywhere in the cab, a light for the taximeter, ventilation—and then at the end, when everything possible apparently had been thought of, the Commissioner evidently felt a sudden fear that he might not have covered the ground properly, so he added: "Though the above conditions may have been complied with, yet, if there is anything in the construction, form, working, fittings, or general appearance which in the opinion of the Commissioner renders the cab unfit for public use, or is undesirable in the public interest, it will not be licensed." Which effectually stops any humorously-minded driver from painting his spare wheel green and carrying it in front of the radiator, against which practice there is no specific regulation.

These Conditions of Fitness are, of course,

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for London taxis : those for provincial towns are in general not so strict, and vary according to the town. Very often an ordinary private car fits a meter, takes out a hackney licence, and then is a taxi. In some towns there are even sidecar taxis to take one person, at a reduced scale ; for the ordinary fares in provincial towns are anything from 30% to 60% above those in London. The sidecar taxis are forbidden in London ; nor indeed would any of the provincial cabs be permitted, principally because of their too big turning-lock.

With such a mass of conditions to be complied with it is surprising that any firm thought taxis were worth while making at all. Yet there are at the present day well over a dozen makes of cabs on the road. Somewhere in London may still be seen on taxis the names of Renault, Panhard, Vinot, Argyll, Fiat, and Napier ; while a walk down any big rank will show Unic, Beardmore, Belsize, Hayes, Morris, Citroën, and, like an orange among pebbles, the W. & G. Yellow Cab. These latter aroused considerable feeling among taxi drivers when they first appeared in 1923, as it was rumoured that Mr. Hertz, the founder of the big and highly organized Yellow Cab Company of Chicago, was contemplating a similar invasion of England



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with an accompanying price-cutting war. But they were never operated as a separate concern though over a hundred of them were soon put on the road in the normal course of business by the Turpin Engineering Company.

The latest of the above names is Morris, who did not join the ranks till 1929; the earliest is Unic. As a matter of fact Unic is also responsible for the most recent model to be found at the time of writing; it did not come on the streets till May, 1930. Renault, Fiat and Belsize are other early names who still have taxis in the family; but Darracqs and Wolseleys are no longer seen. The oldest taxi plying in London to-day is one of the very few original two-cylinder Renault "scooters," more than twenty years old. But it must be remembered that it had by law to be thoroughly overhauled each year, so that probably after constant reconditioning there is little of the original Renault left but the number plate. Anyway it still goes.

The question of elderly taxis is one that is always cropping up. Undoubtedly there are elderly taxis on the streets, for with such high initial cost, the owner-drivers in particular (and there are over three thousand of them in London) naturally try to get as much service as they can out of their vehicles. But even elderly cabs are not necessarily obsolete and

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inefficient, as every now and then a crusading journalist, looking round for something to be fearless and provocative about, tries to make out. Only a few months ago a reputable London newspaper asked in an article: "Why should we be longer tortured by the musty, rattling, aged taxicab with a driver who seems always to have come unwillingly out of the age of growlers with knock-kneed nags?" Apart from the implication that aged taxis always have aged drivers, the newspaper, at least, should have known that every taxicab has to undergo an annual overhaul before applying for its renewal of licence, followed by a stiff inspection by the Public Carriage Inspectors of the Metropolitan Police. This inspection, at which also the premium receipt for next year's insurance of both cab and passengers must be produced, may take anything up to an hour, and brakes, steering, transmission, body, everything is thoroughly gone into by experienced men. If the cab is not up to its job or, more important, if not likely to remain so during the ensuing twelve months, a renewal of licence is refused; nor is it possible nowadays to get an obviously inefficient cab passed by any form of persuasion. It follows therefore that though the design of some cabs may be old-fashioned—for the rigid police specifications ensured cabs that would

last for years—the performance must be reasonably up-to-date. And in any case less than 10% of London's cabs are officially classed as "aged."

Moreover, these Public Carriage Inspectors do not confine themselves to sitting down and waiting for the cabs to come in every year. There are about sixty of them divided among twelve areas, each under an inspector, and they are out and about in the streets with full authority to inspect at any time any cab on the rank, street or railway station, and enter any private garage where hackney carriages are kept. Should anything be found wrong with a cab a form called a "Stop-notice" is served on the proprietor informing him of the defect, and giving him official warning not to use it till it has been repaired and passed fit again at the Area Passing Station. And when they get it in their clutches for this passing they don't confine themselves to the particular defect: they give it a full and complete inspection of the same severity as the annual one. It has a hard job to be very inefficient after that.

That the average London taxi is not particularly inefficient can be vouched for by two Americans at any rate who, a year or so ago, hailed a cab in the Strand and gave the order "Scotland." When the driver had come to, bought a toothbrush and put

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their luggage on the cab, they set off, and did a two thousand mile sight-seeing tour all over the Highlands. They returned in ten days, which was not so bad for a casual taxi off the rank. The cab had run beautifully, though the meter which was not built for such things, passed out at Leicester with £4 19s. 9d. Over and above the total fare the driver received what is perhaps a record tip—two £10 notes and a diamond scarf-pin.

Again, only as recently as 1929, a taxi was hired in Battersea and successfully undertook a round trip of nearly one thousand four hundred miles, extending as far north as Aberdeen. This particular taxi was *sixteen* years old when it left the rank, so it had something to be proud of. It is still, I believe, boring all the other Battersea taxis by its tales of foreign parts and that strange town up North where strong men pale every time another threepence goes up.

Where the old taxis go to when they are done, it is difficult to discover. A large number are bought by small tradespeople the cab removed and a van-body placed on, the chassis. Some are used on farms. Others are occasionally employed in provincial towns where the conditions of fitness are not so strict. One derelict two-cylinder Renault was only the other day converted by an ingenious

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young man (whose hobby really was repairing antique clocks) into a modernized touring car. In 1929, a hundred were sold to Russia and are no doubt to-day doing good service in Moscow and Petrograd. Few cabs are actually broken up because, once free of Scotland Yard's restrictions as public vehicles, they generally have several years of private life in front of them. In 1928, one very old cab lightheartedly forsook the streets for a theatrical career, and under the stage name of "Gladys" starred in "No. 77 Park Lane."

LONDON, as a matter of fact, now possesses some of the most up-to-date cabs in the world, for the year 1929 was a great year for new taxis. There was more difference between the taxis of that year and those of 1928 than there was between 1928 taxis and those of 1918. The Morris "Commercial" Taxi-cab appeared for the first time in January; and about the same time the London General Cab Company started its fleet of "Luxury" cabs, being specially designed bodies on a Citroën chassis; and the Beardmore "Hyper" model, the first taxi to have four-wheel brakes, was on the streets by April. Towards the end of the year the new model Unic chassis, with a longer wheel-base than any before sanctioned, was passed by Scotland Yard prior to its introduction in August, 1930. Ford and Austin, not to be outdone by Morris, also produced their first taxis, for work in provincial towns, and the Austin was also first seen in London in June, 1930.

All these new models had much in common

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with one another and, from the point of view of the public, marked a very distinct step in taxicab progress, a transition to the luxurious from the purely utilitarian. In the first place, owing to the lower clearance permitted, there was a departure from the familiar box-like design of all previous London taxis, and the new cabs were lower and slimmer and far more like private cars. Apart from chassis improvements, they also possessed, speaking collectively, many entirely fresh or improved fittings, such as spring roller blinds, four-wheel brakes, unsplinterable glass windows, bumpers on front and rear, and door-handle guards. Best of all, they had endless chain window-winders instead of that old-fashioned strap which has probably been responsible for seventy per cent. of the bad language used in taxis; for you could never get a straight pull at it without getting out of your seat, and once out your only support in a swaying vehicle was that very strap you were supposed to be manipulating. Another innovation was the electric-battery dictaphone communicating with the driver. This replaced the old voice-pipe, down which you could never make the driver hear anything unless you shouted with all the strength of your lungs—in which case as often as not you blew his cap off; And anyway it was highly insanitary. Upper

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windcreens for the driver with screen-wipers were also fitted, a concession that was only granted by Scotland Yard after years of agitation; previously the wretched taxi man was expected to brave the elements unprotected in, one supposes, the interests of public safety. By the end of the year there were about 300 Morris cars, 250 "Hyper"-Beardmores, and 80 "Luxury" Citroëns, in all well over 600 new type cabs, plying for hire, out of a total of eight thousand. The year 1929 was indeed a red-figure year in taxi history.

In 1929, too, an entirely new type of taxicab body (fitted on a Morris chassis) was tested and passed by Scotland Yard, but only one has as yet been put on the streets. It is called the "Cape," being invented by a Mr. Gowan of South Africa, and creates a precedent in design in that it possesses a curved sliding door in front of the passenger compartment. This obviates the risk of accident from doors flying open in transit, and the all too common damaging of lamp-posts, pillar boxes and passers-by from the doors being opened before the cab has stopped. The driver can operate it quite simply without leaving his seat. Presumably he also has the additional satisfaction of knowing that his fare, once inside, can't slip out without his knowledge, as has



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sometimes happened. The upholstery and internal fittings of this cab are right up-to-date. Smart-looking oval windows are at sides and rear and give a good all-round view of the traffic blocks. Quite probably this is the standard taxi body of the luxurious future.

One effect of the general introduction of the new style of cabs has been to make the public more inclined to complain of the older ones as obsolete. In such cases the complaint is unreasonable and probably quite unfounded; but unfortunately there are some people who will grumble if the first taxicab they hail is not that very minute's model. The taxi man's retort is "What the hell do they expect for ninepence a mile? Rorls-Royceses?" but the best answer to these people is that there are plenty of the newest taxis on the streets and they are not bound to take any particular cab—not even if it is the first on the rank or has been called for them by a commissionaire. For, by law, all cabs on a rank are equally for hire and by law the man who calls the taxi is responsible till someone else accepts it; the courts have ruled thus on several occasions.

So with the law on their side to protect them from the indignity of a last year's model they should have nothing to grumble about.

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But if they still feel injured, let them not think of their cab as a "taxi" at all. Let them use the official term used in Police records. That is, a "Mechanical Clarence." Somehow I think that if they muse on that for a bit and have any sense of humour at all, everything will seem quite all right.

One should not discuss present-day cabs without discussing present-day taximeters. The present-day meter is already a long way from Herr Bruhn's little clock, and is year by year, if not month by month, being adapted and improved as minor alterations suggest themselves.

As many people are extremely vague as to what the meter will and does do, it may not be uninteresting to give a short description.

There are roughly four main functioning portions in a taximeter. There is the mechanism for charging up the journey on an arranged time scale, the mechanism for charging it up on an arranged distance scale, the speedometer part for measuring and recording both the total mileage gone and the paying mileage (i.e. when the flag is down), and there is the cash register part, which records the money taken, by sixpences and threepences.

In certain cities abroad and in the provinces, where different day and night tariffs are in force or where waiting time has to be charged

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on a separate scale, the meters are so constructed as to be capable of being switched over at a turn of a handle to run at whatever scale is desired. On London cabs, however, the meters are all "horometrical" with a single tariff, which means that they charge at one previously fixed rate by a combination of time and distance. In other words, the meter is so made that when the cab is travelling over five-and-a-third miles an hour the charge is by distance: when it goes under five-and-a-third miles an hour, as in delayed traffic, or when waiting hired, the charge is by time. Meters are usually driven off the front wheel by the usual sort of flexible cable, but latterly it has been found more suitable to drive them from the main shaft just behind the gear box.

Generally speaking, the flag has three positions— FOR HIRE, HIRED, and STOPPED. When unhired and the flag up, the meter is only working if the cab is running, and then only records the miles gone on a mileage indicator situated at some convenient part of the meter. The words "For Hire," besides being on the flag, can also be seen on the face of the meter above the fare-indication slots, which are, of course, covered by a blind.

When he accepts a fare, the driver puts the meter into the HIRED position, pulling the

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flag down. At the same time the word "Hired" takes the place of "For Hire" on the meter face. The initial fee of sixpence appears in the fare-indication slot, and is also at once recorded in the total of sixpences taken, on a totalizer also visible at some convenient part. At the same moment the clock mechanism begins to charge by time, at the rate of seven and a half minutes for your first sixpence. If there is a space for showing extras and if the driver so desires, he can mark them up, but as they belong solely to him it is optional.

As soon as the cab moves off the paying or "engaged" mileage begins to be recorded on another indicator near that for the total mileage, which naturally also recommences to be registered. When the speed reaches the five and a third mile per hour limit a bit of the meter's internals called the "differential" comes into action, cutting out the time scale, and the charge is continued at the rate of two-thirds of a mile for your initial sixpence. This distance gone, up goes the next threepence for the next one-third of a mile (or three and three-quarter minutes) and this sum is at the same time registered in the total of threepences taken in the money totalizer. All taxi fares, the public should note, are thus payable in *advance*, as they go up. So, if

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another threepence appears just as the destination is reached, it is no good asking the driver to back a few yards. The meter will go on registering thus (though for the time registration the clock part must be kept wound up) until its maximum financial capacity, generally £4 19s. 9d., has been shown, when it takes a deep breath and rests on its oars at that figure.

At the end of your journey, the driver puts the meter and flag into the STOPPED position. This makes it cease recording by time, though the total payable by you still remains in the fare-indication slots. If you think at this point that by pretending to have made an error in your destination and getting in again to go on further, you can get the rest of your ride free, you are mistaken. Though the flag is at STOPPED the meter will still record by distance. On the other hand, the driver cannot pretend to make an error by putting the flag rapidly from HIRED to FOR HIRE and then telling you an excessive total. It *must* go on to STOPPED first. Moreover, once it is there it is impossible to return it to HIRED at the approach of another passenger, in an attempt at keeping the first one's fare on the clock for the second to start off at. It can *only* go on from STOPPED to FOR HIRE, which automatically wipes the fare-indication slots clean; and it cannot

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be moved on again till the mechanism has all come to rest at the zeros. Throughout these operations a bell or gong must ring every time the driver pulls the flag. In certain meters, notably in some American and Canadian cities, there is a device for delivering, at the moment of paying, a ticket with the fare printed on it, which doubtless has had the effect of nipping several very promising rows in the bud.

At the end of the day's run the driver or proprietor of the cab will be able to calculate his total mileage from the main mileage indicator, his fare-carrying mileage from the "engaged" mileage indicator, and from his money totalizer the full tally of sixpences and threepences that have been rung up, which will be the money taken, exclusive, of course, of extras and tips.

As you will have realized by now, to perform all these tricks the taximeter must be, like the psalmist, fearfully and wonderfully made. Yet to look at, it is probably one of the most deceptive pieces of mechanism in the world. If the average man were asked to give an idea of its components, he would no doubt say a spring, several pinion-wheels, three or four numbered discs, a spindle or so and a handful of screws. If told scornfully to think again, and pressed to state how many separate

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and distinct parts he really thinks the taximeter contains, he might say fifty or sixty, and at the look on your face correct himself to two hundred. He would still be nowhere near. I was shown in a big taximeter works an authenticated record of a meter that had been taken down piece by piece, and the pieces counted. In one type there were nine hundred parts, while another had well over a thousand. A third type, my informant explained, only possessed a mere eight hundred; his tone gave me the impression that this last was a simple little affair for the kids to put together in their spare time.

Looking into the mechanism of a meter which has been stripped of its outer casing is like looking into a nightmare maze of closely set spindles, wheels, screws, bevels, bars, pawls, springs and struts. I believe that in some factories, before the fitter finally puts the case on, he drops a spider down into the centre of the affair. If the spider can make its way out at any point then he knows some piece has been forgotten.

Many of the component parts are almost unbelievable in their delicacy of workmanship. Side by side with the main clock spring, a beautifully tempered affair three-quarters of an inch wide and some five feet long if stretched out, is a tiny spring which,

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even when coiled quite loosely, is far smaller than a threepenny bit and would not disgrace a ladies' wrist-watch. Then there is that mechanism called the "differential" the function of which is to change over the recording of the meter from the time to the distance scale. To look at, it is like a spindle two inches long with three small wheels set on it. Actually it has no fewer than 56 parts, and to get an idea of the accuracy of workmanship necessary one has but to look at the centre wheel. It is about the size of a florin but possesses 120 exactly cut pinion teeth, whereas there are no more than 144 "teeth" in the milling of an actual florin. Each pinion tooth of the wheel is barely one-fortieth of an inch long, and the work is so fine that the impression given is only that of a coin with extra deep milling. Yet four stop pawls have to be so fitted on the adjacent wheel that at any position one pawl is just engaging at the point of a pinion tooth, one is right down at the base, and the two others are at equal intervals between, which is to say that the adjustment must be so accurate as to subdivide the one-fortieth inch long pinion into three. If this is not just right, I was told, the meter will not work and something terrible happens. What, exactly, I don't know. Probably an alarm bell rings, a packet of



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chewing-gum is delivered at the O.P. side and "No Sale" goes up on the clock.

Every new design for a taximeter, before it can be manufactured, has to be passed by the police and then "approved by National Physical Laboratory officials, who keep a specimen as a pattern. This approval costs £15. Every single meter of an "approved" type subsequently made must also be tested by the Laboratory and officially sealed up to prevent its being tampered with. This, however, only costs 7/6. It can then be fitted to a cab, when it must be brought to the police for a final time and mileage test. The margins of error allowed in each test—in the public's favour, of course—are 3d. under-charge in the hour or 117 yards overweight in the mile. In practice, however, this last is rarely allowed to exceed 50 yards. Police seals are then affixed on all the connections. If at any time any seals are broken the cab must have its meter re-tested; in any case this must be done once a year.

Only firms specially approved by the police are allowed to undertake the manufacture, repair and adjustment of taximeters and the fitting of them to cabs. It is a business which, as can be guessed, requires as much skill and knowledge as that of watchmaking; probably more, for slight errors in watch-

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making do not strike at your pocket. The repair department of a taximeter factory is a sight well worth seeing. Meters in every stage of undress lie around, embedded in some thousands of loose parts and delicate tools, and the sight of this gives the average man of tidy habits a positive fit. Yet the foreman fitter seems to be able to put his hand in three seconds on anything he wants. It is uncanny. The visitor has to console himself with the thought that according to natural law that same fellow probably has the devil of a job every morning finding his collar stud. All around, under the busy hands of the workmen, meter bells are ringing, and half-naked meters ticking and clicking away. No visitor stays long: sooner or later his eye falls on a meter which reads 17/6 and is just snapping up another 3d. and force of habit does the rest.

IN the ranks of the London taxi drivers (and their cousins the London bus drivers) are to be found to-day many of the cleverest and safest drivers in the world. This praise must still sound a little like heresy to some, for universal condemnation of the taxi man has been very much the custom in the past and is only just beginning to go out of fashion. And even to-day there is a tendency, as with the post office and other public services, only to notice mistakes; invariably more fuss is made over the one letter that goes astray than over the ninety and nine that don't. So the taxi driver, judged perhaps by a very small minority in his ranks, has repeatedly been called reckless, selfish, rude, unskilful, ignorant, decrepit—and then the same tune all over again with different words. At intervals his detractors have shaken their heads and said, "Now on the other hand, take the bus driver . . . Wonderful . . ." and then they have taken him, fitted him

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with wings and a halo, and dismissed the poor taxi man with a final contemptuous snort.

Now, to begin with, the bus driver is not all that by any means. He certainly handles his red juggernaut with great skill and so as to inspire his passengers with confidence—I definitely confine my remarks to the London General Omnibus driver—and he is extraordinarily unselfish, considering that he of all people might very well be content to let other vehicles bounce off *him*. But it is when he is ahead of or behind his schedule time that he becomes an infernal nuisance, and doesn't care who knows it. In short he is not half such a good driver as he is made out to be; and equally the taximan is not half such a bad one. He by no means deserves those adjectives that have been applied to him. Of course there are exceptions; there are some reckless, rude, and not very skilful drivers; but they are few, fewer even than they seem; for one such driver in ten always sounds like five. In this kind of book, moreover, one must keep to generalities, try to discover typical characteristics and thus perhaps strike the average.

Now, "George," the typical London taxi driver, is not reckless and unskilful. Neither facts nor reason will admit it. The facts

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are the accident statistics. It is, of course, notorious that statistics will prove anything; like balance sheets, they can be made to sing hymns if you want them to. Still, in this case it is only necessary for the following figures to speak for themselves.

Until 1929 the accidents caused in London streets by taxicabs and those caused by private cars had been lumped all together. This, to begin with, was most unfair. A taxi driver is a trained man who has had to pass severe medical and driving tests before he can touch a steering wheel, while in England, alone of civilized countries,\* any private person who has five shillings to spare can at once and with perfect legality take a fifty horse-power car out into the streets and do his worst with it, be he a learner-driver, a cripple, an epileptic, or even a blind-leaping idiot. He probably won't get far under those circumstances, but still he *can* do it, and his resultant "bag" would, before 1929, have been added in with that of the taxicabs. When, after strong representations to the Home Secretary, the two classes were separated out it was found that the eight thousand or so London cabs, many of them on the most crowded streets nearly the whole clock round were only responsible for roughly one accident

\* Except Belgium—oh, and Bolivia.

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in every nine, though the proportion of private cars, rarely out for more than an average nine hours was certainly far less than eight to one. Further, taking the figures for the last quarter to hand at the moment, one finds that out of 364 fatal street accidents only 51 were caused by *public* vehicles, i.e. taxis, buses, and trams; and that, though there are about as many taxis as buses and trams put together, and that trams operate on special tracks and generally in less congested areas, yet taxis were responsible for only 8 out of this 51. It is difficult to maintain that taxi drivers are reckless after that. Why, in the same period, even the humble, innocent push-cycle caused more deaths and six times as many injuries.\*

These are simple facts, now let reasoning take a hand. It is rather illogical to accuse the average taximan of recklessness, ignorance and lack of skill, if one fully realizes the following two points. First, that conviction on any charge to do with his driving or behaviour, or indeed a justified complaint by any member of the public, may result in a suspension of his licence, which is his livelihood. Secondly, that before obtaining that licence at all, he has

\* Compare the figures for New York State, when taxicabs, representing only 2% of the motor vehicles registered were responsible for nearly a quarter of the motor street accidents.

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had to satisfy the police, during very strict inquiries, examinations and tests, that he has the necessary ability and qualifications. In other words those applicants who are by nature inclined to be ignorant and unskilful and reckless will almost certainly never be able to join the ranks of taxi drivers at all. If they do they have kept it all pretty dark.

In proof of this, it may be of interest to detail here briefly exactly what a man who wishes to take out a licence as a hackney-carriage driver has to do before he gets it and is loosed on the public. The procedure does not err on the casual and lenient side.

The first thing that happens to the applicant is that he gets a paper which tells him no licence will be given if he cannot read and write, is under twenty-one years of age or five feet in height, or cannot produce his birth certificate. It also warns him of the various examinations that will have to be passed, as occasionally men present themselves under the impression that licences can be had for the asking. If he finds that he is sufficiently tall, old, and educated, he must fill in a form giving these particulars and must be photographed in the Public Carriage Office photography room at Lambeth, after which he is given a paper of questions to answer. These must be signed by him in the presence of a

police officer, and require him to state his previous service in Army, Navy, Police, or any public service, and all details of previous licences, refusals of licences, summonses, charges, or convictions. The information given is verified, and there is a five pounds penalty for answering falsely. It is interesting to add that about two convictions per month under this head are secured by the police, the average penalty being forty shillings, or, putting it from the ratepayers' sordid point of view, £48 a year towards the Police Fund.

Next comes the medical test. The applicant can go to any doctor he likes, but must take the prescribed form (with his photo attached) to be filled in and certified. There are seven questions for the doctor to answer covering any possible defect which may interfere with efficiency as a driver, from epilepsy, heart trouble, and defective eyesight, down to excessive addiction to alcohol and temperamental fitness for the work. This also is verified by the police, to ascertain that the doctor who has ostensibly answered the questions really does exist. If the certificate queries the candidate's vision in any way, then he must arm himself with a further form, a Vision Certificate, and must visit a qualified oculist. Or if any other points are raised, he may be required to attend one of



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the half dozen specialists retained by the police at their own expense.

After all the above certificates have been found to be satisfactory the applicant is notified to attend the Public Carriage Office at ten o'clock any morning for a "knowledge of London" test. This examination, conducted day after day by three or four inspectors who probably have the most monotonous and soul-destroying job of anyone in London, is a very stiff one. The candidate may be examined without warning upon any one of twenty-five similar lists of questions. Each list has roughly two parts. One demands a precise knowledge of the position of all railway stations, police stations or county courts, and also of six each of the principal clubs, hospitals, hotels, squares, theatres, or public buildings. The other consists of eighteen pairs of points, the quickest route between each pair, with the names of streets traversed, to be correctly given. Here, for example, are the first three routes of List No. 3.

1. Canonbury Square to Evelina Hospital.
2. Bethnal Green Museum to Lambeth Palace.
3. Norfolk Hotel, W.C., to Peckham Rye Station.

Few born Londoners even could answer these off-hand, and there are fifteen others.

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All questions must be answered, and unsuccessful candidates are put back a week to be re-examined on a different list, and then again for another week and so on. Luckily for candidates there is no limit to the number of attempts that may be made. Some lose heart after a while, give up all idea of driving a taxi, and go in for flower-selling; others go on trying month in, month out. At the present time there is a candidate who has been at it for two and a half years. I am told he is now showing promise. Another who has been trying for two years is no further on than when he started; he just seems to have got into the habit of attending and can't break himself. Of thirteen thousand odd examinations held during 1929, under five hundred men were ultimately successful. The average time taken to pass is three months.

When at last a candidate has reduced the number of his unsuccessful answers to not more than six, he is considered to be "getting warm." This means he need only answer in future a few questions on the districts in which his failures occurred, and while getting these right he is allowed to start the next move in the game. This is the filling in of an "Original Requisition" for a licence (a form aptly coloured a triumphant bright green). This "Original Requisition," when

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completed, embodies a certificate of service signed by the man's last employer and a certificate of character stating that he is sober, honest, clean and civil, which must be signed by two householders who have known him personally for the past three years. Any misrepresentation in all this by anyone concerned carries a penalty of £5, and since the Police Fund gets the money, all the statements are pretty carefully verified. Should any reflection at all on the man's character appear on this form the Commissioner of Police must personally consider the case before authority can be given to issue a licence. If the allegations are serious it goes before the Licensing Committee at Scotland Yard and they thrash it out.

At any time now the candidate (who is probably feeling that if he passes all this he'll be a fool to be a mere taxi driver and ought to get the job of Royal chauffeur at least), can begin to take the driving test. This consists of two parts; in the yard, and on the road. The yard test is merely to make a reverse near-side turn at right-angles into an indicated roadway nine feet wide.\* The

\* A reverse off-side turn, or "long-arm reverse," used also to be asked for, but, after it had been pointed out to Scotland Yard that any man trying such acrobatics in practice in a public street would probably be run in for dangerous driving, it was no longer insisted upon.

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real object of the Yard test, I presume, is simply to ascertain whether the man can drive at all before he is permitted to take a valuable examining inspector out into the traffic in his cab. The road test takes about half an hour, during which the driver must stop and start on a hill, turn in three motions in a 16-foot street, and negotiate heavy traffic with proper giving of hand signals and observance of police regulation. If he fails to satisfy the inspector he is put back for fourteen days to practise, and for the same period if he fails again. A third failure sets him back thirty days; while failure at a fourth test, conducted by a senior inspector, puts him out; and all the sheaf of filled-in forms, certificates, examinations, is down the drain.

If, however, he passes, he is issued with a Motor Cab Driver's Licence for one whole year and a metal badge with the corresponding number. These numbers range between 1 and 12,000 quite indiscriminately; a man may get No. 11,999 or No. 1. If he does not like his number, being perhaps superstitious, or otherwise finicky, he can do nothing about it, unless his badge gets accidentally damaged, in which case, since no duplicates are kept ready for issue in the Public Carriage Office, the licence and badge are called in and a fresh number allocated. It is, of course, difficult

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to prove that an accidentally damaged badge has not been banged with a tactful hammer, particularly if it is, say, No. 1313 or No. 11313. In passing, however, I might point out that No. 13 badge at any rate has been held by the same driver ever since 1922 without ill-effects to the man, his cab, or the badge.

The driver's licence, when issued, bears the man's signature and photograph and is in duplicate, the original being sent to the proprietor of the cab he drives, who has to fill in his own name and the dates of service under him of the licensed man. An owner-driver is, of course, the proprietor too, but an applicant for a first licence, owing to the uncertainty of passing, is rarely intending to start off by driving a cab of his own. More likely he has a promise of employment, if licensed, from some taxi proprietor, who also provides the necessary cab for him to be tested on. This is to say, that nearly every owner-driver in London has begun by driving for someone else, and only purchased his cab after he had got an idea of what the job was like, and worth.

The fee to be paid for the licence at the end of all this is five shillings, and considering what the prospective driver has had to go through to get it, it would appear to be the best five-bobs' worth in London.

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Once a licensed driver, the man is by no means free of police supervision. Apart from the fact that the Public Carriage Inspectors, moving hither and thither on their lawful occasions, may have an eye on him, he must fill up a licence renewal form each year, on which he has to state whether he has been summoned or convicted. Moreover, he must also certify thereon that during the whole of the past year he has gained his livelihood by his cab driving, or if not, why not. The reason for this is that badges and licences which are not being regularly used may come into the possession of unauthorized persons. Should it be thus discovered that illness or injury has been responsible for any man's absence from work, or should the Public Carriage inspectors find at any time cause for suspecting illness, he must, for the protection of the public, be once more medically examined and re-submit the same searching form as he did when originally applying.

Normally, however, he need not again be examined till he reaches the age of fifty, when he has to have a simple examination, and once more at 55 and at 60. At 65 he must start again on the comprehensive seven-question-power forms, also at 70 and at 75. Moreover, during this period he has to be seen annually by an inspector at the Public Carriage Office.

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From 73 onwards he must have the full medical examination every year. Realization of these last facts goes to prove that those who refer to George, the London taxi driver as decrepit, as well as unskilful, have just as few grounds for the accusation. To be old is not to be decrepit. It is hard to see how any man, whatever his age, who has to pass annually the same severe examination as is undergone by the young applicant of 21 can be really decrepit, and anyway, a certain lack of youthful vigour is often more than compensated for by the instinct acquired from experience.

Certainly there is a large number of old taxi drivers in London to-day. A rough estimate at the Public Carriage Office gives about a hundred men over 75. And there are many mere children of 70 or so. Most of these are ex-horse cabbies who took to gears instead of reins in conformity with the laws of progress. The late Mr. John Fisher, of Harlington, who died in 1928, was driving his cab at the age of 80, having held a hackney carriage licence for fifty-six years. Probably the oldest living driver at work at the time of writing is Mr. Byatt, who is over 81.\*

\* New York, however, boasts a horse cab driver eighty-three years old and still at work. He is one of the twenty-four remaining horse cabbies in that city.

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The two other common charges brought against taxi men, those of selfishness and rudeness, have a little more in them. George is perhaps inclined to be a selfish driver, but it is not entirely his fault. It is forced upon him by the conditions of his profession. Unlike the bus driver, who has merely to proceed along a recognized route and whose earnings do not vary with the number of passengers he carries, the taxi man's living depends on his picking up fares, getting them quickly to their destinations and picking up others. When hired, his mind has constantly to be preoccupied with the quickest way to his destination—not always the shortest in these days of hundred-yard traffic blocks. And when unhired and cruising, he is apt to be watching the pavements rather than the traffic, and as a result is bad at giving signals. Often he has no time; if he doesn't stop at once the prospective hirer is snapped up by another cab behind. No wonder the bus driver with fixed routes and stopping places can concentrate solely on his driving and can always give those courteous signals.

Where George's driving is, occasionally, not very good, is when he has been summoned off a rank in the centre of a street to a fare on the kerb. Far too often he forgets either to look and see if anything is coming up



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behind, or to signal his intention, so that they may have time to slow up, but darts out, across, and curves round on his big wheel-lock, leaving other vehicles to avoid him as best they can. This is the private car-owners' greatest grievance against the taxi driver, and it is by no means unfounded. The worst of it is that if an accident does result, very often it involves the vehicles trying to avoid the taxi and not the taxi itself. This is a bad spot in George's otherwise extremely good driving.

Failure to give signals when he has a fare is, however, generally not in the least the taxi man's fault. He is perhaps half-way past a turning when a loud yell in his ear denotes that the fare has changed his mind and wants to go down it—or, more likely, thinks it is quicker to go down it. He has to choose between a bad signal followed by a sudden turn which annoys those behind him but results in nothing worse than outspoken reflections on his parentage, or carrying straight on because there isn't time, which annoys his fare—and it is his fare, not the driver behind, who is ultimately going to tip him. And unfortunately for taxi men, fares are easily annoyed. Single passengers, and particularly single female passengers, are worse than any because they seem to have nothing

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else to do but watch the road and correct the taxi man. There is a type of woman passenger who is invariably certain she knows her way about London better than any driver, and it takes a tactful angel to avoid trouble. For if he argues back, he is "insolent"; if he carries serenely on his way, he is taking her "the long way round"; if he goes just as she tells him she is furious at what "he has run up on the clock." The following story I take from the newspaper report of a court case which occurred only the other day. It shows how a drive alone in a taxi apparently brings out the worst side of some people's nature. A lady having hired a taxi at Victoria, proceeded, before getting in, to say goodbye at inordinate length and with much conversation to three other ladies. She was then driven to Liverpool Street, with five shillings on the clock, which she argued was more than it ought to be for that journey. "I have never paid more than four shillings and sixpence before," she averred. And, accusing the driver covertly of cheating, of having a false meter, and of having gone a long way round, four and sixpence was all she would give him, and she had to be summoned for the extra six coppers. A talk with the drivers on any rank will show that this sort of thing is far more common than you would suppose.

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They will probably add that the taxi man was lucky not to have been summoned himself for insolence.

The member of the public who complains of rudeness on the part of the London taxi drivers nowadays (let the average war-time driver be forgotten and, if possible, forgiven) has often only himself to thank. Even a taxi driver is human, and if you are rude to him he will be rude to you. Since by training George is probably far better at it, you are naturally more sore than you would have been had you crushed him with that fine retort which unfortunately you never think of till you are in your bath a couple of hours later. But the occasions when the taxi man is rude without provocation are very few. It must be remembered that you have only to take his number and complain to the police of incivility, whereupon he will be interrogated and, if the complaint is considered justified, will receive a caution. In serious cases, or if he denies any incivility, he is hauled before the Licensing Committee at Scotland Yard, where you may attend to substantiate your charges. If proven, his licence may either be suspended or taken away altogether. In any back-chat exchange, therefore, you risk nothing except a wasted morning, while George risks his livelihood. So, whatever he might like to say,

it is unlikely that he will say it unless under great provocation.

Some retorts, of course, just have to come out, they are too good to keep in. There was an acid lady once who hailed a cab, refused to let the man put up the flag till she was safely inside and started, told him the exact route to go and that it should not cost more than  $1/3$ , stopped him a little before her destination—and just as the  $1/3$  was due to go up—and paid him a shilling exactly. The driver remonstrated, whereupon this modern Ma Prodgers snapped, "Don't you try and tell me anything, my man. I haven't been riding in taxicabs for five years for nothing." The driver sighed, put in his gears, said, "Well, I bet you've been 'aving a damn good try," and was off.

The fear of legal action being removed, there is of course more conversational freedom between drivers themselves, and particularly between taxi men and private "learner-drivers." The former nearly always scores, of course, though once the gentle reproof "Coward!" from the Baby Austin owner who was inadvertently bumped by a big new "Hyper" Beardmore cab so surprised the latter's driver that he gulped and said "Pardon, chum!" In general, however, retorts vary in crudeness, from comparison of

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your adversary's car to (a) a milk wagon, (b) a tin can, (c) an ark, up to the following classic answer. It has been told at various times, but is worth repeating. During the Christmas season a lorry was taking a stack of holly from Covent Garden to a big florist's and the driver, feeling in the spirit, had decorated the bonnet with various sprigs from his load. At a corner he was nearly ran into by an elderly taxi driver, and so, leaning out, proceeded to tell him what he thought of him in blistering terms. The old driver listened till it was over, then shook his head reproachfully and said, "What's the use of 'aving 'olly in yer bonnet, if you ain't got 'olly in yer 'eart!"

What a line for the chorus of a music-hall song!

THE previous chapter seems to have been principally devoted to an attempt at clearing the taxi man's name from some of the opprobrium which has been slung at him. Though the charges may have been originally founded on fact, they are certainly not true of the great majority to-day, and for that reason should be killed and buried. We might now have a look at the London Taxi driver—in so far as there *is* a typical taxi driver—from a closer and slightly more critical point of view.

Comparing George with drivers of other big capitals, one must admit that he comes out of it very well. Certainly he is the safest of the lot. His driving is more sedate, not so inspired as that of the Paris taxi man, but he does not give his fare so many grey hairs. It is not so suicidal as that of the Italian, not so conventionally unimaginative as that of the German. He probably has the greatest knowledge of his city of any, except possibly the Berlin driver. He is no more

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or less selfish than any driver of a hackney carriage whose living depends on mobility and ubiquity, but he does not, in the manner of most New York drivers, play merry hell with the traffic regulations if a policeman is not in sight. While, of course, holding his own views on police restrictions—and pretty pungent ones, too, sometimes—he nevertheless obeys them, because he appreciates the necessity for conforming to traffic regulations in his own and everyone's else's interest. The Berlin driver, of course, meticulously obeys all regulations, but then he is built that way. The Roman driver doesn't appear to realize that there are any regulations at all. And the Parisian seems to go out of his way to disobey them—also because he is built that way. Only the other day in Paris a gendarme told off a taxi man for not pulling up quickly at his signal, and the driver, a proud and fiery Gascon, at once let in his clutch again and chased the wretched zig-zagging policeman, down the street and even on to the pavement.

George is not so friendly as the average New York driver, and though he is keener about the size of his tip, he is infinitely more honest. It is very, very rare indeed to find George taking advantage of your not having looked at the clock before paying, to tell you

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a higher figure than is really on it. His honesty on the whole is amazing; there are many instances where taxi drivers have gone a long way out of their way to refund over-payments made in error. One well-known City man once received a letter from a taxi man saying that the previous night, after being driven home from his office, he had given him a pound note in mistake for a ten shilling one, and that the writer would call at his office at the same time that night and either refund the money or carry him free each night till it was wiped off.

The lack of convictions for theft by finding and the incredible number of valuable articles brought in to the Lost Property Office every week—among them many such untraceable items as ten shilling and pound notes—also testify to George's ability to resist temptation. Quite possibly his honesty is greater than that of most of his clients. In Paris once, a taxi man tested the integrity of all his passengers during one week by leaving a parcel in his cab and keeping a record of what happened. The results were astonishing. Over fifty per cent. deliberately tried to walk off with it, of whom a not inconsiderable number brazenly swore, when their error was pointed out, that the parcel was theirs. Only about thirty per cent. told the driver a parcel had



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been left; and a small minority apparently never noticed it at all. It would be fun to try this in London.

Sometimes George's honesty is a trifle more sincere in intention than in actual effect, as is shown by the following tale, told me on the rank. An American in London used a taxi, and on being told there was 3/- on the clock, paid out three shillings and added the courtly tip of two more. Unfortunately, only being just over, he hadn't yet got the low-down on the British coinage, and all his shillings were half-crowns. The driver to whom this had happened, naïvely concluded the story by saying, "And before I could recover from my surprise, sir, to call out and tell him, he was gone in the crowd." Wonderfully absorbent these London crowds!

In case the reader is beginning to think from these eulogies that the London taxi man is more than human, one ought now in fairness to mention a few of George's faults. The first of them is the regrettable display of a certain avidity over the size of the tip, and in this he is sadly inferior to his cousins of New York and Paris. The American driver (contrary to the popular impressions) often accepts the absence of a tip with a shrug of the shoulders; while the Frenchman will be content with a small one, and if there is an

argument affecting his dignity, will almost, but not quite, refuse to take it. Not so, I fear, the English driver; again, of course, I generalise; too often the impression given is that you are defrauding him out of a legal right.

This is not good. The whole tipping system is not a pleasant one, either for the giver or the recipient, and therefore it should not be made any more unpleasant than it is. The tip is not a right, and it should not be treated as such. Theoretically, tipping is a recognition of the fact that the tippee has done the tipper some extra service over and above what he has contracted to do, such as helping with the luggage or speeding up to catch a train. Actually it has grown to be part of the recognized remuneration, and a driver who has done nothing beyond what he is paid for, and that perhaps in not any too willing spirit, will expect a tip with an almost degrading eagerness, and will often be rude if he does not receive it. Worse still, he is sometimes offensive if he only gets a small one. His argument, often forcibly expressed, is that if you can't afford to tip you oughtn't to take taxis; in other words, for the sake of an extra sixpence he is prepared to lose a rider to the trade altogether—which is extremely poor logic and worse business.

Side by side with this attitude of tip

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expectancy, George may be found complaining in his trade publications of the indignity of tips, which he says he is forced to accept in order to make a living at the present low scale of fares. At the same time I have never yet remarked a driver who displayed any signs of loss of dignity or even embarrassment over taking one, nor can I recollect any driver sacrificing one in the days just before the tariff was lowered, when presumably he didn't need it. Neither can I believe that if the fares were raised again it would lead to a refusal of tips; it certainly has not done so in Paris. No, there is something wrong in that whole attitude towards the tip, though perhaps it is not such an important point after all.

Perhaps George's greatest fault is that he is inclined to be surly. Or if he is not so really, he gives a very good impression of it. He displays little interest, sometimes apparently disgust, at being hailed, and often makes you feel vaguely ashamed of wanting to go where you do. He frequently does not respond to the casual cheery word—and often fails to return your good night. I am speaking, of course, of the average driver's attitude to the average casual fare. And he is too apt, if ever you have to point out that he has made a mistake, to open an aggrieved argument on the hypothesis that he at any rate is infallible.

No, I fear on the whole he is not nearly as friendly or cheerful as other of London's workers, say bus conductors, postmen, or porters, or his cousins in other countries.

Probably it is the worrying nature of his calling, which, depending as it does so much upon chance, is enough to make anyone surly. After all, the taxi driver can never calculate from week to week what his profits will be, and a run of bad luck may remove them altogether. If he has not been in any other trade before, he is more or less inured to his permanent casual labour; but I have talked to many ex-private chauffeurs, lorry drivers and other men who, before taking to taxi work, had had a job with regular money, and their first and chief complaint has always been the utter dependence on chance for a living. Or it may be that George is not so much surly as suspicious; which may not be all his fault. I cannot say how the normal run of fares behave, but it is quite possible that if friendliness on the part of his temporary client-employer is marked he is apt to view it with alarm. There are many people who believe that a few kind words will do for an extra threepence. It is, moreover, the British nature to be suspicious of strangers—ones whose aims of compare the average British order in all pro-

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with its American or French counterpart—but, in a taxi driver, this lack of friendliness is invariably construed as surliness, which is a fault. At best it is far from being an asset to a man whose livelihood depends upon an increase in the taxi-using public.

I would like again to point out that the above criticisms are mere generalisations about the average taxi man, and are intended in a spirit of fairness. Probably more harm is done to the taxi driver's case in the eyes of the general public (on whom, remember, his livelihood depends), by the narrow-mindedness of some of his partisans who ungraciously accept all praise as a prescriptive right, but raise protesting howls of "Another libel on the poor taxi man!" at the faintest breath of animadversion, however well-intentioned or justified. This seems to me highly unintelligent, for the logical inference from these indignant denials of every single criticism is that, in this imperfect world, the taxi-driver alone is perfect. Perhaps they really think he is! Or perhaps it is just an inadaptable habit of mine—an intolerant defensiveness originally engendered by the one-time hostility of the press.

Quite possibly the real root of George's surliness—or un-friendliness—lies in his quality of fanatical independence. Independence,

indeed, is his outstanding characteristic, a very natural one considering the conditions under which he works. In no other trade is the lack of mutual interdependence so marked. For, to begin with, thirty per cent. of the London taxi men are owner-drivers, responsible to no one but the police, owning their own cabs, free to work or laze when and how they like, their hand against all men, compelled only by the necessity of keeping themselves and their families. And it is much the same for the drivers who work for a cab company. In any other trade, two men working side by side in the same firm would, though in competition with other firms, not be in competition with each other. Yet two taxi men paid by the same firm drive out of the same yard and proceed to cut each other's throats for business. No wonder they are an independent race.

This independence of taxi drivers as a body is reflected in the variety and number of unions, societies and associations which the trade supports. There are only some forty thousand drivers in England, ten thousand of whom are in London—and a large number of them are proprietors as well as drivers, which is to say in many cases there is no clear-cut demarcation between the aims of employers and employed. Yet in all pro-

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vincial towns there are local associations of owners and drivers, often with varying policies and aims, and in addition, the whole of England, including London, is embraced by the big union for all drivers, whether owner-drivers or not, the Cab Section of the Transport and General Workers' Union. In opposition to the "Cab Section" is the Motor Cab Trade Protection Society, formed some twenty years or so ago and known as the "Green Badge," which holds that taxi men should join a union which is for taxi men alone and should not be lumped in with a union, half a million strong, and comprising all sorts of general workers with whom they can have absolutely nothing in common and are often at variance. This society, though its chief work and largest membership is in London, also tries to cover the whole of England; and it, too, is for all taxi drivers. But since conditions are a bit different for the owner-driver, who is both driver and proprietor, there is another society, the Motor Cab Owner-Drivers' Association, known as the O.D.A., which is for owner-drivers or very small cab owners only. In addition there is yet another society, quite a little one, for owner-drivers, called the Owner-Drivers' Branch of the Motor Cab Trade or the O.D.B.

The cab proprietors in London, as opposed

to drivers, have a choice of two societies. There is the London Motor Cab Proprietors' Association, which is also a trading concern supplying oil, tyres, accessories, and so on at cheap rates. This is the more important of the two, though its members are principally the smaller employers, from proprietors of about fifty cabs downwards; indeed, several owner-drivers, who consider themselves more owners than drivers, belong to it. There is also the Federation of London Taxicab Proprietors to which, broadly speaking, the bigger proprietors, say of sixty cabs and upwards, belong. It was formed some five years ago, because it was found that many of the really big owners, whose aims were often different from those of the smaller ones, did not belong to the Motor Cab Proprietors' Association. From this federation sprang the only real attempt at one representative organization for the whole taxi trade. It was called the Joint Conference of the London Cab Trade, and was inaugurated largely by the energies of Mr. H. Ross, then secretary of the Federation, who became secretary to the new organization. It represented all proprietors of whatever sized companies, all owner-drivers and all men driving for companies, in fact the whole trade, and dealt with everything affecting London taxis from 1925 until 1928, when the interests



of those drivers employed by firms were found to be unreconcilable with the other members' interests and it died. It left, however, its core in the shape of the Cab Proprietors' Council, which affiliates the two proprietors' organizations mentioned above and the Owner-Drivers' Association—in short, the proprietary interests alone—though, in seeking to popularize taxis, abolish anomalies, and obtain unification of policy, its aims are still those of the cab trade at large.

Another cab men's society which should have a mention here, though it is now in no way connected with politics, working conditions, disputes or anything else except charity, is the Cab Drivers' Benevolent Association. This was founded in 1870 to establish a fund for protecting individual cab drivers' interests, to adjust their grievances, give temporary assistance to drivers in distress, and grant small pensions to their widows or to aged drivers when past work, which last office it has faithfully fulfilled to this day. At the moment of writing it has among its members an old fellow of 91 who first drove a cab in 1863 and claims to have had as a fare the late King Edward when he was Prince of Wales. The Cab Drivers' Benevolent Fund holds a ballot for these pensions every year, and its annual treats

and dinners are generously supported by many sympathizers with the fate of the old horse cab. In this connection, it might be mentioned that the very first reunion dinner of early motor (as opposed to horse) cab drivers was held only quite recently at a Strand hotel. It was organized through the initiative of a gentleman once connected with the firm that nearly twenty-five years ago placed the old Argyll cabs on the streets.

Besides all the above societies there are to-day in existence no fewer than three trade papers: *The Taxi World* (monthly) and *The Steering Wheel* (fortnightly)—both of which are independent papers publishing the views of all sections of the trade and putting space at the disposal of both the Cab Proprietors' Council and the Cab Section: and *The Green Badge Journal*, which is the monthly organ of the "breakaway union," The Motor Cab Trade Protection Society.

There is therefore no chance for any driver or proprietor to say he has no means of representing or airing his views, yet such is the independence of the trade that at least half-a-dozen cab proprietors and some hundreds of the ten thousand drivers in London will have nothing whatever to do with any union or society at all.

Perhaps another reason for the independent

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spirit of taxi drivers is that their ranks embrace such an extraordinary variety of types. Men who are trained for no particular trade invariably seem to turn to cab driving as being something far better than any form of "general" labour.

Certainly there are all sorts and conditions of men driving taxis in the streets of London to-day. There is a lieutenant-colonel and a V.C. captain and a couple of ex-naval officers. There is (or was a year or so ago) a driver who in his spare time painted good pictures, and a driver who can speak nine languages and quote Homer by the yard, this last probably far more effective in argument than any plebeian repartee. There is a man who was a doctor in a south coast town, and a man who was a clergyman, a man who was assistant to a well-known music-hall comedian, and an ex-cornerman from a well-known minstrel troupe who has also worked in the chorus of a famous London musical comedy theatre. And there is a taxi man in Scotland who on one occasion, having driven the conductor of an orchestra (who knew his capabilities) to a concert at a big hall, was persuaded to take the place of a missing artiste, and leaving his taxi outside, went on the stage and sang perfectly an air from *La Bohème* in a beautiful operatic voice, which, if only it

could have been trained, might well have provided him with a better living than he could ever get from a cab.

There is also a driver who was Parliamentary candidate for a West London constituency in both of the 1929 General Elections, working his cab by day and holding meetings by night. He only missed being elected the first time by two thousand votes; otherwise he might have followed in the famous footsteps of Mr. Ben Smith who, after many years as a taxi driver, ultimately became Treasurer of His Majesty's Household in the second Labour Government. There are, too, two or three borough councillors from outer London. There is also, according to the tales told on the rank, a driver who is an ex-university man, whose parents possess a title, two large houses and many servants, but who is too proud to take money from them and prefers to earn his own living; but this story may only spring from an excess of cheap fiction. It is, however, a fact that a year ago there was a man driving a taxi in a big provincial town who in 1925, before ill-luck came upon him, had actually been a millionaire.

Then there is another driver who was at one time a chiropractor. He did not do well, and so took to driving a taxi. He did not, however, give up the chiro-pody, and still

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carries it on in his spare time. Another, well-known in the trade, is a champion dirt-track racer and rider for a South London team. Another man, usually to be found at one of the big termini, is an ex-professional pugilist, but luckily does not now combine the two trades. In contrast to him there was recently an elderly driver, also at a big terminus, who for thirty years was a sidesman and Sunday school teacher in a Walworth parish church, never missing an attendance in spite of the late hours his calling imposed. This man, known aptly as "George," was (and still is) the only taxi driver to have a memorial erected to him. It is in the form of an altar reredos with a figure of St. Christopher, the patron saint of taxi men, and may be found in St. Peter's Church, Walworth.

Quite a fair sprinkling of taxi drivers are "pin-money" men, that is to say, they are supplementing, rather than earning, their living by driving a taxi. These include several retired policemen, ex-army N.C.O.'s and the like, who all, of course, possess pensions. "Pin-money" drivers are naturally not very popular with the others.

There are many men who spend their spare time in study and self-education. Mr. Bernard Shaw himself tells of one driver who refused point blank to accept any money for

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driving him because he admired his plays so much, and had in fact recently been to the five successive nights' performance of "*Back to Methuselah*," which is more than many leisured people have found time to do.\* This recalls the story of the taxi driver who for every performance of a certain London play regularly fetched a well-known actress from her house to the theatre and back afterwards; and in spite of all she could say, steadfastly refused to be paid. He gave no reason, hardly spoke, but was always outside waiting for her at the exact times she was due to go to the theatre or leave it. This continued for the whole five months' run of the play and then the actress, still in a state of mingled gratitude and embarrassment, had to go abroad.

Not so long ago there was a London taxi driver who had written a book, in contrast to the many who threaten to do so. An American taxi-man, too, published one only last year, and another one has done so this year. but none had such a good business head as a certain French taxi driver poet who, having published a "slim volume," used to bend his mind during the drive to deciding whether his passenger looked like a reader of verse

\* I am told that this particular driver was, as a matter of fact, acting as dramatic critic for an East London paper.

and, if the conclusion was favourable, tactfully offered a copy for sale at the end. He claimed that in nine cases out of ten he was able to pick out a prospective purchaser. Why don't some of our younger and more modern poets take up taxi driving to increase their sales? I offer the idea for what it is worth. I can imagine a business man in a hurry about to pay off his cab at Charing Cross and being greeted by the sudden production of something in limp rose vellum, and a high tenor voice saying, "Can I interest you in a little thing of my own, entitled *Intraversions*?"

Paris, by the way, has some very queer drivers, but there the percentage of foreigners of all kinds is extremely high, being well over fifty per cent., whereas in London only one taxi man in every two hundred is a foreigner. Quite a large proportion of the Parisian drivers are Russian refugees, among them a prince (who speaks four languages and gives you an engraved card to tell you so), several ex-colonels from the Imperial General Staff, and many other ex-officers. In contrast to these, the Fratellini brothers, the famous clowns of the *Vil' d' His'* Circus, are also licensed taxi drivers, though not practising ones. They passed all their tests and drove round Paris for one glorious day a few years ago. Cynics say it was for advertisement,

but it must have been worth seeing. Another well-known Parisian taxi driver was "Miss Senegal" with her coal-black countenance, cheery grin and broken French. She was the only sister of a Senegalese soldier killed in the war. There is also in the French Capital a Scotch girl who not only drives a taxi but owns a small fleet. As a matter of fact there are quite a number of female drivers in Paris—as many as forty in 1925, but London has not a single one. Even Constantinople has her Mlle. Muammer Hamum, licensed last year, who intends to reform the Turkish taxi service by never swearing at other drivers.

Contrary to the prevalent impression, there is now nothing in the Scotland Yard regulations against a woman being a taxi driver in London. Indeed, a large number applied for licences during the war, but most of them found the examination too stiff. No more than four were passed and these only held licences for short periods. Perhaps the long hours in all weathers which were necessary to earn a living proved too much for feminine physique. Outside London, however, Canvey Island, Essex, and Worthing, Sussex, each boasted a woman taxi driver in 1929; and Woking possesses a very famous one indeed who is also an air-pilot, flew in the 1929 King's Cup Race, and has been associated with



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National Flying Services (Sir Alan Cobham) in pioneering for an African Air Taxi Service.

The first record, by the way, of a woman driving a taxi on the London streets is far earlier than most people would suppose, being as long ago as 1908. The lady in question was a Miss Sheila O'Neill and was employed semi-privately by a business gentleman, Mr. Mill, and many of his friends, because Scotland Yard, very ungallantly, had at that time refused to grant her a licence to ply for public hire. Miss O'Neill retaliated by fixing on the front of her vehicle a little metal figure of a policeman with upraised hand perpetually ordering her cab to stop, behind which disregarded warning she drove quite happily and no doubt with a lively sense of having got the better of the police. Which, after all, is the dream of every London taxi driver male or female, ancient or modern.

Now that the London taxi man has been discussed fairly fully, it might be as well to explain in more detail the conditions under which he works once he is a properly licensed driver.

At the present day every London taxi man is earning his living under one of three systems. That is to say he may be either an owner-driver, a journeyman-driver or a flat-rate man. The owner-driver, who is known in the trade as a "musher,"\* is, as the name implies, a man who has bought (or more likely is buying by instalments) his own cab and drives it himself, paying all expenses and taking all profits. In some cases two men may share one cab so as to keep it on the streets night and day. As long as the owner-driver complies with the police regulations he is a law unto himself. He can go out when he likes, come in when he likes, and his hand is against every man. There are scores of garages in any part of London which will undertake the housing, washing,

\* Or "mush." Originally "mushroom-driver."

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greasing, cleaning, polishing and general care of his cab for about a pound a week, and so he can live where he likes. He is independent of everything except luck and sits squarely on his own bottom, his receipts and expenditures all his own.

I give a rough estimate of the average weekly expenses of a "mush." They will of course be criticised, but I think that the greater number of experienced men will agree with them in substance. They are:

	£	s.	d.
Garage and Service . . . . .	1	5	0*
Road Licence . . . . .		4	0
Meter Rent . . . . .		3	0
Insurance . . . . .		7	6
Overhaul and Repairs . . . . .		10	0
Tyre Bill . . . . .		8	0
Average cost of Petrol . . . . .	1	1	0
Weekly Instalment on Hire			
Purchase of Cab . . . . .	2	10	0
		<hr style="width: 100%;"/>	
	£6	8	6
		<hr style="width: 100%;"/>	

He has therefore to take certainly £6 10s. 2 week before he can begin to earn. But if he

\* This figure is for a garage in a good locality and includes free oil and oiling, free grease and greasing, washing of body, cleaning of machinery, and tyre service for one cab, however long it is on the streets.

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is a good driver and knows his London, by which I mean he knows the times and places to catch the taxi-riding public, there is no reason why he should not take, with tips, at least £11 or £12, which gives him a living wage of about £5, though this probably means a twelve-hour day. A poor driver who always goes on the nearest rank no matter how many are there already, and rarely bothers to look out for trade, will probably not take more than £10. An exceptionally clever driver who uses his brains and does not mind long spells at the wheel, say from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. or later, may make a good thing out of it, with as much as £13 in the week, a clear profit of £6.

It is, of course, very difficult to extract reliable figures from owner-drivers themselves. Many don't seem to worry overmuch about it, and, anyway, their answers depend on circumstances. Either you haven't yet given your tip, and so your informant, being but human, will tell you that taxi driving is hardly enough to keep body and soul together, "take my word for it, sir." Or else he has just had a stroke of luck—say a pound job—and he proudly multiplies that day's earnings out to a weekly basis. Or else, conversely, he has a few days ago paid for his yearly overhaul, and displays an

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inability to comprehend annual expenses distributed as weekly ones. And at other and very frequent times he is quite frankly "leading you up the garden" for some reason of his own, perhaps only in the hope that it may get "a piece in the paper." It is also amusing, though not helpful, to note how the taxi man's earnings, as stated to a magistrate, vary according as to whether he is in danger of being penalized himself or is claiming costs from a defendant for loss of a day's work. He is either scraping such a wretched livelihood that a five shilling fine would sell him up, or he is losing a pound for every three hours in court. There is, I have noticed, nothing between.

In London to-day there are well over three thousand drivers with only one cab; that is, about a third of the total number of licensed drivers are "mushers." Legally each of these "mushers" is also a cab proprietor; and in some cases he becomes one in reality, for besides driving his own cab he may find he is making enough to begin to buy other cabs on hire-purchase and to employ drivers for them. From the status of "owner-driver" he has arrived at that of "driving-owner," which is the embryo stage of the small cab proprietor, who in his turn is the tadpole of a possible cab company frog, with its

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drivers all over London and a monogram on every cab door. The ambitious driver has a hard life, but a life full of possibilities ; indeed most of the cab proprietors, small and big, have worked up from driving their own vehicle. There are about two hundred and fifty men in London who possess just two cabs each ; while another couple of hundred are proprietors of anything from three to ten cabs. That is to say that only about forty per cent. of London's taxis belong to cab companies of more than ten-cab power—a great contract to Paris or New York.

On the whole “mushing” attracts the ambitious man who does not mind risking his money and working hard if he can get all the profit accruing. Recognition that success is dependent entirely on individual effort has always been a great driving force, and will, I suppose, continue to be so till it is at last smothered under dole policies and falsely socialist restrictions on output. There will be no owner-drivers in Maxton's Millennium when all men have been saved from the ignominy of obedience to the human instinct to work for a living. There probably won't be any taxi men at all—too independent a life altogether.

The second, and largest, class of taxi men are the journeymen drivers, men working

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for a proprietor on a commission basis. That is to say, the employer owns the cab, pays all maintenance, repair, garage, and other charges, including of course petrol, while the driver has only to take it out on the street for him. Of the money shown on the meter (excluding extras) the driver is given a commission of 30% (increased from the original 25% in 1920 by negotiation with the Trade Union). This is also called "driving on the meter, or clock." The extras for luggage, passengers above two, and so on, belong to the driver. And, of course, all tips. With a few firms the commission is as high as 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ % and occasionally bonuses are added for high takings.

The employer may be the owner of a mere dozen cabs, if that, or he may be a firm possessing anything up to three hundred. Two hundred and eighty is the biggest fleet owned by any one London cab company; the next biggest possesses one hundred and eighty, and the next one hundred and sixty. On the whole, London does not go in for such big or highly organized concerns as New York—or even Paris.

At Acton, Brixton, King's Cross, Mount Pleasant and elsewhere you will find some of the biggest companies' garages: the smaller ones are dotted all over the place,

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down mews, in side streets, and particularly behind public-houses, a good strategic position for men who know it is unwise to drink much during their job. All the maintenance and upkeep is looked after by the cab company's own fitters, washers and so on; even in a small business of but half a dozen cabs this will be done by the garage hands where the cabs are kept. The only thing the journeyman driver has to do is to walk into the garage at the appointed time (more or less) and get into the driving seat. The public who tips the taxi man may be interested to know that in most garages it is the custom that he himself gives tips to perhaps the petrol pump man, the cab washer, a lamp man, or a greaser. I wonder if one of these ever gazes disgustedly into his palm and growls out, "What's this here?"

Since all cab companies aim at keeping cabs on the streets as much as possible, cabs are generally "doubled," that is each vehicle is provided with a night man and day man. The day or "early" man comes on usually between seven and eight. Some are as early as five a.m., others do not start till nine. The garage is not run like a factory, and its drivers are to an extent their own masters, in that they can fix their times by mutual arrangement with the "boss," but once



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arranged they are expected to keep to them. The driver who arrives eager and panting at crack of dawn one day and rolls up at eleven the next, explaining that he feels a little off colour, will not last long with any good company. The "early" man will be out from eight to ten hours, depending on the business he does, and on the man. One man will always knock off at a certain hour, another at a certain sum on the clock. When he returns in the latter part of the afternoon, he refills with petrol at the company filling-station, reports any faults, and then goes to the paying department where, his meter having been previously read, he hands over 70% of the day's total and goes home. Meanwhile the cab is cleaned, washed and generally checked over for the night or "late" man, who will be along between six and seven to catch the dinner and theatre crowds and will probably stay out till four or five a.m. It is queer to think that two men earning their living day by day in the same seat of the same cab may never see one another for years.

Night work is not so popular as day work. This is due to the inconvenient hours and the fact that, once the theatre hours are over, riders are fewer. Moreover, they have to be "cruised" for, because many of the

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ranks are so often empty at night that people do not bother to phone, but go out on the chance of picking a cab up. Night fares, however, are on the whole more generous and there is always the chance of a scooping a cheery party too full of fun to worry about what's on the clock, or even where they want to go.

Drivers for night work are naturally harder to obtain, and in the majority of garages you will find that there are more "early" than "late" men on the books. This brings the "long day" man into being, who, for the sake of the extra earnings will arrange with the company to take on a fourteen or fifteen hour stretch, returning at nine p.m., or even later. But the cab companies do not favour this particularly, for it completely cuts out any chances of night work with that cab: no night driver will miss his chance of the restaurants and theatres.

The control of the employer over his drivers is very elastic. He picks good men and does a lot to keep them, and generally they stay. He can check their capacity very well by a comparison of the petrol used, mileage gone and money turned in. Continuous cruising is too expensive for the extra jobs it gets; continuous sitting on ranks is not profitable enough for the petrol it saves; the good driver knows when to

rank and when to cruise, and his employer can judge him from the "statistical department. Most big concerns would rather have a cab off the road a bit than have a poor driver on it. On the contrary, should a driver's usual cab be temporarily out of action, the employer will often make an arrangement with some owner-driver whom he knows to hire the latter's cab for night work; or he will even pay his driver a small retaining wage. But actually the driver has no claim on the employer, though with a firm which owns many cabs there is, of course, far less chance that he will be out of the driving seat than if he were a "musher."

Driving on the clock, as a journeyman, attracts the cautious man rather than the ambitious. He has nothing to pay out; he is 2d. in pocket the moment his flag clicks down for the first time. Should his cab break down or be "stopped" not only is he not responsible for the expense of repair, but, as stated above, the company can usually provide him with another. Moreover, he is looked after by his employers, who, if they are a big firm, provide free legal advice, often pay fines, run a sick club, prizes for regular attendance, and in general adopt the main principle of business philanthropy that it pays to have contented workers. On the

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other hand, in return for these advantages the journeyman only keeps about half of the *total* money he handles. A good man will make nearly £6 without any out-goings; a poor one not much more than £4.

Of the ten thousand odd taxi men in London about two-thirds are driving on the clock. The ranks of the journeymen are perpetually being fed by newly licensed drivers, and in turn are perpetually supplying new "mushers" to the army of single-cab-owners. No doubt, having to pay in that 70% rankles in the young and ambitious drivers' minds; but often the unexpected expenses of keeping up a cab of their own, if they make the mistake of buying one cheap, sends many of them back after a while to the comparative safety of driving on the meter.

The third system under which men are driving in London to-day is that of the flat-rate, which is a combination of the other two. The flat-rate driver is on the books of a firm and drives for them in much the same way as a journeyman, except that instead of handing over the 70% of the meter total he pays the proprietor in advance for the use of the cab, at the flat-rate of ten shillings for a ten hour shift of sixty miles, with one shilling an hour or two pence per mile beyond that. He has also to buy his own petrol.

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Set against these outgoings he can keep everything he subsequently takes. This system combines, for the taxi man, the solid advantages of working for a firm with the owner-driver's chance of getting full profit from increased individual effort. At the same time it does away with part of the gamble of "mushing," for he knows his expenses are only a fixed £3 a working week, plus the cost of his petrol, instead of a variable £6. Under the name of "yard money" the flat-rate used to be in operation at the time of the old horse cabs, till it was forced out of existence by the unions, except in a few small companies; early in 1929, however, it was again introduced on a large scale by a big company in South London, as an alternative, at their drivers' option, to working on a commission basis. Only about 60% chose the former; there are, of course, always men who dislike having to pay out money in advance and prefer the more comforting sensation of being at any rate something in pocket the moment they have taken their first fare.

The flat-rate, giving a driver, so to speak, the chance of having his cake and eating it, is not unnaturally popular with those who work under it. They find they can earn the same money in far less time. But

the whole question is a very vexed one and has caused gallons of ink to be spilt in anger. For at its introduction the Cab Section of the Transport Workers' Union vigorously opposed it, and as a result of this opposition an agreement was signed between their officials and the representatives of the cab proprietors, in which the latter undertook not to operate the flat-rate system. The South London company who reintroduced it (together with its two associated firms) of course stood out against this, and a subsequent ballot of their employés showed that 99<sup>0</sup>% of those voting approved their action. These companies, therefore, with a few quite small proprietors who have discovered that unless they offer a flat-rate agreement they have difficulty in getting drivers, are the only ones who work the flat-rate system to-day; with the result that the number of flat-raters in London is small and not likely to increase to any great extent.

The opposition to the flat-rater is not confined to the trade union; it comes just as much from other drivers and proprietors and springs from various sources. By some he is looked on as the lowest form of blackleg; because he drives for a company and yet pays for his own petrol, even though the journeyman's right to free petrol was won

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in the 1913 strike. By some he is disliked because, once he is well in pocket on the day and has more time or mileage to run, he can make price-cutting bargains. This a journeyman, constrained to hand in 70% of the total shown on his meter, can never do, while the owner-driver, paying for the full upkeep of his cab, can rarely afford it except for a big job. Others object to him because, since he does not have to have his clock checked for money and mileage at the end of the day, nor pay for tyres and engine, he can "cruise" to his heart's content for the mere price of the petrol, which naturally reduces the fares available for ranked drivers. Or again, because he can hang about station entrances and snatch fares from the men on the standing by snapping down his flag (it costs him nothing) in order to slip in where only hired cabs are allowed. These habits result in the "flat-rater" being bitterly referred to by humorists on the rank as the true definition of Perpetual Motion.

I don't say that other drivers don't do these things: your journeyman is often quite as careless of his engine and tyres and your "musher" will often snatch a fare. Nor do I say that all flat-raters do them either; the point is that they *can*, and that some *do*. This, of course, is demoralizing for them,

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disturbing for other drivers, and very upsetting to members of the public who cannot understand how it is that one driver can give them a cut price one night and another man be quite unable to do it the next. All of which forms the basis of the opposition from the proprietors, those who do not work the flat-rate. Moreover, in their opinion the combination of the journeyman's absence of any responsibility for his cab and the "musher's" independence does not make for the best type of driver. There are men driving under the flat-rate to-day who would find it difficult to get a journeyman's job with any good firm.

It must be mentioned in fairness that one of the principal reasons for a company's working the flat-rate is that drivers like it, with the double result that few cabs stay idle and that employés are contented. One ought to add that a certain amount of the expressed hostility to flat-raters has its origin in jealousy; men who would like to be on it and can't are very loud in their condemnation. Anyhow, whatever the reason, he *is* pretty unpopular, and I know many ranks where the drivers practically ostracise any flat-rater who comes on the rank, even going so far as to do him out of his turn when a telephone call comes through, if it can be managed.



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But undoubtedly it is beneficial to any driver who doesn't mind first putting up the necessary ten shillings. In fact it is ideal—too ideal—and the very thing that makes it so attractive to the driver—the absence of any responsibility for wear and tear on the cab—is the one that may ultimately make it unattractive to the proprietor and in the end cause its abandonment. For it must be remembered that to have the flat-rate system, there must also be a company willing to operate it, and this constant hard usage, with resultant high maintenance charges and shorter life of cabs that can never turn in more than ten shillings a shift will in all probability prove it no longer a paying proposition. For that ten bob per shift is equivalent to seventy per cent. of but fifteen shillings on the meter if driven on commission basis, and fifteen shillings is a poor average for a ten-hour day, even for a cheap cab.

For the initial price of the cab is, of course, a very important factor. A cheap cab can obviously show a profit where a more expensive cab will be making a loss; its hire-purchase price (the basis of cost calculations) will be paid off before a cab bought even two or three years previously, when prices were higher. But it must be remembered that a company starting out now to run the flat-rate

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is not the only company in a position to buy the modern cheaper taxis, though for the moment it may have an advantage over companies who have the older and more costly cabs on their hands. If competition in the cab world were of the same nature as that outside, there might be an assured future for the flat-rate, but nine people out of ten take the first cab they see, no matter what attraction the company puts into its vehicles. So that the only form of successful competition left is that each cab must continue to earn for its owner more than the next man's, and must continue to cost less to maintain. Which is why the flat-rate system may probably fail. But to make any sort of prophecy which has to go into print is silly; no doubt by the time this statement is irrevocably down in black and white, it will have been proved wrong in half-a-dozen different ways.

It has been estimated that the average taxi man spends roughly only about 30% of his time on the street carrying fares, 30% cruising or returning empty to a rank, and 40% on the rank. There are, of course, cab men who prefer to cruise as much as possible; indeed many have to owing to the shortage of ranking facilities; but generally speaking the rank is half the driver's life. It is his club, meeting place, gossip-mart and gossip-factory, business office, and often restaurant, all in one.

Cab standings are naturally very long established, for the first hackney carriage was licensed in 1615 in the reign of James I, and, in spite of a succession of restrictive laws, their numbers rapidly increased. At first they stood in the courtyards of inns, but in 1634 a certain Captain Baily, a retired sea captain, appointed four "superior coaches" to ply at rates fixed by him at the Maypole in the Strand, where St. Mary's Church now is. The present rank at St. Mary's, therefore, is the oldest in London, being nearly three

hundred years old. Others were subsequently established in different parts of the city, as the idea proved popular. The earliest motor-cab standing was in Trafalgar Square.

Cab standings are naturally always subject to change: new residential quarters, the encroachment of slum or non-cab-using areas, the congestion of traffic, are the principal factors making for the appointment of new ranks and the alteration or abolition of existing ones. Actually the Commissioner of Police makes an average of three changes per month of one kind or another in the London standings. Some ranks are quite out of date; there is one in Brunswick Square where now scarcely one call would come in three days, though it is still a licensed rank for forty cabs. On the other hand, from ranks such as the famous one in Piccadilly, opposite Bolton Street, and those at Hyde Park Corner, Brompton Oratory or St. James's Street, cabs take off about one every two minutes during the busy hours of the day, and they hold anything up to forty cabs. The biggest rank in London, not counting those at railway stations, is Northumberland Avenue, for over seventy cabs, though it is not as busy as others and therefore not always full. Of the stations, Victoria is the winner, with a rank licensed to hold 184 taxis. It is in

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twelve different portions spread over the station itself and eight adjacent streets, the cabs moving up from one portion to another as required. Many other London ranks similarly have two or three sections—which is sometimes confusing for the hirer, who tries to take a cab from the head of what he thinks is the rank and is asked to go to the real first cab which may be over a hundred yards away and round a corner. Occasionally the driver takes a chance and snatches the job out of turn; occasionally the hirer insists on his legal right to hire any cab; either way there is subsequently a good row.

At many of the busier ranks will be found cab shelters for the drivers waiting thereon. The conditions under which the old horse cabbies had to work, completely exposed to rain, wind and frost, whether waiting on the rank or driving a fare, moved many philanthropic persons who took an interest in the drivers' welfare to found the Cabmen's Shelter Fund in 1875. The object of this was to provide, on as many big ranks as possible, shelters where any cab man might get protection from the weather, buy refreshment at moderate prices, and in general wait for a fare in comparative comfort. The fund was managed by a committee and many public and private people subscribed, or even presented

complete shelters, with the result that two years after its inception no fewer than thirteen shelters had been erected, the majority in West London, while many more were contemplated, and indeed eagerly sought after by the men concerned. In 1876, for example, a "memorial praying for a shelter at Palace Yard, Westminster" was signed by well over a hundred cab men; and the next year the shelter (now gone) was presented by members of both Houses of Parliament.

The very first shelter erected was in Acacia Road, St. John's Wood. It was officially opened on February 6th, 1875, by the Hon. Arthur Kinnaird, some forty cabbies attending to do the occasion honour. It was, however, removed to a site in Hendon in 1903, the proximity of the Eyre Arms public house being held (principally by the publican), to afford all the same amenities, and some others as well. The oldest shelter, therefore, in use to-day is the one at Elgin Avenue, Maida Vale, which was the sixth of the original ones and was also erected in 1875.

In 1890 there were forty shelters, and in 1911 forty-seven; but to-day there are only thirty-two. For this drop the financial situation is responsible. The cost of a new shelter, originally under £200, is now double that sum, and the increasing upkeep charge

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on existing ones is naturally a heavy drain on the fund. Unfortunately, too, the legacies and private subscriptions on which it depends have fallen off enormously of late years, largely because in the first place it is realized that a shelter is not quite such a necessity to the motor-cab driver, protected by roof and wind-screen, as it was to the exposed horse driver, and secondly that peculiar bond between local residents and cabbies of the neighbourhood does not now exist to anything like the same extent as it formerly did,

Each shelter is managed by a selected attendant, whose living comes from recognized profits on the catering. At first he used to be paid a small wage, but the number of cab men coming to the shelter for their meals made it so profitable that he now actually pays about 5/- a week for the privilege, and for every job vacant there are anything up to two hundred applicants. Usually the man selected by the committee is one recommended by the drivers habitually using the shelter in question; often he is one of their number who joyfully gives up his taxi to take on the new job. It is right that the drivers should have a say in the choice, because the attendant, in addition to supplying dinners or cooking for them any food they may bring in (at 1d. per cooking), has also probably to act as secretary

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and treasurer of the shelter's Sick Benefit or Twenty-one Club or even of a subscription for a comrade in misfortune. Taxi men are peculiarly generous and sympathetic towards companions sick or out of work; often they will give freely on behalf of a driver they hardly know who happens to be down on his luck and they are indefatigable in organising Benefit concerts, which realize considerable sums for unfortunate drivers or their dependants.\*

The attendant, too, is responsible for ensuring tactfully that the rules are obeyed. By these rules he must not allow gambling, card-playing or bad language (for which there is sometimes a hospital box, each forbidden word a penny); he must keep the place clean and tidy and open at the hours laid down, admit only cab drivers, and forbid any publication or pictures to be received without the committee's sanction. Remembering dug-out decoration during the war, one feels that this is perhaps wise. During the early years the editors of certain journals presented free copies to each shelter; in 1875 and 1876 these were *The Graphic*, *Judy*, *Fun*, and *The Animal World*.

\* The public should know that the taximan's charity is by no means confined to his companions. There is a well supported Taximen's Orphan and Cripple Children's Fund which regularly gives the children of certain Homes an annual outing by taxi to Burnham Beeches.



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The attendant's job, though considered a good one, is, as can be seen from above, no sinecure. Taxi men are not easy to cater for; and if displeased are apt to express themselves forcibly about it. Few drivers will eat anything but the best meat; fewer still will refrain from grumbling if asked to pay anything more than coffee-house prices for it. The hours are long, generally from midday up to ten at night and later. Eleven of the thirty-two shelters are open night and day, which means the attendant must engage and pay assistants. The shelter in Piccadilly has no fewer than four such assistants. But then it is the busiest of the lot, and a few years ago had a clientèle which extended, quite illegally, well beyond the ranks of cab drivers into those of their riders. Many a good plate of sausage and mash have driver and his fare engulfed in the small hours of the morning seated side by side in the "Junior Turf Club." So prevalent did this custom become that at last many drivers complained that they often could not get into their own shelter because of the rows of opera-hatted gentlemen and evening-cloaked ladies eating away inside. So the "Junior Turf's" hospitality was officially curtailed, though the rule is still broken now and then. Many famous men have fed in cab shelters, particularly that at

Hyde Park Corner. The late Sir Ernest Shackleton was a constant visitor and indeed spent most of his last night in England there. He was very popular and when he left on his final voyage, the drivers had a whip-round and presented him with an inscribed case of pipes as a souvenir. His letter of thanks now hangs on the wall.

Internally a cab shelter is divided into two ; at one end is a small cook-house with stove, sink, ice-box and so on ; the rest is a mess room with a board table and locker seats running round it. There is just space for a taxi driver to squeeze in—only just in some instances—and get down to his food, generally cheek by jowl with the next man. The interior of one of the smaller shelters on a cold wet day round about two p.m. has to be seen to be believed ; certainly the atmosphere can be seen if not subsequently believed. In the ordinary “cottage” type shelter as many as twelve drivers can sit and eat at once, but no more ; even eleven is close packing and the twelfth man is rarely popular. Popular rumour often credits the fogs over South-west London to the inadvertent leaving open for a moment or so of the Hyde Park shelter door ; but I won't insist on your believing that.

When a rank possessed both a shelter and

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a telephone, the latter used to be fixed inside, and it was the attendant's job to answer it. But this proved too much for him altogether, apart from the fact that the first driver off the rank was naturally never in the shelter; so now it is generally found fixed to the railings near the head of the rank. Not every rank, however, has a telephone, by any means; even to-day there are only about 130 ranks in London with them. Anyone who happens to be near the phone takes the order; theoretically, however, it is the job of the "looker-out" or cab-minder.

The looker-out is a man, generally an old ex-driver who has perhaps lost his licence through medical unfitness, who has been asked by the drivers to "run the rank." He moves the cabs up as the first one goes off, takes the telephone calls, and summons drivers from the shelter as their turn to be first pair on the rank falls due. Popularly he used to be supposed to fetch them out of the adjacent pub—a complete fallacy, for the average taxi man is very abstemious while on duty; even the lingering aura of a mere half-pint might be fatal to his licence should he subsequently become involved in a mishap. Some years ago, when meters were first introduced, an important part of the looker-out's job was to stop small boys pulling the

flags down on unattended cabs in order to hear the bell tinkle—a bit of boyish amusement for which the unlucky driver had to pay; but the novelty of this has now worn off. The looker-out also is responsible for waking up those drivers who may be asleep when they have to move up the rank, for the taxi man often snatches a nap in the back of his cab. About three years ago one old driver, with twenty years on a taxi and almost as many on a hansom before that, actually died during such a nap in his cab—a gentle, perfect death among his friends and on the rank where he had waited so often for a call. Many a taxi driver would not wish for better.

In return for all his services the looker-out either receives a copper or so from each driver as they take off, or else the regulars club together and pay him so much a week. Sometimes he takes out a police “Messenger’s Licence” to put his position on a more secure footing, but, throughout, the drivers on the rank are his employers. It is they who ask him to take on the job, and if he proves unsatisfactory they leave him a little note, signed by most of them, telling him to clear out.

The looker-out on a station rank is slightly more important, owing to the number of cabs. At, say, Paddington, there will be as many as

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150 waiting shortly before an important train such as the "Torbay Limited" arrives, and it is not uncommon for 40 to take off within two minutes of arrival, and nearly that number again as the luggage is sorted out. This means quick moving up, and as stations will not hold many cabs, the main part of the rank is often round the corner, in the yard or down a tunnel. The looker-out has to signal them forward with a flag or newspaper, and where, as often, they have to bank up in two or three parallel lines he must see that job-snatchers don't get in the wrong line out of their turn. After a big train has distributed its passengers he will perhaps go down to the street or yard entrance and signal to any passing cabs that there is room if they want to come in. Most drivers will give him a few coppers as they pass inside. Quite a few don't. There are mean drivers in London as well as mean passengers.

In the old days the looker-out had a slightly more strenuous time, because horses required more looking after than a motor-cab does. No taxi shakes its nose-bag off, or decides to edge up and chat with the taxi in front, or turn round to swear at the taxi behind. There is nothing to prevent a horse-cab coming on any rank to-day, among all the "Mechanical Clarences." Though one would not think

it, there are still nearly a hundred four-wheelers licensed in the metropolitan area ; but as a rule they frequent the stations, where they get a chance of nervous old ladies from the country. The poor hansom is, however, on its last wheels. There were only seven licensed last year ; there were eight the year before, and twelve in 1926. Generally the hansoms only come out at night, when they still pick up quite a fair living from modern youth which has dined well, or from occasional sentimentalists who wish to breathe the stuffy, leathery atmosphere of a horse cab once again.

I hired one the other evening, at about midnight, but he would not take me all the way home ; he wanted to keep in the centre of things. So we went to a Tottenham Court Road taxi rank ; which was a little cruel. However, they reap quite a harvest on Boat Race and similar nights from enthusiastic undergraduates. Indeed these lads often do not bother to wait till one happens along : they give all hansoms a belated revenge by hiring a taxi to go and fetch one, and even the horse laughs when he hears the message. In spite of the new and luxurious taxis, hansoms are still the most comfortable public vehicle on the streets.

It is amusing to remember that about forty years ago a hansom was considered fast in

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more ways than one. No nicely brought-up young girl could ever ride in a hansom alone with a man without losing a large chunk of her reputation, even if the very worst was not suspected. But its disappearance will not be long delayed now, and it will soon be relegated to past history, to take a place alongside the cab-runner\* and others of London's memories.

The old horse cabby's contempt, by the way, for those who, being "toffs," yet walk instead of taking a cab, is still something too abysmally virulent for contemplation. In the old days, one veteran (now mechanised) told me he was often engaged to take ladies in evening-dress just from one side of a street to the other. "But nowadays they come out of the theaytres with *nothing on* and WALK 'ome. My missis wouldn't even go to bed with what they 'ave on—and they—they WALK 'OME. Our job's done for, guv'nor. The 'toffs' is losing their 'abits."

\* There may be readers who do not remember the cab-runner for I don't suppose he has been seen for sixteen years at least. He was a ragged unemployed man who invariably materialized outside any London station immediately upon the emergence of a four-wheeler with luggage on top, and ran indomitably behind it to its destination, in the hope of getting a shilling for carrying the boxes upstairs. Whatever the distance he always had enough breath left at the end to warn off in blood-curdling tones the various opportunists who tried to pick the cab up at its own street corner. Sometimes a footman awaited the cab and his run was in vain, but he was generally fairly adept at summing up the job inside as well as the job outside.

## CAB SHELTERS AND STANDINGS

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Another thing that has passed with the horse is the fashion of giving drivers long and sonorous nicknames, which were just as well-known to their regular fares as to their comrades. Nicknames there are nowadays, of course, some of them good; but their possessors are not known to the general public in anything like the same manner, and most of the sobriquets themselves are but bare shadows of a one-time polysyllabic glory. Even the best of them (note the flavour of modernity) such as "Harringay George," "London Calling," "Crankshaft Phil," and "Sunflower" (who drives a yellow cab) sound like mere colourless initials beside the nicknames of the old London cabbies. Here are a few: "Old Dan Knott of the Self-Help Society," "Tyko of the Metropole," "Nourishing Stout," "What's to be Done," "Busy Bee," "Joe in the Copper," "Turkey of Waterloo," and "Lord-love-me Nichols."

Those were the names, and those were the days.



OF all London's well-known "gossip exchanges" a cab rank is, probably, one of the most efficient. Card-playing or gambling being difficult, because forbidden, drivers have little to do but "chew the fat." For an hour or so at a time they will swap stories, bits of news, positions of little-known hotels and streets, scandal about the police, views on politics, arguments about sport,\* and strange experiences. A prominent official in the cab world once said that if there was any bit of taxi-intelligence he wanted to get round the trade as soon as possible, he told it to a couple of drivers and it was over London in a day. A man on, say, a Hampstead rank will garner half-a-dozen pieces of news before he goes off with a fare, and when he has dropped him, it may be at Hyde Park Corner, he goes on the rank there, and his budget is at a new distributing centre, while he takes up a new budget.

\* It may not generally be known that the London taxi-drivers have their own Athletic Club, the *Mocatta*, and football teams are even sent as far afield as Edinburgh.

The queer fares and peculiar jobs that fall to the driver's lot are a constant source of entertainment, but in the discussion of their fares there is one rigid point of etiquette, at any rate among the older drivers. On duty is on duty, and a man may be hailed by his own employer and, unless spoken to, will make no sign, either then or subsequently, that he has recognized him, nor, what is sometimes more important, whom he is with. Quite right, too. It would be very awkward were a driver to remark one evening to a regular rider taking a young lady to the Criterion: "Lumme, gov'nor, you're a hot 'un! That's the third different bit o' skirt this week!" or words to that effect. Except among his friends, a driver knows nothing of who takes his cab or of what they do, unless, of course, he finds himself being put in the position of breaking the law. Many divorce petitions have come to nothing through taxi men, subpoenaed as witnesses, being "unable to remember," when they were put in the witness-box. And on some occasions, men who have given certain evidence against fares in civil suits have, if deemed to have broken the code, been very unpopular and have sometimes even found it advisable to give up taxi driving. They had failed to observe that etiquette which says

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a driver must be just a driver to his fares, and that his tact must be on occasion all-embracing.

In this connection, perhaps the supreme example of tact was once provided by a Singapore driver. A shy young man, having one afternoon ordered a taxi to take him back into Singapore from a lunch-party at a house some way outside, was asked by his hostess if he would mind giving a lift to another guest, an extremely pretty girl, whom he had only just met for the first time. He stammered that he would be delighted; they got in; and off went the Malay driver, hooting with his horn all the while from sheer native love of a beautiful noise. So oppressive was this continuous horn-sounding that the young man, urged by the girl, rapped vigorously on the glass, and told the enthusiast to stop it. The Malay did not understand either English or his fare's Malay, but nodded as much as to say he was going as fast as he could—and redoubled his noise to show it. Again the fare rapped, and tried to explain; again the driver agreed with everything—and sounded his horn more vigorously. At last the young man made a supreme effort; pointing first at the horn on the side of the dashboard, in scowling negative, and then at himself and the girl, to show how they both disliked it.

At this a sudden look of comprehension flooded the driver's face. With the sympathetic air of one who has been young himself, he reached forward, not to the horn, but to the driving mirror close by it, reflecting partly back into the cab, and turned it chastely heavenward. He then drove home slowly, looking rigidly to his front in an understanding, almost conspiratorial manner—sounding his horn still continuously, but oh so soulfully!

A very favourite subject of discussion on the rank is, naturally, topography. A driver arrives who has just had an argument with a fare about the shortest way. Though stoutly maintaining at the time that he was right, he now wants to find out whether, perhaps, he had not made an error. Streets under repair, quicker "long cuts," the possibility of traffic blocks, places where the police are hot on "loitering" cabs, all come into this discussion; for now and then the fare is right. The taxi man knows all London well, but there is always a fare who knows one little part—his own home area—better. In the discussion on streets and traffic, buses, of course, secure a good deal of abusive notice. So do trams, for the London driver hates trams. This is different from New York, where cabs and trams occasionally seem to have a working partnership. A

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New York taxi man who has stalled his engine on a tram line, thus blocking the traffic, will rarely bother to get out and start it up; he will put it in gear and signal with his eyebrows to the tram behind, which will then come up slowly, and bump him forward till his engine restarts. All without a word spoken on either side, and most amusing when seen for the first time by English eyes.

It is only natural that the police come in for a good deal of discussion on the rank. Criticism is often unfavourable, not to say scandalous; for the distinction between the men who make the laws and the men who have to enforce them is not always appreciated. Moreover, every true Briton, particularly if he is a taxi man, must have something to grouse about, and the police, who are, so to speak, present during the birth, life, and death of every taxi driver as such, naturally fill the bill. The chief cause of the complaining is a certain sense of unjust treatment, a feeling that the police "pick on" taxi men for obstruction and other traffic sins, rather than on bus drivers and worse offenders. There are, no doubt, grounds for this belief, though as a matter of fact it is really due to the hated "Cruising Cab" order, the enforcing of which is often allotted to specially detailed

constables and which, as stated earlier, definitely bears unfairly upon the taxi trade. This, however, is hardly the fault of the police; indeed, one might suggest that had the taxi trade been sufficiently unified, it might have secured some representation for its eight thousand cabs on the Traffic Advisory Committee. At present it has no member, while the four thousand buses have two; it is, therefore, obvious who is made to hold the baby. In general, however, and putting healthy grouching aside, taxi men realize that the constable has his duty to do like anyone else; and in fact the cases of police persecution are few. A certain intimidatory manner towards drivers adopted by the police at some passing stations is hardly persecution, though it does scare nervous drivers out of their skins, and might well be modified. Anyway, without the police, conversation on the rank would soon flag, and at least there is always the joke about the officiously zealous constable who pounced on a cab for a slight breach of regulations and found that the driver was an ex-hackney carriage inspector, who had taken to "mushing" to help out his pension.

Good places and times for getting jobs are also discussed; but not so freely, for all are in competition. Many a driver has a

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pet place where he feels certain of a fare if he finds himself anywhere near it at a certain hour, and if he is wise he keeps dark about it. Others are a bit boastful, with the result that the place soon ceases to be worth it. Good cabbing is an art, and your old horse driver is still the best cabman (from point of view of his own gain, of course) in the trade. Pay him off anywhere, at any hour, and from his years of experience he will know the best and nearest chance of another job: whether to rank or whether to cruise, whether to go to a station, a residential area, an office area, a theatre, a restaurant, or a night-club. And he doesn't chat too much about it either, though talkative enough on other subjects.

Every taxi driver has his own system of working. Some will go to a favourite rank, stay till called off, and then work their way back to it. Others will go on the nearest rank wherever they find themselves. Others will cruise the fashionable streets, will even, it is said, follow the society columns of the papers to keep in touch with aristocratic parties and big dances; others frequent Harley Street or some selected residential area, cruising or ranking on one of the many two-cab stands dotted about at street intersections. Many specialize in station work; some even ply at one big terminus only.

as Waterloo or Paddington, knowing the arrival time of every important train. One man, a flat-rater, told me that wherever he is he always makes for Piccadilly Circus, drives three times round, and if he isn't hired by then goes on the Haymarket or Piccadilly rank. Once out of every four times he is picked up before he has time to rank. Still others, who prefer night work, will start at six p.m., working in from Kensington and aiming to take a fare in to a restaurant, then to pick up again a short one from restaurant to theatre, then to take, with luck, a dinner party home, and be back for the first theatre out. If unlucky, they move on to the next theatre; they know the times that each finishes—and, moreover they know if there are likely to be many fares available.

In this connection the taxi driver is probably the best dramatic critic in London. No matter what the Press, the actors, or the manager say, the taxi man will tell you more accurately after a week whether the play is doing good business and likely to run, or whether the public is giving it a miss.

It is among the drivers on the rank, too, that you will hear all the taxi man's slang, though there is not as much of it as in other trades. "Putting on" is the taxi man's expression for coming on at the end of the



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rank. A driver will say he "put on sixth cab at the so-and-so," meaning he came on the so-and-so rank when there were only five other cabs there. The fare is "the rider," or "the job." "Pinching (or knocking) a job off the rank," means cruising near a rank head and snapping up a fare who would otherwise have taken a cab from the standing. To "do the rank over" has the same meaning. The "musher" (also the "mush" or "mushy"), the "flat-rater," "driving on the clock," and the "looker-out" have already been explained. "Toasting" your rider is to take him the long way round, or even to some place (such as the Lost Property Office after 4 p.m.) when you know it will be shut and he doesn't. "Hanging it up" is loitering past a theatre to snatch a fare away from the recognized rank. The "bill" is the driver's licence, generally with reference to the original held by the man's proprietor, and "to draw your bill" is to ask your employer for your licence, i.e., leave his employment. You may also have "your bill blistered," a "blister" being an endorsement on the licence upon conviction. Your "plate" is the metal plate showing the licence number on your cab. "Peters"\* are pieces of luggage,—a threepenny extra for the

\* In thieves' slang a "peter" is a safe.

driver. Theatres emptying after the show are said to be "burst," and the show itself is the "gaff"; hence "when the gaff bursts."

There are many humorists in the taxi trade, and the rank is always a good place for stories. Some of the tales are real old stagers and go round and round London every few months or so. In case they yet may be new to one or two people, here are a couple. The first is the story of the Jew who, late one night, asked a taxi man how much he wanted to take him to the Commercial Road.

"Five bob," said the driver.

"Ah, that wath too much! I'll toss you double or quits."

The driver agreed, and the Jew lost.

"Ah, vell!" he said, "I'll jutht have to walk, after all."

The other is about a Scotsman who, after cogitation, tipped a driver one penny. The driver in traditional style said, "What's this?" and the Scotsman said "Heids?" looked into the open palm, found he was correct, and took it back with the remark that the driver  
--- "sportsman."

two have been doing good duty  
fs.

lightly younger joke, but one which  
riably goes well is for a driver answering  
e phone to tell the next cab off that he is

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wanted to pick up two men—Carnera and Teddy Brown. Even the hoary game of Beaver had its counterpart at the time on the cab ranks. Only instead of being played with whiskered old gentlemen as counters, it was played naturally enough with taxicabs—Beardmores. There is also the story of the Edinburgh taxi driver whose mates could not make out why he was doing such good business with short rides, till one discovered that he used to keep a half-crown nailed to the floor of his cab and leave the door open. This trick was also played in Aberdeen, but the driver concerned used three nails and the half-crown was a counterfeit one.

In contrast to the cheery tellers of stories and quips, old and new, whose fame has spread to every rank and shelter in London, you will always find on any big rank one or two uncommunicative, mysterious men. They do not speak, or mix with any group, hardly say "good morning"; even the other drivers think them surly. They pace aloofly up and down or remain in their cab sunk in apparently morose self-communion, keeping themselves to themselves. Perhaps they are pondering on life, for life is very close to the taxi rank. To the casual observer the rank is just a place for talking, arguing, or waiting for work, to those who look a little deeper it is one

of London's gateways to romance, waiting for a second Stevenson to write a Newer Arabian Nights. George, the taxi man, in the thick of this humdrum world, is yet on the edge of the other. At any moment the curtain may be drawn aside and he will see for a brief instant into a private domain of love and hope and fears and dreams.

Day after day it happens. He will be standing by his cab chatting absorbedly with a friend, though both eyes and one ear are away up and down the street. His world flows around and over him; buses roar past like avalanches, limousines slide haughtily by, business vans nose in and out, pedestrians dodge and run. He stiffens abruptly upon catching one movement out of the sea of movement around him, but it is only the point-duty policeman waving back a van, and he resumes his conversation: "Now what I says, Bob, is this. You put a new tax on petrol and you've got to put up taxi fares. Now what the Gov'nment ought to do is . . ."

Again a flicker of an arm along the street, this time an arm and a walking-stick. George brings his own arm up with a big circular motion from his side to well over his head by way of showing that he has seen and that no cruising job-snatcher is now to be

considered. Then he has scrambled up into his seat, and with a "So long, Bob," he pulls out into the traffic, snapping down his flag at the same time. The Government will have to wait awhile to know what they ought to do: for George has momentarily left the world of commonplace and is scudding through the curtain into the world of adventure.

A young man and a girl! Good, thinks George—no, damn it, not so good; for the young man is only putting the girl in and is not going himself. They look a matter-of-fact couple; the girl is pretty and well though inexpensively dressed; they say farewell calmly, and the address is a prosaic one in Bayswater. But as he lets in his clutch the girl says with a lightness that seems forced, "So, that's that!" and the young man goes a little red and says, "Well, you see, yes . . . that's that." Then George is off. His mind is blank save for a mental picture of the quickest route to his destination. His lips mutter an imprecation upon a flashing cyclist.

In a quiet Bayswater square the girl gets out and runs up the steps. George has had a half-crown given him by the young man and there is only  $1/9$  up, so he is quite happy. As he turns away a little faded woman appears

at the door and her eyes look as though she has been crying. "Well, darling?" she asks, and the girl, drooping now, says, "He wouldn't."

The door shuts and the curtain has dropped again. George is thinking about his dinner. But his dinner has to wait. Two streets away the curtain is once more pulled aside. A little man with a moustache hires him.

"Are you quick, driver?"

"This here cab," begins George, "is . . ."

"No, is your brain quick? Can you watch another cab and follow it?"

You can never surprise George. In a few minutes he is drawn up with his fare inside not far from a house where another taxi stands waiting. George even knows its driver slightly, but makes no sign. Two men come quickly out with suitcases, look round, and jump in. Off goes the cab; off goes George at a word from his voice-pipe. Along to Paddington, down the departure platform slope, and without stopping straight up the other slope. Harrow Road, Edgware Road, Wigmore Street, Oxford Circus, and at Tottenham Court Road a policeman's hand divides them. The quarry speeds on: George is left. Next minute his fare is out of the cab, three half-crowns are in his palm, and with "Better luck next

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time, cabbie," the fellow is off. George grunts and makes straight for Noon's for his long-delayed dinner.

Pipe alight, and a plate of steak and kidney under his coat, the curtain is pulled momentarily aside once more when a dark, heavy Italian woman with flashing tears in her eyes and something concealed beneath a black shawl, hails him in Old Compton Street, and is taken to Tottenham Court Road Tube station. Sixpence is on the clock, and sixpence George gets. For once he is a little less impassive.

"This all?" he asks, sarcastically.

The woman gives a short sob and runs down into the station.

"From the way she ran," reflects George, as the curtain drops again, "I'm lucky to get the blinkin' tanner."

At three in the afternoon he finds himself ranking once more with his friend.

"How's tricks?" asks Bob.

"So, so," replies the figure of romance.

"Well 's I was saying, what the Gov'nment ought to do is this. . . ."

None of the jobs mentioned above are imaginary ones; all have actually occurred. Sit in a shelter for an hour or so and listen and you will realize, perhaps, something of the romance of the rank. A taxi man never

knows in what comic, tragic, or commonplace drama he is to play his part. He may merely take an old lady to the station, or he may be about to witness the death of his fare, as did the driver who, in May, 1922, picked up an officer in uniform one day at a station, and took him to Eaton Place. Here he put him down, received the fare, and then saw him, after forty years of soldier's life, shot in the back on his own doorstep by two South Irish "heroes." Some minutes later another taxi driver, casually cruising for a fare, was hailed by the two armed murderers, but on hearing cries of "Stop them!" slammed his door and after trying to pursue them and being shot at twice, went to the police station, whence he again went in pursuit with two constables, who ultimately helped in the arrest. One night, a taxi man may pick up a reveller who insists on undressing in the cab, under the impression he is in his own bedroom; next night he may be invited into the house of another fare for a drink; or he may even be going to his own death, as did the taxi driver, in 1923, who was told to drive to a quiet Brixton road and was there killed by his fare. He may be hailed by a prince, for an unobtrusive journey, or by some poor man who has never before ridden in a taxi, hurrying to a hospital at an urgent call.



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He may be required to take a young man to his mistress, a prisoner to the police court, a comedian to rehearsals, a girl for ever from the man she loves. The ride may be one of the most commonplace events in a commonplace fare's existence ; it may be a wonderful, unbelievable incident of which, years after, some mind will still remember every detail. And a taxi man never knows. He waits at the head of the rank ; he is, under his overcoats, his cap and his badge, a man like any one of us ; then, " Here y'are, sir ! Where to ? " and he becomes a figure of destiny.

TAXICABS have had some unusual things to do in their time—jobs which one would not normally expect a taxi to do. There is, for example, a small town in Essex where all the taxi cabbage of the neighbourhood is (or was) under standing orders to take the local fire brigade, which has no proper fire engine, to the scene of any fire that may break out. Apparently the casual passenger is quite liable to be turned abruptly out during a ride at the sound of the alarm, in order that his vehicle may pick up earnest gentlemen in brass helmets. No doubt, he has to be careful to settle up the amount on the clock, or he may find subsequently he's had to pay for part of the fire. Taxicabs were also used at a big fire in London, in 1925, but not by the fire brigade. The blaze was at some wastepaper works in the Old Kent Road, and was such an attractive spectacle that by the time it had been going for an hour or so nearly every spare cab in the West End had been chartered by

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enthusiasts who wanted to be driven across the river to see it.

Taking the ballot-boxes from the polling booth in the country stations, at election time, is another unusual job upon which taxis were once employed in a big English city, owing to the failure of other arrangements; while in garrison towns selected taxis are always used to draw the soldiers' pay from the bank every Friday. In somewhat similar fashion taxicabs have even been known on occasion to have been hired by unemployed to go to the Labour Exchange to receive their dole—which is a sad commentary on our times. The same thing happened once in Vienna, too, a few years after the war, but the other Viennese unemployed in the queue—more excitable than the British—pulled the “plutocrats” out, and after a sharp “argument” put them in again, with instructions to the driver to go on now to the nearest hospital.

Among other strange jobs of taxis, examples of which it is, perhaps, indiscreet to record here, is the conveyance by other than advertised routes of certain well-known personages who wish to travel incognito or to avoid publicity.

Taxis have occasionally been hired to appear in films, particularly—and naturally—

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in films of London, and as a result taxi men have temporarily figured as supers. No taxi driver that I know of, however, has ever had a job on the stage; though, the other day, about a thousand of them had a job in the audience. The management of a newly-built theatre not far from Piccadilly Circus had got the idea, from various complaints, that taxi drivers had not yet realized exactly where this new theatre was. So they invited as many of them as were free to attend the dress rehearsal of a forthcoming production, with their wives and families. It is not reported that any failed to find their way to the theatre on that occasion.

Taxi men themselves are often asked to do peculiar things by people who seem to imagine that they have hired the man rather than his cab. A driver was not long ago called up by phone from a Kensington rank to go to a big house near by. When he arrived, he drew up behind an enormous Daimler standing outside and was about to ring the front door bell when a sweet young thing appeared and said, "Oh, are you the taxi I ordered?" "Yes, miss. Where to?" asked the man. "Oh, nowhere, thank you. But I can't start up my car. Will you do it for me?"

Another London taxi driver, early one

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April morning, in 1927, picked up a young man, was told to call for a girl, and then drove them to a registry office. Here, they went in, blushing. But before the taxi could move off, the young man came rushing out again, looking pretty embarrassed, and asked the driver if he would be his best man. The driver cheerfully agreed, left his cab (having, I suppose, remembered with great presence of mind to put his flag down again, first), and went in to be best man at threepence per three and three-quarter minutes.

Again, a driver, having carried some parcels into a flat for a lady fare after her ride, asked politely: "Can I be of any further service?" The lady replied jokingly, "Not unless you can cook," and explained that she was expecting seventeen guests to lunch, but that her cook had just been taken ill. The driver promptly offered his services (at the usual meter rates of course) and proceeded to fry forty-five lamb chops, cook peas and new potatoes, prepare fruit salad, and eventually serve it all up.

Another unusual rôle which taxi men in the City have had to undertake quite frequently during the last year is that of telegraph boy. In rush hours business men found that a taxi could deliver a short-distance message in far quicker time than it took the telegraph service, and at a cheaper cost. The driver's

known honesty, backed by his badge number, is sufficient security; moreover, there is hardly any limit to the length, breadth, depth, or weight of the message.

For this same reason taxi men are often used as messengers, or given charge of luggage unaccompanied by its owner. It is related of a certain driver that he was stopped one spring day by a gentleman in St. James' Street, who took off a heavy fur-lined coat, which a sudden change in the weather had rendered unnecessary, put it in the cab and told the man to take it to the Queen's Hall, while he himself walked. On arrival there, the cabby found that the fare who had been thus present only in the spirit was Sir Thomas Beecham.

"Quick! Follow that cab!" orders, with their hint of mystery, crime, love, or what not, are far commoner than might be supposed. A lot of them appear to mean, and generally lead to, nothing; perhaps the fare has merely over-Wallaced; for as long as you can do it unobserved and so aren't guilty of annoying strangers, there is no law against tracking people about London, if you really wish to see how it was Inspector Elk did it in Chapter VII. Other cases are more serious; there is perhaps a private inquiry agent and a divorce court sequel behind it. Some chases

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end in fights, or arrests after a highly exciting ride. Only the other day a driver who was on a Lincoln's Inn Fields rank was hurriedly boarded by a detective and given the order to pursue two men who had that instant been seen to steal a car. The thieves, trying to escape, circled Lincoln's Inn Fields twice at a great pace with the taxi in pursuit. Then with great skill the driver managed to manœuvre his cab so that the detective could jump on the footboard of the car, by that time going at thirty-five miles an hour, and the men were ultimately arrested. What the driver did after that was not recorded, probably he went back on the end of the rank and finished his conversation. He was subsequently complimented at Bow Street on his extraordinary skill, to which the capture was due.

It is always supposed to be impossible to surprise a taxi man, and they will tell you on the rank that they are ready for anything. Certainly they have frequently been requisitioned by police at a moment's notice to chase criminals. But they must get surprises sometimes, and particularly I should imagine when the chase and capture, so to speak, all take place inside the one cab. Something of the sort happened to a south country driver the year before last. He

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was returning to a small town from a job outside when he was hailed by a powerful and rather wild-looking man who jumped in and told him to drive quickly to the station. The fare was barely in the cab when a policeman and five haymakers, with pitchforks, appeared across a field in hot pursuit. They all leapt in after him, the constable shouting to the driver to go as fast as possible to the lunatic asylum, from whence the stranger had just escaped. During the whole of the ride the five haymakers with four pitchforks, the one policeman and one extremely strong Irish homicidal lunatic, now armed with the fifth pitchfork, fought together all over the back of the cab, the floorboards of which, to make it more interesting, fell through quite early in the struggle.

Quite a different sort of chase which a taxi man was suddenly ordered to undertake was the following. A woman who had just changed from one bus to another, realized, when she came to pay the fare, that she had left her bag with all her money in the one in front. Being unable to persuade the bus driver to make a chase of it (unfortunately, for it would have been a fine sight) she borrowed half-a-crown from the conductor, descended, jumped into a taxi, and, followed by the breathless enthusiasm and cheers of



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her fellow passengers, pursued the first bus and retrieved her bag. Then having paid off the taxi, she returned to her own bus to pay her fare, repay her debt, tip the conductor and receive the congratulations of all.

Another humorous experience was that of a driver who was summoned to a big Bloomsbury house. The fare, an old gentleman, loaded the taxi up with luggage, gave the order "Paddington" and got in with the words "Right away." When the cab arrived at the terminus, however, he was not to be found inside. The mystified driver, the police, and several porters were all looking for bloodstains and taking notes when the old gentleman, foaming at the mouth, appeared from another taxi, which had just drawn up, and at once tried to give the first man in charge. The mystery was unravelled at last and then it was discovered that when the old fellow was just about to get in he remembered he had left his latchkey behind. So with the words "Just wait" he went back to get it, whereupon to his amazement he saw the driver, having got all the luggage aboard, proceed to make off with it. Luckily he was able to get another taxi and keep the "thief" in sight. It all took a bit of straightening out, and for a long time the

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driver and his would-have-been fare were saying "Right wait" and "Just away" to each other with varying inflections.

Several other instances are on record of drivers who found that they had no fares when they thought they had. In most cases the fare is a deliberate bilker, or is some sort of criminal covering his tracks by slipping out in a traffic block. On one occasion, however, the missing fare was apparently a ghost. The story, unauthenticated, is told by a certain taxi driver from a South London garage. He stoutly maintains that having set down a passenger in Hampstead one night, he was returning to the West-end down Haverstock Hill when he had a queer feeling that the taxi was not empty. Looking round he saw a man wearing a bowler hat lying back inside his cab, but on stopping and opening the door there was no one there. Four months later he passed the same place and saw the man inside again. This time he put on speed for half a mile down hill, but though no one could possibly have jumped out, the figure had again vanished. He will now not go past that place at night, though whether he is frightened or whether he has the taxi man's very natural objection to taking anyone, however wraith-like, for a free ride, he would not tell me. If true,

it is the only instance known of a ghostly bilker. If, as I say, true.

A better authenticated story is the following : it is told by a Mr. C. G. Harper with whose permission I re-tell it briefly here. One evening in December, 1913, a certain vicar in Kensington was leaving his church when an agitated lady, a stranger, asked him to come at once to a nearby house where a gentleman was dying. "He is very worried about the state of his soul," she said, "and wishes to see you before he dies." It was very urgent and the lady had a taxi waiting outside, into which they got. In a little while they came to the house and the vicar, urged to hurry by his companion, jumped out and rang the bell.

On telling the butler the reason of his visit the man displayed astonishment and said his master was in good health ; and when the clergyman turned round to ask the lady if it was her idea of a joke, he discovered that she and the cab had both gone off.

At that moment the gentleman in question came into the hall, and after explanations told the clergyman in confidence that as a matter of fact, though not ill, he had something on his conscience and had been intending to consult him. The vicar discussed the matter, extended consolation and spiritual

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relief, and left after arranging a meeting at the church next day. This appointment, however, the gentleman did not keep. Walking round later to inquire, the clergyman was told by the butler that his master had died just ten minutes after he parted from him last night. On going upstairs to see the body he noticed a photograph on a bedside table of the very woman who had brought him in the taxi and then disappeared. The photograph, the butler informed him, was of his late master's wife who had died fifteen years ago.

This story is probably the only example on record of a "taxi ghost," and those who believe in spiritualism can take it as such. Nevertheless the material and curious mind must feel it was a terrible pity the vicar had not chanced to take the licence number of the cab; it could hardly fail to have been invaluable evidence for the honest inquirer—one way or the other.

Since we are on the gruesome; it may be worth mentioning that taxis sometimes get the job of driving a suicide to his death. Presumably the luxury of a taxi is part of the last fling that the poor devil permits himself, for often the cab is hailed after dinner from a fashionable restaurant. The order is nearly always to drive to the middle

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of Waterloo Bridge. On arrival, the wretched passenger has paid what was owing with a good tip and then calmly committed suicide by jumping into the Thames. One is glad to say that often the driver, though burdened with his traditional half-dozen coats, has in many cases pluckily gone in after him.

This strange habit of taking a last taxi is even more common in Paris. Indeed, I was told of a young American working in Paris shortly after the war, who had an apartment just by the Passy Bridge in what taxi men considered such an inaccessible part of Paris that drivers constantly refused to take him there when he had missed the last train home. However, he hit upon the plan of adopting an expression of utter despair and ordering them in hollow tones to go to the very middle of the *Pont de Passy*. Human nature being what it is, no driver ever failed to accept this hiring, being, in the dramatic French manner, wildly curious to see whether he were really going to take the plunge or not. He never did; he had only a couple of hundred yards to walk home, —accompanied most of the way by distant and disappointed mutterings.

As a final story, there is the famous occasion when Prince George was off to the South of France to convalesce after an operation for

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appendicitis and half Victoria had been cleared of traffic by the police in readiness for the arrival of the royal car. At the very moment when the Prince was due, an elderly London taxi burst past the cordon and sailed into the sacredly isolated area. Several constables rushed forward and waved the driver back but he came stolidly on, whereat an inspector on a horse charged forward and sternly ordered him to come no further as the Prince was expected any minute. To which the driver replied in a husky whisper and with a backward jerk of the thumb: "But I've got 'im in 'ere."

TAXIS, being public vehicles, are naturally hedged around by innumerable rules and regulations. Some of them have been mentioned in earlier chapters; but there are very, very many others. Indeed it is a wonder that the taxi man, whose licence and livelihood depend on observance of these many regulations (which are distributed over some thirty to forty statutes, orders and bye-laws beginning in 1831) can manage to exist at all.

Perhaps the most interesting way of illustrating these rules will be to conduct you through a sort of nightmare taxicab journey, during which you and everyone concerned are as unreasonably tenacious as possible of all legal rights. Of course it will be quite imaginary: if you try to do in reality even a small fraction of what I propose your doing in print you'll probably be slaughtered within the first five minutes.

Coming out of your hotel in the Strand you order the hall porter to call you a cab

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from the rank forty yards away. When it arrives you say you don't like that make of vehicle and refuse to take it. The driver demands that you pay the sixpence on the meter, but you refuse to do so, stating that the porter who called the cab is the legal hirer till someone else accepts it from him. The cabman can sue him and get his money—and there is actually a precedent for this. So leaving them to their argument, you walk out to the cab standing yourself and choose a "Hyper" Beardmore near the end of the rank. The driver who is about to have his dinner tells you to take the first cab. You retort that it is only custom that decrees the first cab to be hired first and you are legally entitled to hire any cab. He counters this by indicating to you that he has placed his cab on the "reserved portion" of the rank for a 30-minute meal-time, and is therefore "not for hire."

Baffled by him you pick out a Morris "Commercial" four places down and this driver also promptly tells you to take the first cab. You say no, you intend to take him and that if he objects you will call a policeman and give him in charge for refusing to be hired. He too, however, outwits you by producing "a reasonable excuse for his refusal," namely, in this case, that he is so tightly jammed in



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the rank that he can't get out. You then try to take a Citroën just in front of him, but are once again unsuccessful because its driver is "not to be found" (having hidden in the shelter as soon as he saw your intention.) You can do nothing about this, as by law only the first two drivers on the rank have to be standing by their cabs.

So you have at last to go to the first cab and say you want to hire him. He will not be hired till you have told him where you want to go. This you have to do because it may be more than six miles away, in which case he is not compelled to accept. (As a matter of fact you *could* take him six miles, get out, pay him off and hire him again for another six.) You tell him you want to go to your hotel first and afterwards to Paddington station, and he must then accept. But at this point a police Public Carriage Inspector approaches and asks to see the taxi man's licence (the duplicate, that is to say, for the proprietor of the cab holds the original). This the driver must carry at all times and must produce to a police officer on demand. The licence to be in order must bear upon it the owner's photograph, signature, his present employer's name and address, and those of any former employers since the licence was last renewed, with the dates of his service

with each ; also his own address, any change in which he has to notify to the police in writing within two days. The licence must, in addition, be for the particular type of cab he is driving. If any of the particulars contained therein are erased or defaced his licence is wholly void. He must also, while working at his employment (and when before a magistrate) be conspicuously wearing his metal badge \* so that the whole of the writing on it is distinctly legible.

Before the police officer passes on, you note that he just glances round the cab to see that it carries its hackney licence, number-plate both inside and out, and another plate inside showing the scale of fares payable. He also satisfies himself that the number of persons the cab is licensed to carry is painted on the back, and that the taximeter seals are unbroken.

When he has moved away, you get in, watching carefully to see that the driver puts down the meter-flag as soon as the hiring starts and no sooner. You then drive to your hotel and tell him to wait while you fetch some luggage. At this he points out that there are side entrances to the hotel

\* The old badge, upon representation from the taxi men, has recently been replaced (1930) by a smaller and neater one weighing only  $1\frac{1}{2}$  oz.

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through which you may bilk him, and so refuses to wait, unless you first pay him the sum already on the clock and a reasonable deposit in addition. You must by law agree to this, but, requiring him to produce his licence badge for inspection that you may "note the writing thereon," you take his number.

Knowing that the hall porter (whom you have recently let in for 6d.) will certainly not help you with your luggage, you ask the driver to give a hand. He also refuses, pointing out that legally he is not a porter and need do no more than lift it from the pavement to his cab. So you have to fetch it along yourself, and when you finally emerge with your effects, you and the driver have a great argument about them. For you have—I said it was a nightmare—ten suitcases, a large canvas sack containing all your money in silver, and a case of oranges.

The driver begins by refusing to take five of the suitcases, explaining that he need only take a *reasonable* quantity of luggage, and ten suitcases for one person is not reasonable. You leave five of them behind, but when he declines to take the oranges also, you point out in turn that the law says nothing about the nature of the luggage, only the quantity. He is forced to take them, but will have nothing to do with the canvas

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sack of money on the grounds that it is bullion, and in 1917 a magistrate at the Mansion House ruled that money was not luggage and special arrangements ought to be made for its transport. Worsted over this, you try to take all five suitcases inside the cab, so that they cannot be charged up as extras, but as there is only room for two of them on the floor the driver makes you put the other three outside, arguing that they are liable to damage his cushions. He also points out that he is not responsible for damage to any baggage carried inside. By way of getting even, you insist that he gives you one of the printed tickets which by law he must carry, showing the cab number and the proprietor's name and address. In addition you make him show you the Authorized Book of Distances which, although only applicable to horse drivers, every driver still is legally required to have in his possession and produce on demand.

During the journey you point out that he has not rung up the "extras" for the luggage on his taximeter, but with a triumphant jerk of the thumb he explains that it is laid down that he need not do so. You spend the remainder of the time wondering if he can be legally summoned for being guilty of an insulting gesture.

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He takes you to Paddington, where you pay him with a pound note and demand change. He declines to give it, being not compelled by law to do so. So you take back your pound and in turn decline to pay him. He protests, but you give him your name and address and tell him that you have no intention of avoiding payment but he cannot have it till he comes to collect it. He drives off in a pet. You call him back and point out that he has not searched the cab immediately on completion of a hiring to see if there is any property accidentally left in it. He does so, trying vainly at the same time to find that you have injured or defaced his cab, for which you may be summoned, and at last goes off in a greater pet.

You deposit your luggage in the station cloakroom and signal another cab. You tell him where you want to go and try and strike a bargain, but in the middle of it someone else takes the cab. You protest, but cannot prove that you had already hired it because the driver had not pulled his flag down, and by legal precedent no hiring starts till that is done. So you hail another cab. This one refuses to be hired, no matter where you want to go. You cannot compel him because he is in the station precincts

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which are private property, nor is it any use your calling a constable from outside. You report him to the station police, however, in order that the railway company may forbid him the future use of their property, to which he is only admitted on condition of accepting fares.

After this you hail yet another cab and make a bargain with the driver to drive you back to your hotel for four shillings, emphasizing with ill-bred glee the fact that he cannot claim more than this agreed sum even if the taximeter shows it. You then get in, leaving the door open. As he is responsible for seeing that the door of his cab is shut, he has to get down again and shut it.

On the way out of the station a porter jumps up beside the driver, on his way out to a rank outside. You stop the cab and sternly reprimand the taxi man for permitting a person to be carried on, upon or about the taxi hired by you, without your express consent, and also for allowing anyone at all to be with him on the driving box whether his cab is hired or not. At which the porter gives you a nasty look and gets off again.

During the journey to your hotel the driver slows down several times to let cars pass in front of him and you remonstrate. He

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tells you that he is bound "to give way if he conveniently can to all private carriages." In spite of the delay, however, when you reach the hotel you find there is only 3/6 on the meter. Notwithstanding your agreement to pay four shillings, you only give him 3/6; for an agreement to pay *more* than the legal fare is not binding. He then suggests that you give him a tip. At this last, you smile sweetly and inform him that he is liable to a penalty of forty shillings for "demanding *or taking* more than the legal fare." You wake up from your nightmare, before he can answer you—which is just as well.

There are just a few more quite interesting legal points dealing with taxicabs, not mentioned above, of which the public is perhaps not generally aware. The first is more than a point; it is almost a conundrum. By law a taxi may not, under a penalty of twenty shillings, ply for hire elsewhere than at some standing or appointed place, yet any taxi which is found standing in any street or public place is, unless already hired, deemed to *be* plying for hire and cannot refuse to be hired; in other words is legally deemed to be breaking the law. Again, a taxi may be hired and told to wait outside a shop in a busy thoroughfare. This puts the driver in

an awkward position, for if he stays he is liable to be charged with obstruction, if he moves away he may lose his hirer and the money on the clock; if he takes his cab away and comes back himself to find his hirer, he can be charged with leaving his cab unattended.

Other things a taxi man must know are: the streets in central London which he is not allowed to enter with an unhired cab; all the "one-way" streets in the metropolis, for, though labelled as such, he must have them in mind as he plans his route; and the special rules made for each theatre in London, telling him how his taxi must approach the entrance when bringing a fare. His cab is then referred to in legal phraseology as a "vehicle with company." Not so well-known, but perhaps useful if employed against "job-snatchers," is the law that allows a taxi man to summon another driver for wrongfully, in a forcible or a clandestine manner, taking away his fare from him.

It is amusing to learn that a taxi man, being a hackney carriage driver in law, is still supposed to hold the check string or wire in his hand while driving, for the accommodation of any person in his cab. This is actually an existing statute (dating from early horse-cab days) though of course it is considered obsolete as far as motor-cab drivers are



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concerned. Another elderly law still in force is that which specifically forbids hackney carriages to stand or ply for hire outside the General Post Office in St. Martins-le-Grand. The penalty is £5. A lot of money could be collected if it were strictly enforced.

Another law, often broken in ignorance on election days, is that which makes it illegal for taxis to be hired, lent or used in order to take voters to the poll. Nor must a taxi driver, even if he owns his cab, take his wife and family out in it for a free ride, because he is then using for private purposes a vehicle which, licensed as a hackney, has paid less than it would do if licensed as a private car. This, however, would not apply if his taxi happened to be one of the old 7.9 h.p. Renaults, for in that case the private car licence would be less than the hackney licence, and he would not be guilty of paying insufficient duty. Even in the former case, however, the driver is quite guiltless if he can prove that his wife hired and paid for his cab. To keep on the right side of the law, therefore, he need only strike a bargain with her to drive her the whole day for sixpence, as long as he puts his flag down while hired.

In many cases the law bears extremely hardly on the poor taxi man. Here is an example (attested and verified), as recent as

June, 1930. A lady came out of the American Express Company's offices in Haymarket, called a cab, via the commissionaire, and asked the driver whether he knew the way to a certain destination. He said "Yes," and put his flag down, whereupon the lady, still on the pavement, said she must await her husband. He soon came out and because the destination was not far off, announced that he would walk and refused to take the cab; he also refused to pay the hiring fee on the meter, and later refused to give his name and address to a policeman. And the taximan could do nothing, for the policeman was not allowed to insist upon the information. In other words the only redress poor George had was to follow this "gentleman" about all day in the hope of finding out his name and address and taking out a summons—obviously an impossibility. Here then is something to which the taxi man's parliamentary friends might turn their attention.

Another legal problem which is still obscure and which might with advantage be clarified, is that of a man who has hired a cab with three friends, drops two of them half way, and picks up two others, and still only pays the "extras" for two. The law says each person above two may be charged for, but a charge for four extra on one journey would seem to

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contravene the law, which says that a vehicle shall not carry more than the number of persons it is licensed to carry. Notwithstanding this law I have been in a London taxi coming home from a dance in which were seven other revellers, not counting the driver in front. And there is of course the newspaper headline :

**TWO TAXIS IN COLLISION IN ABERDEEN.  
TWENTY OCCUPANTS TAKEN TO HOSPITAL.**

WE might here make a little digression to the Lost Property Office at Lambeth, whither all articles found in taxicabs (and buses and trams also) are taken. By law a taxi man must search his cab after every hiring and must hand in anything found to the nearest police station within twenty-four hours. At the police station full particulars of the find are recorded on a Deposit Sheet, which then accompanies the articles to the Lost Property Office. Here they each receive an index number, the article is stored away, and from the Deposit Sheet abbreviated particulars are copied on to a small Property Card, which is then filed under a suitable heading according to the nature of the article, in order that it may be rapidly turned up when the claimant arrives.

All lost property is divided into two main sections. One, naturally enough, is "Miscellaneous"; the other, equally naturally, is "Umbrellas." These latter, indeed, make up forty per cent. of the total articles deposited,

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and three-quarters of them are feminine. An average of fifteen hundred per week is received throughout the year, though, of course, they come in far more heavily in winter than in summer. The record number ever taken in one day was just over seven hundred. In other words, throughout the whole twenty-four hours of that day, umbrellas were left behind in public vehicles at the rate of one every two minutes—an appalling thought!

In the Property Card index umbrellas are classified under various headings which are based on a combination of the different possible characteristics of the handle, such as knobs, crooks, straight, composition, wooden, white metal, fancy, birds, animals, and so on. The umbrellas themselves are stacked according to the day of the week on which they were found. They stay for the space of one week, in big racks headed Monday, Tuesday, etc., then those still unclaimed close their depleted ranks and are shunted back into a sort of limbo where, under the day of the month, they await their owners for a further twelve weeks, at the end of which time they are disposed of. There are generally about fifteen thousand or so of them on hand at any one time.

There is quite a lot of information to be got from a study of the umbrella racks. First

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and foremost one marvels at the ingenuity of the umbrella-handle maker. Every possible of variation of colour, shape and material is represented, and repeated, though sometimes it is hard to convince a lady that her missing umbrella is not so unique that it can have been left by her in a bus on Friday and yet according to the official ticket found in a tram the previous Wednesday. Some of the handles must have baffled even the all-embracing official classification. One notices a weird hawk-like sphinx head and wonders if it is "animal," "bird," or even "fancy," though the mind can hardly conceive the irreverence of calling a sphinx "fancy." The fashions, too, are clearly indicated. "Colour-Compo-Knobs" are the rage just now, the majority of them very cheap. Indeed a feminine umbrella can be bought for as little as 1/11. Of course, it is doubtful whether they keep the rain out, but what matter getting wet on a rainy day when you have a colour-compo-knob to display on a fine one! Gentlemen's sticks, which officially are "umbrellas," are reported going out of fashion; only about three-quarters of the preceding year's bag was realized in 1929. Or else gentlemen are holding on to them more tightly. The previous week's weather is also recorded to some extent by the umbrella

racks. As the superintendent remarked, in the manner of a stock exchange broker explaining the fluctuation of shares: "A wet day affects our umbrellas. We had rain on Saturday. Look!" Sure enough, Saturday's racks had two hundred or more; while next door, Friday—a sunny day—showed only a bare fifty.

The "Miscellaneous" section includes all other lost property, classified under more or less obvious headings, such as suit cases, attaché cases, ladies satchels, gloves, jewellery, watches, money, and so on. There are one or two special headings; for instance "smalls," which covers any things so little that they would get lost among the other articles on the ordinary shelves and so must have special shelves to themselves. The glass eye that an absent-minded gentleman forgot one day was a "small." At the other end of the scale is the "rough" store, which possesses many of the more extraordinary items. The gem of the collection when I last visited the place was a large bricklayer's hod. There were also no less than ten folding prams. Other items noticed were, the lid of a dustbin, a large roll of rabbit-wire netting, a 14 lb. pot of paint, a housemaid's feather duster, and a road-mender's sieve, two-feet-six in diameter. On another shelf were three whisky

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bottles, tied round with string. They were empty when I saw them; yet they were still being kept for a possible claimant, so I wondered if they had been empty when found.

Then there is a section largely composed of parcels. It is a rather pathetic section; some of them are so obviously newly-made purchases, children's toys among them. There was even a large gramophone, and, of course, myriads of shopping baskets. Field-glasses come under this heading. Like umbrellas, these are a seasonable commodity; the office gets five times as many in during Derby week as at any other time.

Another section is called "sports." Though it certainly contained tennis racquets, a lacrosse stick, and golf clubs, "sport" was evidently an elastic term used to cover those things too long to go on the shelves with the parcels, for I noticed also a violin bow, a riding crop, and what looked like a length of gaspipe. Near by was a jazz-band set, the losing of which probably caused sorrow to a few but relief to many. As a contrast to this, another relic once found in a taxi was a coffin plate.

Some things are too miscellaneous to be classified at all, and have to have a "miscellaneous" section of the "Miscellaneous" to themselves. A glance at some of the file



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cards show why. One was a birdcage—without the bird. Three door-knockers were recorded on another property card, also a lizard skin; but the best card I saw was “Child’s toy goggles, milk-jug, and two oranges.” I could hardly have thought of a more miscellaneous find if I had sat down and tried to invent one.

Probably everything in the world that can possibly be left behind in a vehicle has at one time or another been left. One begins to wonder as one hears of them whether half the world is not wrong in the head. One can understand, perhaps, a gentleman pushed for time leaving behind a set of brass electrical fittings, or a model Chinese temple, or even his false teeth. One can sympathize with a lady who forgets her corsets, or even her marriage lines on the way back from the church; probably she had other things on her mind. But when a passenger omits to take with him his African tree bear asleep on the seat and doesn’t come for it till next day, one has the feeling that he is a little more than absent-minded. So, too, must have been the member of the Japanese Embassy who, some years ago, left in a casual taxi secret diplomatic papers of the utmost importance to both his own country and England; you know, “papers, the finding of which, my dear Watson, by

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a certain interested power will have the most serious consequences imaginable and plunge the whole of Europe in war." And as for the New York lady who took a taxi down to her bank specially to fetch from her safe deposit \$170,000 worth of jewellery to wear at a dance that night and then left the whole lot in the same cab on the way back, well, one feels she oughtn't to be allowed about alone. It would be fun to marry her to the gentleman who in London forgot eight large bags, each containing £100 worth of silver. Their domestic life would be as good as a music-hall turn. And what quarrels probably over a lost penny in the housekeeping accounts!

Money is always being forgotten in cabs, which seems, to me at any rate, peculiar. Funnily enough it is very frequently returned, though in some places one would imagine that the resultant rewards are a big inducement to future dishonesty. A business man in New York once had \$125,000 brought back to him by a taxi driver and gave him \$30 for his trouble, whereas a travelling European who that very same week left a mere \$500 in a taxi gave the finder \$50. Which, perhaps, shows why some business men get where they do. The record for meanness, however, is probably held by the British Post Office who, at a time when they were losing mailbags by theft at

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the rate of two a month, rewarded a taxi driver, who came upon one lying in the road and took it to a police-station, with a whole half-crown.

One of the most interesting finds was made when a cab was in process of being re-upholstered. Tucked away down behind the cushions there came to light several pieces of jewellery, worth over £2,000, which had been there for two years. That is to say, three or four thousand people had at one time or another all unwittingly sat upon a small fortune and passed on. It worries me to think that I might even have been one of them myself. They were never reclaimed—probably they had been stolen and the thief had had to get rid of them in a hurry.

When an article is claimed at the Lost Property Office its Property Card is turned up on the file, the Deposit Sheet brought out, and the owner's description and particulars of the loss have to tally with those recorded. On some people, principally old ladies, a sort of mental corkscrew has to be employed to get out of them, in the first place, even what the thing is they have lost. If the article is a parcel or attaché case the claimant must describe the contents. Sometimes the officials and all concerned get pretty embarrassed over this. People lose funny things.

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When ownership has been established, a fixed charge of  $3/6$  in the pound on value is made for jewellery, watches and money, and  $3/-$  on everything else, with a minimum of  $1/6$ . Of this charge 6d. in the pound goes to the Lost Property Office to defray office expenses. They rake in about £3,000 a year in this way and need it, too, for a staff of nearly fifty is employed. The rest of the money is the finder's reward. The charge is only fixed, however, for articles worth up to £10; over £10 the fee is such as is considered a reasonable percentage of the value by the Commissioner. Occasionally this results in argument. There is sometimes a peculiar drop in the value of a lost article as the owner travels from the insurance company's office to the Lost Property Office.

Anything unclaimed after three months is usually given to the finder, though this is not, as commonly supposed, a right. It may be sold and the fixed reward given him instead, which often causes trouble.

One hundred and sixty thousand articles were handed to the Lost Property Office in 1929. About fifty-three thousand awards were made and about sixty-four thousand were restored. Some of the articles, with particularly absent-minded owners, are old favourites and even get to be recognized by the

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officials. Quite a considerable number of people leave the article they have just reclaimed in the very bus or taxi which takes them home from the Lost Property Office. And you can't beat that!

It is unusual for England to be ahead of America in any new thing, but the introduction and employment of taxicabs was certainly an exception; for there were something over six hundred motor-cabs in London when the first ones appeared in New York in 1907. No doubt this tardiness was because America was behind Europe on the whole question of mechanically propelled vehicles; indeed, only a few years before, when motor-cars were already popular over most of England, the sight of one in many quarters of New York was the signal for a shower of epithets and even stones.

Two companies operated these early New York taxis, one using Darracqs and the other Delahayes "of a type (as the journals of the day stated) which had been popular in Paris and London for two or three years." Fifty Darracqs and thirty Delahayes were in action in October, 1907, and others followed in large shipments. The new business then expanded with the usual rapidity of New

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World ventures. By 1914, American illustrated papers, with their passion for facts and figures, were showing pictures of the earth connected to the moon by an inclined ramp with a taxi running up it. The idea (expressed underneath) was that the mileage run by taxis in a year in New York was equivalent to two trips to the moon and back. The driver of the cab shown looked pretty bored, and it was easy to guess that the second trip would have to be made by a different driver. The money spent was also calculated out and came to \$6,300,000 in the year. This figure, of course, is only rough and does not include the tip.

Taxi fares, however, were from the first extremely high compared with those of Europe. In 1911, a New Yorker came to England and took a taxi ride from his hotel, north of Oxford Street, to some point in Shaftesbury Avenue—we are not told why. The meter showed 8, and at first he thought it a bit stiff—£8 for a short ride. However, he worked it out in his head, realized that it must be 8 shillings, about two dollars, and considered it quite reasonable compared with New York. . . . He was never quite the same after they broke the existence of pennies to him, and for years afterwards merely roamed about Europe riding in taxis and working out the fares in

cents, in order to write home to the New York papers and urge that something should be done about it. He wound up one letter with the statement that "the Americans are the most supine people on earth." A phrase to be remembered, but I'm glad it was said by an American and not by me.

As a matter of fact something *was* done about it, principally by Mr. John Hertz, of Yellow Cab fame. He saw that the taxi would never establish itself unless it aimed at making taxi riding a necessity of life rather than a luxury, and after a visit to Europe he initiated in his cab companies the principle of cheaper and yet cheaper fares. The taxi which had hitherto been referred to in the humorous journals as "a contrivance for getting about—yes, getting about all a person has," became really popular with the public when a fare-cutting war began. By 1923 there were 15,000 taxis in New York alone, while to-day, out of a total of nearly a million cabs for the whole of the United States, New York possesses 28,000, of which 24,000 are on the streets practically the whole time. More than three-quarters of the New York taxis are already operated by cab companies, and slowly, but surely, the individual owner is being forced out of business. He cannot compete with organization.



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In the U.S.A., right from the beginning, the tendency has always been to the formation everywhere of big cab companies, run on highly scientific business lines. As early as 1914, a merger brought 1,200 cabs under one control in New York alone, and all the big cities to-day have their cab companies owning anything up to a thousand cabs. This compares strangely with London, whose biggest company at the moment has only just under three hundred. But the American business aim has always been to "Unite and Govern," and there is no doubt that the Transatlantic cab companies are organized with an efficiency that the British ones have never yet attained. Whether some of them, as often in the States, are not *over-organized* is another matter. The principal taxicab companies operating in New York, each with its distinguishing colour or design, are the Parmalee, the Yellow (part of General Motors), the Checker, the Paramount, and the I.T.O.A. Others are coming along all the time, often expanding from small but go-ahead "fleet-owners," anything from twenty to forty cabs, without any distinguishing marks. There are, too, fleets such as the Red-and-White, which specialize in buying up second-hand cabs, re-conditioning them, repainting to their own particular design, and getting whatever use

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is still left in them. The business methods of the large concerns, of course, vary, but here are a few general principles on which a big cab company may be run.

Apart from painting all its cabs in some easily recognizable manner, it will have a single well-advertised telephone number and a central switchboard at its headquarters connected with every rank on which it maintains cabs. A call for a taxi is passed through to the rank nearest the caller where a cab may be waiting and it is round in a couple of minutes. Except, of course, in wet weather, when the switchboard operator hangs up and plays solitaire, experience having shown that no human operators can cope with the flood of calls that rain brings; and anyway there aren't then any cabs on the ranks.

As a result of this central phone system (not used in London) the cab companies do a lot of "telephone business," i.e. supplying taxis for special work from their central garage in much the same way as a private car hire service in England. Women who are off on shopping or other expeditions are particularly good customers. Indeed, these often ask for drivers of a certain type to be sent. Tall blonds are preferred, because women seem to think they're safer—that is, better drivers.

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In an effort to capture this feminine trade one enterprising company in 1923 tried to run cabs with women drivers for women clients. But they had great difficulty at first in getting women to drive; and when they did, there was even greater difficulty in getting women to ride—the men displaying far too much interest in the new venture.

Eloping couples, too, as the head of one cab company once told the world in print, invariably use taxis, which they order by phone, apparently with some idea of concealing their intention. They can usually be detected, however, because invariably their orders are to pick up first the girl next the man, and then to drive to Hoboken. The company in question keep a specially reliable and fatherly-looking driver for this job—but it must take the edge off things a bit, when, having been bashfully asked at the church door whether he minds sharing in the romantic secret to the extent of being a witness, he greets the news with a phlegmatic, “Lady, you’re de thoid dis week!”

A great deal of attention is paid by some companies to the selection and training of their drivers, which is often carried out with all the educational and psychological adjuncts in which highly organized American industry

delights. Embryo drivers are made to do tricks with traffic-imitating apparatus as if they were Montessori school children. For instance, they are tested for "Conduct in an Emergency" by being put in a darkened room with certain levers to pull as soon as something unusual occurs, the something unusual being a loud explosion and a flash of light just behind them. Those that burst into tears and run sobbing from the room are, of course, not considered likely to make good chauffeurs. Then they are taught driving with levers and pedals in a fixed seat, and later on the streets in a dual-control car with an instructor specially chosen for offensiveness. The idea of this last is to see if the pupil gets sore easily; for irritability in a driver alienates custom. It is afterwards impressed upon him that he must at all times be clean, smart, honest, and civil. Presumably he is also told how to become big and blond. At any rate, according to the articles of the What-Service-Means-To-Us type written by vice-presidents of taxi companies in business publications, their drivers have everything but a harp and wings.

This, however, is for the taxi user to judge. That there is something in it is proved by the behaviour of smaller companies with no such

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organization, who invariably get their cabs up to look like the big fleets, and so trade on their reputation and even profit by their advertising. There is the story of a small company which did such good business by counterfeiting a big concern's cabs in every detail that it drove the latter to concentrate solely on its uncopyable phone number (we will call it Namrod 0030) which it then had painted conspicuously all over its cabs as the sole distinguishing mark. The small company's directors broke even with this by seeking out the owner of the number Namrod 0090, a washerwoman, and paying her 30 dollars a month for permission to paint her number on *their* cabs; which they did, in the corresponding positions, carefully slurring over the left hand side of the 9's loop. This worried the big company for some time till it found out the facts, whereupon it told off a man to ring up the washerwoman every five minutes, using a different voice, and ask her for a taxi. She held out a day and a night but could get no work done and so was forced to ask the telephone authorities for another number. This was given and the old one was, of course, bought out immediately by the big company, who had already taken out an option on it.

When two equally big companies come into

rivalry, however, things are a bit different. There was an elegant taxi war some years ago in one big city of the States. In this affair, specially constructed "wrecker" cars were used as tanks to damage rival cabs; tyres were slashed at night, while the slugging of opposing drivers, the beating up of fares and even smoke bombs all played a part. The city, of course, was Chicago, which should delight the average Englishman. He doesn't like to be disappointed in his home-brewed conception of Chicago. He still thinks of it as a place whose golf-links have a rule stating that one may "pick up balls found lying in casual blood."

The real pull the big companies have, however, is not so much in the selling side as in the reduction of costs. By proper organization that bugbear of taxi owners "dead mileage," i.e. time when the cab is running without a fare, and also the period when the cab is off the streets altogether, can be reduced to a minimum. One big concern at least in New York supplies its drivers with a social news bulletin showing the times of dances, parties and other functions each day so that their taxis can be on hand when they are most likely to be required. There was even invented in 1923 a device for making, by pencil lines on a paper roll inside the taximeter, a complete

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record of the cab's running, earning mileage appearing above the middle line and dead mileage below. But it meant a new roll had to be inserted every so often, and where one man can put something into a meter so can another—less advantageously to the company—and it was given up. All company's cabs are, of course, "doubled" if possible; that is, a day man starts anywhere between 4 a.m. and 8 a.m. and returns during the afternoon for the night man to take over after the cab has been swiftly washed, inspected, and "checked-up."

Central organization also greatly brings down maintenance charges. Cars are regularly cleaned and washed by experts doing nothing else—indeed, one firm in Philadelphia cut down on its washing costs by drilling special artesian wells in its garage; minor repairs are reduced to a matter of minutes; engine or gear-box breakdowns are treated by the swift substitution of a complete spare unit. There is even a line in some garages separating cabs under repair from cabs waiting to go out, and no mechanic must cross from the dirty side to the clean, and no driver from the clean to the dirty. Every minute that a cab spends in the garage is costed out in relation to time on the road, and experts are perpetually working to reduce one and increase the other.

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The tyres for the cabs may even be hired from a tyre-renting company, thus enabling calculations to be based on a fixed tyre cost; for a set of five tyres will be supplied for 75 cents per day including repair and replacement. The big companies have also all the other resources of centralization, from arbitration boards and complaint departments down to medical attendance and bonuses—all infused with that business energy in which America specializes—and yet for some reason the taxi ride, which costs 9d., or 18 cents, in London, and less in Paris, cannot be done under 30 cents in New York. Damned odd!

The above rate, too, is well below the legal maximum, since for some years the big companies have operated at cut rates in order to increase their business—and with very satisfactory results. But there are many taxis run by small concerns or owner-drivers who can only afford to work at the full charges officially laid down, namely, 20 cents for the first third of a mile and 10 cents for each subsequent third, making a 40 cent per first mile rate. The cut rate cabs ply at 15 cents the first quarter and 5 cents each subsequent quarter, making a 30 cent per first mile rate. There is no love lost between the two, and the drivers of the Twenty-Tens (from the figures conspicuously painted on the outside)



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express themselves with delightful fluency on the subject of blacklegs. Some of them have reduced the first mile rate by 5 cents to 35 cents—15 cents the first *fifth* and 5 cents each subsequent fifth—in order to qualify for the doubtful advantage of painting “15 and 5” in big letters on their cabs, the deceptive  $\frac{1}{5}$ th being, of course, extraordinarily inconspicuous. The non-combine cabs in return are referred to as “gyp” taxis, which implies mingled piracy and deceit. There are also some real “pirate” cabs which only operate down town at night. They carry no meters and live by “making a price” (a very high price) with any belated, and probably drunk, up-town passenger. They are, in a way, the descendants of the once popular “jitneys”: private cars whose owners would, chiefly during the early war days, carry passengers at a small fixed rate in competition with the trams during the “rush” hours.

As a contrast to this it might here be recorded that New York is one of the few places in the world where I have seen a man having a *free* taxi ride. There is a law forbidding unhired taxis to cruise at will in the “theatre zone,” after a certain hour at night, and to evade police enforcement of this regulation drivers will often pick up (and even pay) a loafer to sit in the cab and

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get out when the fare is secured. So if as you get into a taxi on leaving the theatre and see a seedy-looking man slip out the other side, don't apologize; it is only the "dummy" passenger.

As a rule non-combine cabs, not having the care and maintenance that centralization can give, are very decrepit; the sole reason they can exist at all is by standing two or three in a bunch like unhappy moulting hens outside hotel exits and catching the unwary visitor. If you tell a bell-hop, too, to get a taxi, he will, unless specifically instructed, bring a Twenty-Ten, because it's easier. Sometimes he brings one anyway, having got a dime from the driver, and says he couldn't get a Fifteen-Five—if he thinks you look that sort. It takes the stranger two days to discover the difference; and another two days to detect the spurious Fifteen-Fives, after which he is wise. He never quite attains, however, the attitude of mind of the true New Yorker, who will wait for hours while the Twenty-Tens lumber hopefully past. It is said that even a millionaire whose car is parked over a block away, thus necessitating the use of a taxi, will actually *walk* if a Fifteen-Five is not available, sooner than pay the higher rate of a Twenty-Ten, though he will cheerfully give a dollar bill to an elevator-attendant (short for

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“lift-boy”) for stopping at the right floor first shot.

A New York friend of mine once committed the awful gaffe of stopping a Twenty-Ten. He had enough presence of mind to apologize and wave the man on before the flag went down, but the old driver remarked sadly, “That’s O.K., sir, that’s your prerogative.” My friend was so stirred by that display of erudition and so touched by the man’s resigned manner that he hurriedly called him back and went for a long ride, most of which he didn’t want.

The younger New Yorkers are even more particular. I have waited over a quarter of an hour on Third Avenue at 58th with a couple of lads for one of the new Checker Cab Company’s taxis, then just put on the streets, to come past and take us a ride of six blocks. We must have turned down about a hundred taxis of all sorts during the wait, and could have walked there and back anyway; but we got what we wanted. Why we were so capricious I can’t recollect, but we had just left Dan Moriarty’s and it seemed a highly important point to us at the time.

Certainly those new Checker cabs were the most luxurious I had ever ridden in, even for America, where in contrast to England the enormous number of taxis and their wide

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use has made their manufacture almost an industry. But I have never patronised New York's only Rolls-Royce taxi; it was always in such great demand. Is it still in commission? There used to be another Rolls-taxi in 1927 run by a negro driver, but the Rolls-Royce firm—so runs the story—bought it up because they didn't like their aristocratic vehicle plying for mere public hire. "Really, my dear," the car, on return to its social equals probably said, fastidiously wriggling its body-work, "in these low garages where all *sorts* of common cars go, one has to be *so* careful; one's *quite* liable to catch Baby Austins."

NEW YORK being a very cosmopolitan city, its taxi drivers, of whom there are probably nearly seventy thousand, are equally varied. Not even the dark grey uniform chosen by a sartorially expert Chief of Police in person has been able to change them. As a body they are more diversified (even though twenty thousand of them are Jews of various extraction) than those of any other city in the world. They comprise representatives of every class and every race from Nordic undergraduates "working" their way through college, to Rumanian Jews who know the streets about as well as they know the language, from cheerfully aggressive Irishmen to morose American Indians, from Nigger to Dago, from Chink to Wop. Indeed, there is a story told by Samuel Merwin who hailed a taxi one wet night outside the Players' Club and asked to be driven to the Algonquin Hotel, adding peevishly from previous experience, "But I don't suppose you know where it is."

"I ought to," said the driver. "There's only three of us in all New York."

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"Only three drivers who know . . ." the fare was beginning in surprise when a red-bronze eagle-like beak with eyes that might have scanned the limitless prairies was thrust out at him, as the other replied:

"No, only three Algonquins."

Struck by the variety of types, I once inquired into the personal history of all the taxi drivers I used on one particular day. It was quite an interesting experiment. The first was a Polish Jew who had emigrated at the age of twenty-two from some unpronounceable home town full of "x's," "z's" and "v's." At first he became a driver in Chicago, but moved to New York when "some of the boys got rough." The boys' "roughness," which occurred during the taxi war, apparently consisted in the playful lads putting a couple of shots through his windscreen and subsequently setting fire to his cab, while he, I gathered, was already on the first lap of his non-stop sprint to New York. New York, he said, was great; he once took \$40 worth of tips in one week. My second fellow was American (Wop-extraction). Answering my questions, he nearly ran past a red light, learnt a lot about himself from a policeman and thereafter as we proceeded on our way discussed the matter with me in hurt tones out of the right side of his mouth. He informed me he would have

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“got a ticket” for sure (i.e. been summoned) if he hadn’t had a good witness on board. Personally, I could hardly see myself taking the witness stand against a New York traffic cop. His temper was thoroughly ruffled by the incident and I thought it better not to engage him in further talk.

The third driver came from the South and spoke in an entirely irreproducible drawl. He had, he told me, “jes’ drifted heah,” and added proudly he’d never stayed in a job longer than eleven months. He had an engaging, too engaging, manner, and offered to take me to a speak-easy on the lower East side run by a friend of his. I was sorry, but I had an engagement.

My fourth driver that day who, as I came out of the Players’ Club, seized me with all the alertness of youth, turned out to be seventy-one years old. He had been forty-four years in New York, driving horse and motor cabs, prior to which he had done his eight years with the colours in His Majesty’s Life Guards, and originally hailed from Sussex.

I met another English taxi driver some days later when with a friend, who, as I paid him off, said: “Are you two boys English?” and thereupon told us that he had been nineteen years in New York, and went *home* every three years to visit his people in

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Lancashire. Quite in the rôle of Rich Uncle Joe from the States, I should imagine; for he said he was making at least eight to ten pounds a week clear profit. He ended up by asking when we were due to return to England, and offering to meet us at our hotel and drive us to the dock for nothing, but this we were unable to fix. I felt a bit worried for some time afterwards about the 20 cent tip I had given him before learning his history; however, when anyone talks to me in the future about rich uncles in America, I shall be a little suspicious.

I only quote all the above to show the extraordinary variety of types. By way of contrast, I have just been out and spoken to the first four drivers on the nearest rank here in London. Two of them were Londoners, born and bred, one having lived in Brixton all his life; the third was an agricultural labourer in Suffolk, but having learnt driving in the Army Service Corps during the war, took up taxi work afterwards; and the fourth started life in Southampton, but getting, apparently, the travel urge, came the whole seventy miles to London on a lorry sixteen years ago and has been here ever since. All English, of course; out of ten thousand or so licensed drivers in London only fifty are foreigners.



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It is, therefore, difficult to generalize about the New York taxi driver as one can about his European brothers. One does not know whether to call him Ed or Mike or Ike or Fiorello or what. His chief characteristic, however, as far as the visitor can make out, is a sardonic friendliness, as of one social equal to another slightly less intelligent. Which must be rather disconcerting to the average Englishman. This friendly attitude is, of course, assisted by the fact that unless you definitely close the inter-communicating window behind the driver and so shut yourself off from him, he and you are to all intents both inside the cab. Many a stranger, I should imagine, during what he thought was a very private conversation with a lady, has been sadly shaken by a kindly, "Say, you two's getting togedder fine; wouldn'tja like de windy shut."

Mr. Frank Swinnerton tells a delightful story of how when leaving a Cincinatti hotel in a taxi a bell-boy ran after him with a souvenir he had left in his room. As the boy seemed very impressed with it Mr. Swinnerton presented it to him as a gift and drove off. After a hundred yards the taxi stopped and the driver leaning back into the cab said in a puzzled tone, "Say, I *still* can't figure out what it was you gave that guy?"

In England, of course, conversation with

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the driver is impossible. If you even want to change your destination you either have to struggle with a dictaphone or voice-pipe or else hang out of the door, shrieking into the gale, till a passing bus taps you on the sconce and your destination is automatically changed to the nearest hospital. It is the window which make the New York driver so friendly.

Through this window and without preliminary invitation by myself, I have at different times listened to a brief and wonderfully interesting description of Broadway's sights, been asked for a cigarette, requested to give an account of English taxis, heard a life history (at 30 cents the mile) and been given a short resumé of the various bribes which certain traffic policemen will take for letting cabs ply in forbidden areas. (I remember nothing of this except that it was fifty cents to the officer on duty at a private car entrance to one of the big railway termini for looking the other way when an empty cab saw a chance to nip in and pick up a fare.)

One humorist also told me he had been a taxi driver in Boston in 1925 when the police (or else one of Boston's innumerable societies for the improvement of morals—other people's morals) enacted that no taxi driver was to take a "drunk" anywhere else but home.

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Only a city with such a queer sense of values as Boston could thus empower every casual taxi man to decide what was and was not drunkenness, a point over which even doctors often disagree. My friend told me he had made a small fortune by "being persuaded" *not* to take every single night fare straight home. Either the fare really was drunk and naturally wanted to stay out longer, or else he was sober but feared the resultant implication of his enforced return to his domestic circle.

Interesting though these conversations were, however, as a general rule I failed to get the right sort of kick out of light chit-chat with a man who holds your life in his hands and who in his anxiety to drive home a dialectic point is quite liable to forget what else he's doing and pile you up on a refuge instead. I would have shut the connecting window every time—only it always seemed to me such an unnecessarily rude and pointed thing to do to a friendly acquaintance. New Yorkers, however, don't care: they even slam it shut if the fellow smokes Chesterfields when they prefer Luckies.

During these conversations, and at other times, I picked up a little of the special slang commonly used by New York drivers. Taxi work is often referred to as "hacking"; the

driver is a "hack driver." "Rolling up a bill" is the good old universal game of running up a good total on the clock by taking a stranger a long way round. To drive "stick-up" is to drive without pulling the flag down, having made a flat-rate with your passenger; this too is often a means of defrauding the fleet-owner for whom you are driving. A train coming into a station and setting free fares for taxis is said to "break." "Rolling the tracks" is an expression denoting cruising late at night along the tram lines to pick up fares who have missed the last one. To "play" a certain area or rank means to work in that area, or on that rank. "Bucking the lines" is waiting on a rank with a high-rate clock rather than cruising as the low-rate cabs mostly do, and a "bucker" means generally a Twenty-Ten owner-driver. "A closed stand" is a rank where the regular frequenters keep out strange drivers by concerted hostility. Being "bawled out" means being told off by a policeman for some error, but this is not peculiarly taxi slang; for instance, it could also be used if an irate American reader wrote to tell me that I've got some of the above expressions wrong. A bit of argot, however, that *does* belong definitely to taxi men is of the use of the English word "pound," correctly applied,

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too, to five dollars. It is never employed by anybody else and I don't know how it came about; for many other Americans hardly know just how much a pound is.

As a driver, as well as a conversationalist, Ed of New York has points. He gives one the idea that he is a genius hampered by absurd traffic regulations, that if it weren't for cops and lights he'd show you DRIVING. As it is he doesn't do so badly. He certainly makes good time when he gets the chance. He is at his best, I think, in side-streets which have been temporarily placarded by the Police Department as "Street Closed for Play." He *does* play; and when you come to think of it the notice doesn't specify that it is only for children. His greatest fault is an inability to resist weaving in and out of the "Elevated Railway" pillars in his anxiety to make headway; and this more than any trick of French or Italian drivers is calculated to bring all one's internal arrangements up into the larynx. Thank Heaven the "L" only runs down certain avenues.

Occasionally he lets his personality get too strong for his driving sense. Quite recently a friend of mine was driving in a taxi in Central Park, and approaching a V-shaped intersection, he saw another taxi coming up rapidly on his right on the converging arm. According to

navigation rules, when the bearing of two converging vessels does not change, collision is inevitable, and the bearing of this other cab certainly was *not* changing. They whirled closer and closer, my friend gazing in fascinated horror upon his fate, till at the last split second the other cab sheered off with a screeching of brakes. The first driver carried serenely on over the crossing, and then leaning through the window to my friend remarked calmly and conversationally, "I *knew* that sonovabitch hadn't any guts."

There is, of course, a great difference—and this must be kept clearly in mind—between owner-drivers and the men employed by the big cab companies, following on the accepted fact that most things run by private enterprise in New York are good, and most things done municipally are poor; for whereas the owner-driver is answerable to no one but the police, the journeyman driver has also to satisfy his employers. As pointed out in the last chapter, it is part of the sales-policy of the big Checker, Yellow, and other cab companies to maintain as far as possible cheap and clean cabs and safe and polite drivers, and they are very strict in ensuring these points, even down to putting their own inspectors on the streets to check up on speeding, cheating, running engine unneces-

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sarily, sitting in the cab, and so on. A company running a thousand cabs will have as many as thirty-five of these supervisors. Where one complains to the police in London, one complains, for results, direct to the employers in New York.

Naturally their drivers are well aware of this. They have a good job and in general are out to keep it. A New York journeyman driver works either on a salary of twenty to thirty dollars a week with a system of bonuses; or else on a 40% commission. As the takings of a cab may be from ten to fifteen dollars per half-day he doesn't do badly; for there are tips on top of that. Contrary to the Englishman's belief that the New York driver will pull a gun, if not given a large tip, there are some who do not even argue, complain or hint. I once paid a 75 cent fare with a dollar bill and the driver, so I discovered afterwards, returned the quarter change to a friend with me, who inadvertently took it. Yet the man made no sign, said thank you, politely, and drove off. Anywhere else it would have taken a couple of policemen to put the thing straight; yet in New York there was no row at all—except when I subsequently tried to get my quarter back off my friend.

The owner-drivers, on the other hand, are very naturally a mixed lot. Some are as good

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as any journeyman driver and take a pride in their job; others possess old and dirty cabs, think double when you ask what's on the clock, possess an inadequate knowledge of New York, and in general are just in the game for what they can grab off. Taxi drivers comprise all sorts from college-educated youths down to gunmen and toughs of all kinds; but it is in the ranks of the owner-drivers rather than among the more carefully selected journeymen that you must look if you want to find the gunman or the crook that the foreigner likes to imagine is the typical New York driver. It is not difficult for anyone to get a hack licence, whatever his lack of knowledge and qualifications, and however bad his criminal record, provided he knows the ropes and has a few bills in his palm. But discussion of this belongs to the chapter on Taxis and Crime.



THE first thing that must be put on record about the Paris taxis is that they alone of any taxi cabs in the world have actually helped to preserve their city from enemy occupation. On the night of the 7th September, 1914, by order of General Galliéni, Governor of Paris, every taxicab in the city was suddenly commandeered. On the ranks, outside cafés, in the streets, when the occupants were politely requested to get out "*pour la France,*" every cab was taken, and its driver told to fill up with petrol and report to a certain rendezvous, where soldiers of the 7th Division in battle order were waiting. A few hours later a long line of taxis, old and new, each crammed with *poilus*, and with but one dim rear light to guide the one behind, were stealing silently along the dark road from Gagny to Nanteuil. To General Maunoury's tired VIth Army engaged in a desperately uneven contest with Von Kluck on the Ourcq, came on the morning of the 8th this welcome reinforcement. The Germans retreated and Paris was saved.

This is as it should be; a taxi is such an essential feature of any metropolis that it is only right it should share in the honour of its defence. The last of these famous taxis is preserved, and justly, in the *Invalides* and emerges now and then to take part in processions and doubtless to make a bit of a nuisance of itself telling the other young upstart taxis what it did in the Great War.

Paris taxi history possesses another chapter of interest. In 1924 there appeared on the streets sixty single-seater taxis, which proved an instantaneous success and were soon followed by others. They were four-cylinder Peugeot "Quadrillettes" and possessed one seat, one door, and space for a small amount of luggage. They did no night work, and their tariff was fixed at half that of the ordinary taxi. Besides replacing the rather unattractive taxi-sidecar, their aim was principally to capture the "1st Class" section of the bus and train passenger traffic. This to a large extent they did, and became so popular that the profits on six months' operations were as high as those of the four-seater taxis.

But early in 1925 their drivers went on strike and as a result fares had to be increased. This killed the business at once; the difference in tariff became so slight that it was no longer worth the public's while to

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wait for the cheaper cab. Before the end of the year the single-seaters were no more.

The present-day taxis of Paris do not on the whole compare very favourably with those of London, because they vary so widely. London taxis (at any rate till 1929 began to see the new type) are much of a muchness: but in Paris you may get something with wobbly wheels, moth-eaten upholstery and *strapontins* which have months ago become a primitive practical joke, or you may get what is apparently a stockbroker's private car. You need not, however, in Paris pick the first cab off the rank, you can walk along and choose, and even if the one you want is tightly wedged in, he has "bumpers," which enable him to buffet back and forth, sending ripples up and down the line, behind and in front, till he has cleared a space to turn out. Indeed, I once watched the Rue Royale rank for half an hour, during which time the third cab in line was hired four times before either of those in front of it, and then the second went off before the first, who seemed by then pretty sore. This arbitrary exercising of your recognized right may make you a trifle unpopular, but it is nothing to the insurrection which breaks out if you try to take any but the first in London.

Paris taxis are cheaper than London ones—

even taking count of the fact that to the Frenchman the franc means more than 2d.—and the result is that they are widely used. A whole section of Paris, corresponding roughly to the English lower middle class, takes taxis as a regular thing. I know the proprietor of a tiny restaurant in the Rue Boissy d'Anglas whose home is but one room over the restaurant run by himself and his wife. Their occasional evening relaxation after working hours is to go up to Montmartre for a *demie* or so at one of the bourgeois and un-Anglo-Saxon cafés, and they always take a taxi there and back, although the *Nord-Sud* Underground runs almost from door to door. His English counterpart has the flag clicked down for him barely half-a-dozen times a year.

But it remains to be seen whether this particular section of the taxi-using public of Paris will not perhaps vanish in the same way as the one-seaters' public did, for on 1st January, 1930, all taxi fares in Paris were increased by 75%—an augmentation large enough to scare off all but the most confirmed or opulent adherents. That the Parisian drivers themselves think that this may happen is obvious from the fact that they had a twenty-four-hour protest strike against the new conditions of work. It is probably the only case on record of a strike by taxi men

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against increased hiring, and it certainly shows that the French driver has long realized a truth that his British brother has not yet assimilated—namely that the first essential for the taxi trade is a taxi-using public.

It should, in fairness, be mentioned that one of the reasons for the large number of taxis in Paris as compared with London (there are about twice as many) is that London's transport facilities—tube, bus, tram—are immeasurably superior. Paris, for a capital city, is very poorly served and the difficulties of getting about easily are very great, with the result that taxis there are almost as much a necessity as they are a luxury in London.

The regulations governing taxis in Paris are not so strict as those in London, though framed on the same lines. There is (or was), however, a system, unknown in England, by which a driver, returning after work to his garage, need only accept passengers for destinations not more than 500 metres off his route. The whereabouts of his garage is indicated by a *gaine*, a leather sheath, placed over the flag, also by a system of coloured lights, blue for the N.E. district, red for the West, green the Rive Gauche, and yellow the Centre and North. A *gaine noire*, which may only be used at certain hours, indicates that the driver is not playing at all, fed-up, flag up, and far

from home. Other regulations state that brutality and *grossièreté* (a lovely word which really only means rudeness as distinct from mere incivility or repartee) on the part of drivers will be severely repressed; while, as in England, if asked to wait while his fare descends, the chauffeur can demand payment to date and a reasonable deposit, particularly when required to wait (so the regulations naïvely put it) "outside establishments where it is notorious that there exist several issues." Someone was obviously badly had several times.

The Paris taxis, like those of New York, have no additional charge for extra persons; but they evidently rely on making a bit out of baggage; for I once counted *six* large steamer trunks piled on one tottering taxi roof. Between 11 p.m. and 6-30 a.m. an increased night tariff is in force. Nearly all this night business is in the hands of Russian *émigrés* (many ex-officers of the Imperial Army among them) struggling to make a living and attracted by the higher earnings. As a matter of fact a very large proportion of the total of Parisian drivers is foreign, and of the French ones the majority are provincials, thrifty Normans and Bretons out for quick fortunes. Of the 17,000 or so taxis in Paris less than 25% are owned by drivers; most of the business is

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in the hands of big companies, some of which own two or three thousand cabs.

This brings us to the Parisian taxi driver himself, the legend of whose reckless driving is notorious all over England—and at the same time is quite a fallacious one. Personally, I do not consider that Henri, the Parisian taxi man drives dangerously at all. He only *looks* as if he does to Anglo-Saxon eyes. The perils of a ride in a French taxi are, like the hectic pleasures of Montmartre, largely a myth. Coming, as we generally do, to Paris first of the Continental cities, our minds are still full of our steady, uninspired, comparatively cautious English driving, and we do not realize that French ideas of getting about in traffic are fundamentally different from ours.

First and foremost in France it is the pedestrian's *duty* to keep out of the way of traffic. He is less than the dust beneath Citroën wheels—very often literally. This at once makes the driver's job much easier. To the pedestrian, of course, it means that Paris traffic dodging bears about the same relation to the London game as war does to manœuvres. In London you can cross the road anywhere and the traffic will more or less avoid you. If it doesn't you can summon the driver responsible when you come out of hospital. In Paris—unless you are a nursemaid

with a pram and therefore sacred in a country of declining birth-rate—the risk is yours if you cross at any other place than the recognized ones, and even there you have to be fairly nippy. And if you lose out anywhere it is quite usual for the man whom you have, so to speak, “delayed,” to summon you—or your heirs—for damage to radiator and nerves. This pleasant convention, therefore, enables the Parisian taxi driver to give his whole mind to the other traffic and to ignore anything that hasn’t got wheels on it.

Secondly, the Frenchman—as those who saw French transport in the war will remember—rarely gives a damn for the machinery or vehicle under him. George of London, aiming to avoid *possibility* of accident, handles his cab carefully; Henri of Paris ignores his cab and only avoids accidents when they are actually *probable*, which he inevitably does at the expense of his engine and tyres. The result is that he takes no thought for the morrow, drives as fast as ever he can, and slows up at the last minute with all brakes on and pistons thudding. His brakes, he feels, are part of the car, to be used at all times, and not only in emergency. When he does meet an emergency the sight is said to bring tears of joy to the eyes of rubber shareholders.

So also with the horn. Henri just loves his



horn. That, too, he knows is made to be used; indeed it is often the first part of the car to wear out. At Hyde Park Corner with its seventy thousand vehicles a day, you may wait five minutes and never hear a single toot; anywhere in Paris the din is almost continuous, the Place du Havre perhaps scoring a "possible." This is not, however, done out of sheer cussedness: there is a method in the pandemonium. It is because at corners the Frenchman drives by ear, whereas the Englishman drives by sight, slowing down till he can *see* that nothing is coming. With true French logic Henri says, "Why should I put myself out to slow down at a corner when nothing is near, any more than I should do in an empty street?" So he sounds his horn joyously and breathlessly as he approaches any danger spot. If he does hear another man doing the same, he then slows imperceptibly and prepares with great tenseness to handle a crisis. If he doesn't hear another horn, he beats straight ahead, probably increasing speed from sheer triumph at having the corner to himself. To his uninitiated Anglo-Saxon fare, hat in hand and heart in mouth on the back seat, this is barely distinguishable from suicide. It is on record that a taxi once went at midday from the Madeleine to the Gare de Lyon in twelve minutes, but it is only fair to add that this was

on May 1st, when few other taxis and no buses were working.

Realizing all this, one must admit that French taxi drivers on the whole drive very well after their standards. The way they can manipulate their vehicles at high speed without losing a yard or a second and with nothing more serious than a few pedestrians nearly *écrasés* is quite marvellous. The number of real taxi accidents in Paris is not excessive, which is just as well for all concerned, when you consider the amount of emotional explanation and abuse that springs from a single dented mudguard. But till you realize the French method, it all seems revolutionary to our ideas. I once discussed the subject with a French taxi man and was staggered to hear that the English are the worst drivers in the world. "They march," he said, "at a slowness, my God, at a slowness; they have it always in the head to avoid the collision, they conduct the carriage as if pedestrians were worth the trouble and, see you, monsieur, thing formidable, they never horn!"

Even though I may thus have dispelled from your mind the legend imbibed at your mother's knee that a Parisian taxi man drives dangerously—and as a matter of fact a trip in an Italian taxi will convince you sooner than anything else—it is by no means to say

that Henri is a good driver. He is far too inconsiderate of others; and indeed he is the bane of the Prefect of Police in the latter's attempts to control the traffic situation, largely because he ignores, as far as possible, all regulations. The author of a little handbook for the *Edition Aldine* called "*L'Art de Circuler dans Paris*"—and it *is* an art, too—puts it very sweetly in comparison between London and Paris traffic. He admits that our traffic is very well organized, but adds that "*il faut tenir compte du caractère anglais qui se lie à tous les règlements, alors que notre caractère national nous incite à ne pas nous préoccuper des imitations et des conseils donnés par l'autorité.*" The suggestion that the publication by the authorities of any instructions regarding the traffic is a direct challenge to Henri not to bother about them, is quite in keeping with the French tradition of *Liberté*.

Going on to the question of tips, as a general rule Parisian taxi drivers accept complacently a ten per cent. *benefice* provided you do not have the appearance of a "*poire*" off whom, of course, it is a sacred duty to France to lift as much as possible. Naturally, if you arrive at the *Gare du Nord* with a walking stick, a pipe, *The Times* and a lot of shiny baggage, it is asking too much of Henri, and he will respond by asking too much of you. Strangers are

made to be taken in, though I will admit the Parisian taxi man is more brazen and devoid of pity than any other I know. And when in winter time he swathes himself in shaggy fur he induces an inferiority complex right away. On my first visit to Paris many years ago the driver of my taxi, upon arrival at my hotel, explained to me with a great wealth of plausible detail that all taximeter fares were by recent decree of the *Préfecture* to be double that shown on the clock. I can only suppose I looked like it to him; but it rather hurt my vanity and there was a scene.

The accepted line of action for the shy stranger who wishes to avoid his second Scene (the first of course having been with the porter at the station) is to depart rapidly into his hotel and tell the hall porter to pay the taxi. The Scene will still take place all right because Henri will be left in the same pettish frame of mind as the angler who sees a big one get away; but someone who knows both him and his language will be having the Scene with him, which is quite another matter from his point of view.

From his own countrymen and from habitués Henri will even take a tip smaller than ten per cent. quite cheerfully. Unlike George, his London brother, he is content with small but quick profits, knowing that he has the

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patronage of a large, and not too well-off class, whose English equivalent still only takes taxis on special occasions. His clients may count sous, but at least they use taxis, and instinctively he avoids killing the goose. Of course, if he gets a quite negligible *pourboire* he may think it worth his while to enter upon terrific recrimination, but as his fare nearly always gives as good as he gets it doesn't lead anywhere. The air is thick with "*Bandit ! Assassin ! Fiche-moi la paix, espèce de s—— !*" and so on, but it dies down as quickly as a film storm and with as little effect ; leaving both participants unscathed, feeling much better, and almost friendly. In England, of course, if ever a row reached such proportions, it wouldn't end anywhere this side of a police court.

Not all the language used is ferocious. Two drivers will sometimes slang each other for minutes without coming to blows, till as a culminating insult one will snarl out "*What intelligence !*" The other, going white with passion, will retort "*Badly brought up !*" and they will be at each other's throats. An amusingly cutting retort, invariably made by the filthy, unshaven owner of a jig-saw taxi to the resplendent chauffeur of a private saloon car, is "*Domestique !*"

Henri's presence of mind, sharpened as it

is, no doubt, by his method of driving, is particularly acute in verbal warfare. Nowhere, however, is it better illustrated than in the case of the taxi man with a young lady as fare who was suddenly stopped by a gendarme for furious driving. Pointing at once to a cab ahead Henri cried urgently, "But madame's husband is in that taxi running away with another woman," and the chivalrous gendarme, with a salute of sympathetic understanding towards madame, at once waved the cab onward with a: "After him then swiftly, *mon vieux!*" and even held up other and more law-abiding traffic to facilitate pursuit. This, of course, could only have happened in romantic Paris.

Take him on the whole and his manners apart, Henri is an impetuous and egotistical driver, but a clever one. His vehicle may bear dishonourable scars from every street junction in the city, but they are only scars; his serious accidents are few, and those mostly attributable to wet weather skids; indeed, the percentage of fatal mishaps is proportionally smaller in Paris than in London; for it must be remembered that Paris with half London's population has about twice the number of taxis. Henri is also independent and aggressive, but shrewd, for he makes his living by many fares at small profits. His aggressiveness

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is to prove his independence; and the fact that he never lets his independence interfere with business goes to prove his shrewdness. I have come across New York taxi drivers and even English ones who, after a passage of arms about the size of the tip, have refused to take it; but if Henri ever did that I think the effect on me would be about the same as if I had strolled across his bows in the Place de la Concorde.

WITHOUT a shadow of doubt it is the Italian taxi man who holds the All-Europe Championship for Dangerous Driving;\* for, however one may feel about Henri, one has to admit that he does go upon some definite method. Not so Mario of Rome. He drives at the same speed as his French brother and with the same continuous horn-sounding anywhere near a corner, but there is this basic difference, he doesn't listen for other drivers' warnings. Where the Englishman drives by eye and the Frenchman by ear, the Italian drives by light of nature and possibly a child-like trust in his patron saint. For all he cares he is alone in the world; for him the year's at the spring, the day's at the morn, and he feels like singing. As often as not he does sing. Neither possibility of accident nor probability of accident worry him; he reserves his energies for imminence of accident. That anything

\* The World Championship is, I understand, held by the Malay drivers of Singapore.



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so jarring as a collision could take place does not strike him till it is occurring—or has occurred.

For the rest, Mario drives fast for the love of it—and because notices abound, enjoining him to go “at the speed of a man.” He sounds his horn because the noise pleases him—and because it has the most aggressive note of any horn I know. And though he has the usual Continental disregard for his machinery, his confidence is less justifiable than that of Henri—if not entirely misplaced. Indeed, Rome is the only town I can recall where, on stepping into a vehicle with all my luggage outside the Stazione Centrale, the axle abruptly cracked underneath the weight, and at the same time a door fell off, a truly Puckish touch this last. Latterly, however, one is glad to notice a gradual introduction of more up-to-date vehicles. There is an increasing fleet of 12-h.p. Fiats and occasional privately owned taxis of surpassing elegance can be found. The days dear to archæologists, when one felt that any minute one might discover scribbling by Horace or the younger Pliny on the taxi window-frames, are fast passing. *Eheu fugaces*, as Horace himself did once scribble.

The Italian, I am afraid, has not the temperament necessary for a good taxi driver. A

man to whom the general public entrusts life and limb and luggage should put the safe handling of his fares and their transport in moderate comfort to their destination above other considerations; but this Mario seems psychologically unable to do. In the first place he hates being overtaken by any rival and looks upon it as a personal insult; secondly, he appears to have standing feuds, if not vendettas, with half a dozen drivers and probably with a *Guardia Metropolitana* or so as well; and thirdly, in his mind, vituperation of and argument with enemies is one of the most important functions of life. I don't suppose I am alone in remembering myself crouched terror-stricken in an Italian taxi, while my driver, both hands off the wheel and raised to Heaven, leant out of the side of his wildly careering vehicle and told a rival exactly what he thought of him for trying to overtake.

I have forgotten to add here—but you will have no difficulty in remembering it in Rome—that many of the streets are very narrow and often in ill-repair, and that the rule of the road is left to the discretion and alertness of individual drivers. One good thing is that at last trams have been abolished from the centre of the city and replaced by buses. As a bus can only carry a third of the

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number of passengers that a tram did, the result has been a period of prosperity for the taxi trade.

Financially, the Roman taxi drivers are highly tenacious of their dues, but not, you feel, so much for the sake of the actual money involved, as for the principle of the thing. In this they resemble the old men in the Forum and other show places, who for some infinitesimal service, such as pointing out a *graffito* to the tourist, insist upon remuneration as a prescriptive right, but are invariably satisfied with even a few centesimi—about  $\frac{1}{4}$ d. This characteristic is no doubt responsible for the fact that the various charges in the Roman taxi's tariff are more involved than those of any other capital. Mario apparently spends all his spare time on the rank in thinking up things which he may conceivably be asked to do, but which he considers are outside his province as a pure and simple driver, and should obviously, therefore, be charged as "extras." For instance, at the present time in Rome there is, first, the usual extra—one lira—for each person in the cab above three. Then there are the additional charges for luggage; and these are all graded from handbags at 50 centesimi up to a trunk at 5 lire. Next there are extra charges of one lira if the taxi is hired between 10 p.m. and midnight, 2 lire if hired

between midnight and six a.m., and 2 lire if the cab is taken on to the Pincio Hill, into the grounds of the Villa Corsini, or other specified places. Finally, if the cab is dismissed between the old *Octroi* boundary and the new, that part of the fare for the distance from the old boundary outwards is double; *but*, it is enacted that the taxi driver has to tell his passenger *when* he is crossing the boundary. As he generally does this by a backward jerk of the head and a short sharp shout, it invariably sounds like anything, from a friendly directing of his fare's attention to a near-by café or passing damsel, down to an untranslatable comment on an overtaking rival. Which ultimately tends to confusion, so that it is not surprising that Baedeker, unconsciously humorous as always, selects this point in his list of taxi rules to interpolate "Whenever a dispute arises call the nearest policeman." The Italian for "taxi" is *automobile pubblico e tassàmetro*, but as you never get time in an Italian dispute to say anything that length, you usually refer to it as "taxi" and trust to luck.

The tip at the end of the journey—despite Mussolini "uplift" and other bunk—is naturally looked upon as an inalienable right. That is to say, if you are a gentleman you tip over and above the usual 10% to avoid

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scenes. I have often divided my prepared gratuity into three, something after the manner adopted in Austrian restaurants. One I give with the fare, one to check the resultant flow of protest, and one, in coppers, largely to ensure a peaceful retreat while they are being counted over. The stranger usually over-tips the Italian taxi driver, for the simple reason that more often than not he looks like an ex-member of the Camorra, expelled from his party for being too rough. But in spite of his appearance Mario is a cheerful rogue, full of good spirits, and I don't care how often I sit behind him—as long as it's not in his taxi.

The taxis and drivers of Berlin offer as big a contrast to those of Rome as any in Europe. The taxis, as one might suppose from knowledge of the German character, are so business-like and serviceable, their drivers so official and polite. Both radiate efficiency. The cabs, of which there are nine thousand, or a thousand more than London has, are in general very smart and clean and they all have a band of alternate black and white squares round the saloon (faintly reminiscent of the New York Checker Cab Company's vehicles), so that the "Herr-in-the-street-to-take-a-taxicab-intending" may be able to pick it out at once, without error

or loss of time. Soon they are all to be painted exactly alike all over. Then each cab, like every other motor vehicle, must be fitted with an indicator to explain the driver's ideas about turning to anybody behind. This consists of a pair of concealed arrows about ten inches long, one on either side of the windscreen, which can be raised into view when necessary by two switches on the dash board, and at night illuminated at the same time with a red glow. A year or so ago there were also special taxis for luggage only: if you arrived at a station with more than 100 kilos of personal effects you went on in state in one kind of taxi and your baggage followed in another. Efficiency can do no more.

About the time of the cheap single-seater taxi in Paris, Berlin possessed a counterpart in a vehicle called a "cyclonette," which was a queer-looking lightly-built cab with only three wheels. It operated at a 25% cheaper fare. Ordinary two-seaters were also introduced, theoretically at any rate, in May, 1925; while in 1929 a new type of three-wheel taxi called D.K.W. was proposed and actually passed. It had two rear wheels and one front wheel under the engine from which it was directly driven by a chain. It had room for four people behind and one by the driver,

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was reputed to attain a speed of 35 miles per hour, and cost only £158. Altogether a revolution in taxi design. London, more conservative, is not likely for some while yet to sanction any type of cab with less than four wheels.

The Berlin driver is no whit less efficient than his vehicle. To begin with, the authorities have put him into uniform, and he is very smart to look at. He is extremely polite, invariably has change, and rarely complains of the size of the tip. Indeed, it is quite common to find a driver refusing any addition to the fare—very probably because he is a student. As a type the taxi driver has a reputation for back-answering, not his passenger but other drivers; it is called, delightfully, *mütterwitz* (mother-wit), which makes it seem much more innocent than it probably really is. On the occasions when I have heard two London drivers pointing out defects in each other's character and upbringing, it has sounded far more like "father's wit."

Candidates for taxi driving in Berlin are well and conscientiously tested—somewhat on the lines of the big American cab companies, with dual-control cabs, purposely rude and offensive instructors and so on. In the Berlin Psychological Institute there is a peculiar

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machine for testing chauffeurs' nerves with a driving wheel, a movable indicator working over a map of imaginary streets, and other complicated contraptions for permitting the pupil to deal with crises without incurring the full penalty of an error of judgment.

Unlike other Continental towns, Berlin has never gone in for women taxi drivers. The first woman owner-driver in Berlin did not make her appearance till February, 1929, and as far as I know there have been no others since. Even Constantinople had one before that.

But perhaps the Berlin driver's chief claim to fame must be his knowledge of local topography, for there can hardly be another capital which offers so many confusions to the taxi man. London would be child's play after Berlin, while New York's numbered streets would be just a paradise. For Berlin has grown very rapidly, absorbing a number of important suburbs, with the result that to begin with there are in the city to-day no fewer than 28 Berliner Streets, 23 Kaiser Streets, 23 Mittel Streets, 20 Bismarck Streets, and other common names in proportion. Further, the Kaiser Wilhelm Street during its passage across the city changes its name seven times! Chausse Street suddenly becomes Mueller Street for no reason at all and in the



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very middle of a block; while Friedrich Street turns at one point at right angles, the continuation in a straight line being another street altogether. Few towns can parallel this confusion.\*

Another example of the efficiency of Berlin taxi drivers is the way more and more of them are definitely setting out to become linguists in order to capture more foreign tourist traffic. Drivers who can speak English or French or both, and wearing a red armlet to denote this fact, are now quite a common feature of the streets. There were nearly a hundred of these early in 1930, most of whom had studied several months and passed an examination. About ten candidates per week are regularly examined. This is an accomplishment that the London taxi driver might well take up with advantage.

Recently, too, an enterprising Berlin cab company equipped its vehicles with taximeters which issued a printed receipt at the end of the ride; and when patrons had collected a pound's worth of these, a five per cent. rebate was given. This was apparently designed to attract male clients: to attract

\* New York, however, possesses the crowning example of street confusion. In that city there is actually a building which is bounded on two sides by one street and on one side by two streets. The acquisition of this knowledge, in the form of a bet, cost me a dollar, for which sum I am prepared to pass it on!

female clients every driver was armed with an umbrella and instructions to see feminine fares across the pavement on wet days.

Berliners are, on the whole, very proud of their taxicabs: it is one of the things they ask you about first and which the visitor is invariably expected to praise in a letter to the Press—like saying, “The London police are wonderful.” Unfortunately, when Berliners come over to London their pride often takes the form of condemning the London taxicabs. Only a bare two months ago a journalist from a leading Berlin paper, travelling in London, wrote a long article denouncing them as aged and shaky, and the drivers as dishonest. His accusation of shakiness, at any rate, lost much of its point because in the same paper, but three days after his complaint had appeared, there was printed the story of an unfortunate man who, while travelling in a German taxicab, was so badly jolted that he broke several ribs and died on the way to hospital. London taxicabs have never equalled that achievement.

Taxicabs being so common a feature of the streets and wearing so to speak, such an innocent look, have naturally had considerable acquaintanceship with crime. Criminal and detective alike make use of them to mask their purposes. A taxi can wait about at queer times and places without attracting unwelcome attention, and from its similarity to its brothers it is both difficult to follow or trace, and inconspicuous in pursuit. A taxicab's number never seems to be taken, not even by that clever bystander who always appears later to have popped up and taken the number of a suspicious-looking private car. (Personally, a car would have to stand on its head before it would occur to *me* to take its number—and then I'd never remember it.) So it is quite natural that, more than most other vehicles, have taxicabs been mixed up in certain types of shady business. Indeed, one simply never reads that "the thieves employed a bus," or "escaped in a waiting tram."

All this is, of course, no reflection on the taxi driver—at any rate in London. He is not criminal by nature, and most of his wrong-doing is mere contravention of the various cab regulations. In the old days, I believe, he used occasionally to be pretty good at defrauding either his passengers or his employers, particularly when meters were not so knave-proof as they are now. A dishonest driver could often tickle up another 6d. or so by rattling the clock in a certain manner, and there was, too, a trick with a penny on the old-fashioned meters which made them stop registering altogether; thus the journeyman driver could make a bargain with his fare to receive 10/- for a 15/- run and yet show his employer only 8d. taken on the clock. Sometimes, when the front and back wheels of the cab were different sizes, drivers have been caught, before starting their day's work, changing over the meter-driving wheel to their advantage or tampering with the star-wheel gear fitted on the front axle. And once in Paris, many years ago, where meters were run off the gear box, the chauffeur of a cab told to wait for half an hour, actually jacked up the axle, started the engine, and gaily ran up a stationary mileage for the hirer to pay later. In fairness to English drivers though, one must add that this little

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dodge was solely of Parisian origin and never imported here. The Parisian driver also had, and still has, a pleasant little way, when hailed by innocent-looking foreigners during the day-time, of setting his meter to register at the increased night tariff. And occasionally, for a longish run, he can jiggle his clock to start unobtrusively at eleven francs instead of one. He finds this very successful with returning revellers, who are rarely so self-confident as to point out a mistake of that particular nature.

But nowadays, in London, there are very few meter frauds or similar deceits practised. Even so, they are small offences and not real crime. As explained in an earlier chapter the London driver is far too carefully selected to be likely to be a criminal, and too carefully supervised to make it either possible or worth while becoming one. Indeed, should the police have any suspicion that a taxi driver is even associating with men of a criminal class they will first warn him and then may take his licence away. So apart from breaches of the hackney carriage and traffic laws, particularly that against loitering—on which he is always taking a chance in the way of business—the worst charge against the taxi man is probably that of being drunk in charge of his vehicle, and even here only about

twenty per cent. of the summonses result in convictions. The driver who is said to have "got in with a bad lot" generally does nothing much worse than gamble in certain shelters or in little so-called "clubs" down side streets, and so by being lazy and quarrelsome makes himself a nuisance to other drivers; and there is nothing really heinous there. But he is very often employed in an innocent manner by criminals, and if he has any suspicions it is sometimes unwise to voice them before, and often too late afterwards. Generally, however, he has no suspicions; for a taxi man has some pretty queer jobs at times; moreover, his innocence is the criminals' strongest weapon, and they are careful to preserve its strength. Two well-dressed men once took a taxi to a house, opened the door with a latchkey, came out again with three suitcases and drove off to a station. How was the driver to know it wasn't their house? A safe has even been stolen from an office and lifted into a taxicab in broad daylight, with a crowd standing round giving helpful advice. Had it been a private car instead of an innocuous taxicab, our friend, the clever bystander, would have handed its number in at the police station before they'd gone a hundred yards.

Of course, it often happens that something

does arouse the driver's suspicions, and many subsequent arrests have been made because the taximan took a note of the appearance of the suspected fare or the address to which he took him, or in some cases drove him direct to a police station. This always appears in the paper as "Taxi Man Turns Detective." On one occasion a driver was led to suspect something wrong because, as he put it, "a woman gave him a big tip."

This sounds very unflattering to feminine taxi-users, but there is something in it. There is a type of cheap crook, male and female, who inveigle some fool, fuddled with drink, into a taxi and go through his pockets. This done, they descend quickly and tell the driver to take their friend "who isn't quite himself," to some fictitious address, giving him a big tip for his trouble. Often it is the size of this tip that gives away the fact that something is wrong. It almost looks as though the best way for a criminal to simulate respectability would be to argue about the fare and give the driver 3d. A case that occurred a few years ago bears this out. On this occasion a taxi driver, without apparently suspecting anything unusual, drove a fare at midnight to the back entrance of a South London public house, waited till he came out again with a large safe, helped

him put it in the cab, drove him to Waterloo Bridge, where his fare stopped the cab, while he threw the safe, now open and empty, into the Thames, and finally deposited him at an address in the Strand. Here he received a £3 10s. od. tip, at which for the first time it struck him that "something funny was up" and he called the police.

On the other hand, in the famous Snyder-Gray murder case in America, it was the receipt of a 5 cent tip on a large fare, which implanted so firmly in a driver's mind the memory of a passenger he had brought one night to Columbus Circus that he was able ultimately to identify him and give invaluable testimony for the police.

Criminals trying to elude capture often use taxicabs; though not all of them have the same luck as a bright gentleman who, with a detective on his tail, wanting him for amongst other things bilking taxi drivers, got into a cab at Liverpool Street station—and unobtrusively out of it as it swung into the street a minute later. He left the detective following it across London to find not only no trace of his prey but yet another "bilked" driver.

Taxis are very often used by detectives for inconspicuous pursuit. Sometimes when it is considered inadvisable to use police



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vans, raids are conducted on suspected places by taxi loads of police. Sometimes they are used for raids of another sort. On a famous occasion in 1925 a gang of Hoxton roughs carried out a surprise attack on a rival East End gang by hiring six taxis and dashing past the enemy's outposts into the heart of their territory, where a battle royal was in full swing before the surprised drivers could even say what was on the clock.

In a large number of cases where taxicabs are used in the actual commission of crime the driver of the cab is an accomplice, the vehicle being, of course, a stolen one. The majority of cabs that disappear during the year have been stolen by criminals for their own nefarious ends and are found abandoned next day. In fact, it is difficult to imagine any other reason; for few people can be so morbid as to want a taxi just for the love of it. The cabs are either taken when unattended at the end of a big rank, or when left outside a small eating house. At one time, in 1920, it was so prevalent that many taxis were fitted with thief-proof locks, and there is even the story, probably quite untrue, of the driver who padlocked the wheel of his cab to a lamp-post while he ate his dinner and came out to find the wheel still chained to the lamp-post but the cab gone, the

astute thief having put on the spare instead.

Sometimes the stolen cab is driven at once to a well-to-do neighbourhood in the hope of picking up a fare for a railway station. As soon as the luggage is loaded on, the bogus driver, under pretext of turning round in the street makes off with it. Quite possibly he can do this once or twice more before abandoning the cab in a side street. But more often the cab is taken for the purpose of a "grab and run" raid or to give a burglar or pick-pocketing accomplice a quick getaway. On two occasions actual arrests have been made inside taxicabs by smart policemen. But with the increasing ubiquity and speed of police tenders, taxis have latterly not been employed in this form of crime so much as fast cars, also generally appropriated for the purpose. Anyway, stealing a taxi must have provided perils above those of stealing a private car. I often wonder if some well-planned burglary has not gone wrong just because the accomplice was hailed by an old lady and five children at a critical moment and forced to drive them to Upper Tooting under penalty of a summons under the London Cab Act if he didn't.

There are, one is glad to say, very few cases in which taxi drivers have been persuaded into crime. Sometimes their eyes can be

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judiciously closed, but as a rule the London driver is too honest and has too much common sense to fall in with criminal suggestions. He is not of the wrong-doing type. On one occasion, in 1924, a well-dressed crook proposed to a taxi driver that he should drive him to an hotel where the latter would go in and book a room. After which he would tell the commissionaire to pay off the taxi with a £1 and pretend to go up to his room. The driver would then go round to a side door, pick the crook up and they each would be ten bob to the good and ready to try it again elsewhere. The driver, however, had a conscience, so waiting till the commissionaire had duly handed over the note, he decided he could not be mixed up in such a shady business and went off. I like to muse upon that story; it shows the innate honesty of the British taxi driver.

From the very nature of his calling the taxi driver is often himself the object of criminal attention. He is a solitary man with money on him and can be hailed at any time by anyone, and asked to drive out into the depths of the country. It is a wonder he is not more often assaulted and robbed. But presumably, in England, it is not considered worth the risk, though in 1923 a taxi driver (Jacob Dickey) was actually

murdered in a Brixton street for what he had on him. In Paris, however, this type of crime reached such proportions in 1928 that the taxi drivers actually asked the Prefect of Police for permission to carry revolvers. Luckily for the taxi-using public it was not granted. Knowing how the Parisian driver can behave already in an argument about the fare, I shudder to think of the results if he were armed as well.

Nevertheless, French taxi drivers certainly seem to drop in for more than their fair share of assault. A bare month ago I read that a young girl from Toulouse shot a wretched taxi man, not for his money, but merely because she loved the cinema and wanted to be a heroine with a revolver and get her name in the papers. If I felt like that there are plenty of other people I should pick on before an unfortunate cabbie. Say an income tax collector to begin with.

Generally speaking taxi drivers are defrauded, rather than robbed by violence, "bilking" being the most common form. There are innumerable methods of "bilking," from running off down an alleyway to saying you have forgotten your money and tendering a false address. Others are, telling the driver to wait outside a building with two entrances, sometimes as a sign of good faith leaving in

the cab a parcel which is really worthless; or sending him into a pub to have a drink at your expense and escaping while he is having it. Professional "bilkers" now no longer favour the well-dressed aristocratic appearance of the man or woman about town, but instead hail cabs at stations, looking as if they were just up from the country. The drivers are always more inclined to trust country folk. Domestic servants for some reason have always had a bad record for "bilking." One girl once did it after a ride from London to Ipswich and then stole a bicycle at the end of it. There are, of course, many inadvertent "bilks," due to fares losing touch with their driver and not knowing how to find him. There ought to be some means of informing the public what to do in such cases: at present the best method is to write the facts to the editors of the *Taxi World*, the *Steering Wheel*, and the *Green Badge*, and in time the driver concerned will see it.

Often the driver is defrauded out of actual cash as well as his fare. This is generally done by a girl who drives to a shop and comes out to explain she has no money, and can the driver lend her 10/-, to be paid when he takes her back to her home. In 1924 a woman made a lot out of taxi drivers before she was caught, by tearfully carrying a wreath and

going round to undertakers "to arrange about mourning carriages," and then coming out to borrow £1 from the driver which "was wanted as deposit." During the same year many drivers found they had been victimized at night-time into giving change for crumpled pound notes which daylight revealed as crude forgeries.

A peculiarly mean type of fraud, still quite common in London to-day and generally practised by oily, slick little men with "business faces," is to take a taxi to your destination, wait till the driver has stopped his meter while you fumble for your money, and then say that you have changed your mind and want him to wait after all. Since, as explained earlier, the meter does not record by the time scale once it has been stopped, you will, if he agrees, get your wait free. The proper course for the driver to adopt is to insist on payment as per clock, put his flag right round again to "Hired" and start waiting from there. Often, however, he does not like to do this for fear of losing his tip and the subsequent job.

A very common trick in New York a year or two ago used to be for a woman to hire a cab and drive up-town. After a block or two she would see two men friends and pick them up, and a little later another woman.

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Somewhere up-town the original woman and one of the men would get out and a block afterwards the other man. When the final destination was reached and the driver asked for his fare, the last woman would say, "But you can't make *me* pay. I didn't hire you."

Another New York fraud upon taxi drivers was for an obvious "countryman" to arrive at night with a bag at a station, call a cab, and on reaching his brother's apartment affect to find that he was out of town till next day. The driver, brought up in the belief that hicks were almost too simple and honest to live, but taking a note of the brother's address, would often lend his ingenuous fare money to go to an hotel, bidding him an "Au revoir" which in reality was an "Adieu." One driver, more sore at being outwitted than at losing 25 dollars, was lucky enough to spot his man next day, and had him up at the police station, where they made him deposit his sixty dollar watch as security for subsequent appearance in court. The taxi driver need not have felt sore: for he had been up against an expert, who wasn't seen again, the watch proving on close examination to be a five dollar one faked up for purposes of bail.

But the New York taxi driver is not often

victimized by his passengers: more often it is the other way round. The crime history of the taxi in U.S.A. is a varied and highly coloured one. Which is not surprising when you realize that it is by no means uncommon for a criminal to take up taxi driving as a convenient side-line, or even as a means of pursuing his profession. This may seem queer to English ideas; but the explanation is that to New York the examination and licensing of men applying to be hack drivers are by certain people looked upon more as financial transactions than anything else. It is therefore possible for a would-be driver who doesn't know the Penn Station from Grand Central, to get past in a "knowledge of the city" examination—if he knows the right man to go to and can spare a ten dollar bill. It is equally possible for him to obtain certificates of respectability, statements of previous employment, declarations, testimonials and anything else he needs—if he knows where to go. And it is possible to have all these sworn to in front of a notary—if he knows the right notary. And there you are.

It must, of course, be remembered that this is a chapter on crime in relation to taxis, and that, though there are hundreds of straight drivers, we are here discussing the ones that aren't. The big cab companies



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naturally keep a pretty fair check on their drivers, or their business suffers; it is the owner-driving game which offers the crook an easy entrance and great subsequent possibilities. In the early days a chauffeur who wished to make easy money, but did not care to take too big risks, would often lend his cab, licence, badge, all complete to some small hold-up man, who would then spend an amusing evening running rich fares into quiet corners and getting paid without reference to the meter. If any trouble supervened the driver had a good story of how his cab had been stolen. Occasionally it was. Later on stealing taxis in order to play the hold-up game grew so common that it led to the driver's photograph having to be displayed inside every cab, backed by a request to the rider to compare it with the driver. The New York underworld, however, would be falling down on its job if it was not able on occasion to supply alternative photographs just as it can supply detectives' badges or anything else.

Generally speaking though, the men who want to enter this particular branch of crime do not borrow cabs but simply become taxi drivers in the ordinary way and, if they know the ropes, without any trouble. They then sit tight and take what business comes to them.

Sometimes they will get a simple job such as working for a small bootlegger doing business "straight off the ship," who wants a taxi driver in the game because of an excuse to frequent the docks and keep in touch with sailors and ship officers. Sometimes they will work in with a gigolo jewel thief who will skilfully rob infatuated women during a taxi ride, leaving the results hidden in the cab to deflect suspicion. Sometimes they will go in on a percentage basis with ladies whose profession it is to ride with rich and simple minded business men and to be quite fascinating till they get their fingers on a roll of bills. A really tough crook may even be employed to give some unwanted rival in love or war a "one-way ride," which means the fare after being enticed into the vehicle goes out and doesn't come back—until he is found in a quiet corner and brought in feet first. The police, however, have put this down to a great extent; what with their activities and a certain increase of aristocratic feeling among the criminal classes, "one-way rides" when they occur now take place in private cars.

Occasionally an honest driver complete with cab is temporarily pressed into crime. As in other countries, bandits have frequently made off in taxis by sticking up the driver.

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It was even done in an Illinois town a year or so ago by a 19-year-old girl carrying a baby—and fifteen hundred dollars from the local bank. The baby did not, of course, come from the bank, it was probably borrowed, as in London, to arouse sympathy, or else there was no place in that town for mothers to leave babies when they went out bank raiding.

Taxis are often used in gang wars and the notorious "Chick" Tricker was once nearly killed, when he thought himself safe in the heart of his territory, by two taxi loads of rival gangsters of "Big Jack" Zelig's faction who swept past his doorway armed to the ears and letting off a fusillade of shots. He escaped by simply lying flat at the first bullet and allowing the rest to go into the door; luckily gangsters are rarely good shots. One of the most daring murders since Rosenthal, took place in a taxi, when a gang leader called "Kid Dropper" was killed. He was under arrest at the time and was actually in a cab outside a police court with one detective seated by him, two others about to get in, and the pavement crowded with onlookers and police. The murderer, one Cohen, who had been concealed in a doorway opposite, crossed the road under cover of one taxi, got behind the one in which his enemy was sitting, and shot him through the little back window.

"Kid Dropper" had a funeral procession a mile long, a silver coffin, flowers and a mausoleum, the whole costing nearly a hundred thousand dollars.

It is quite possible that a whole fleet of taxis will be bought up and run by some big gangster or racketeer, who puts his own mob of gunmen and "gorillas" on to driving them. Since he is "in touch" with the police, he is able to protect them from summonses, fines and other annoying hindrances to good business which solitary crook drivers have generally neither the influence nor the money to avoid. In return he has his men all under his hand on an official pay-roll, and gets their services at election time. Another advantage of having his own private roughs driving his cabs is that he can keep "closed cab stands." That is to say, he can frankly appropriate profitable cab ranks by putting a bunch of his own taxi drivers there and having them beat up any other driver who tries to rank on, till the hint is taken and the word passed round. Or else he can levy blackmail on small cab companies "for protection"—the protection being in reality from his own men who, if the company is rash enough to say it doesn't need protection, will at once receive instructions to damage and put out of business as many of its drivers

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and cabs as possible by way of pointing out that it does need it. But one thing about this particular line is that it doesn't affect the public much: the gangster's men play fairly straight with their passengers because of their business. The whole thing is just a racket.

THERE must be some readers who feel at this stage of the book they would like to hear a few stories. So this chapter is primarily for those who are interested in "records" and peculiar incidents of all kinds connected with taxis. It is for the reader with the simple and enquiring mind, the kind of person who likes to be told that the tallest building in the world is the—well, for the moment the name escapes me, but it is one of some five competitors in New York.

I have not been able to find out for certain what is the longest recorded taxi drive. Quite possibly during the "talkie" boom in America some actor, with an English accent, took a cab on Broadway and said "Paramount Studio, Hollywood," which, with the inevitable return journey, would be an easy winner. Otherwise, I should say it was the drive mentioned in Chapter VI, when two visitors to London hailed a casual taxi in the Strand and went on a two thousand mile trip round Scotland. A journey from London to Liverpool, at which

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point the fare asked the driver to wait a minute and then skipped off, probably constitutes the longest "bilk" on record.

Another long and certainly unconventional drive, though not in the same taxi, was undertaken in 1930 by an American lady, aged 60, who set out to go through Africa in a cab, from Windhoek in the south-west to Morocco. She hailed the first one outside her Windhoek hotel, drove to the frontier of Angola, paid off the driver and engaged a Portuguese car, which took her to Loanda, whence she started off into the Congo. How she got on I don't know, as she's still at it at the time of writing. She says African taxi men (of all sorts) are politer than those of New York.

The shortest drive in the world is easier to state with certainty. It is that of the well-lit young man who stumbled into a cab, immediately fell out of the opposite door, and said "How much?" But if this doesn't count, there is the business man who, visiting New York for the first time, arrived at Grand Central and asked to be driven to the Biltmore Hotel. The driver with a grin pointed out to him that it was twenty yards away just across the road, but the visitor was so pleased at the man's honesty (honesty for a New York driver, one is invited to assume) that he solemnly had the twenty yard drive and tipped

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him a dollar at the end of it. Unlike, I'm sorry to say, the British driver on an Old Broad Street rank who was in the midst of an oration to a friend about "furriners coming 'ere and taking the bread out of our mouths," when he was hailed by two bewildered Frenchmen. They were looking for a certain firm at "No. — Broad Street," but had got muddled between the Old Broad Street and New. As it happened, they were by then standing just ten yards from it, but the highly obliging driver put them in the cab with soothing words, drove round for ten minutes or so and ended up from the opposite direction with a cheery "Here you are, gents!" He was profusely thanked, well tipped, and returned to the rank to continue his argument with, "Well, Bill, as I was saying, these furriners ought to be kept out and give us British a chance to earn a living."

One of the most dramatic taxi rides was made in March, 1930, by a Bolton (Lancs.) driver, who was hailed by a terribly worried lady with only an hour and a quarter to catch the liner *Caronia* at Liverpool for America. He got her there just as the last gangway was about to be raised, and could hardly have timed it better if he had been acting for the films. Funnily enough, a London driver, hailed at St. Pancras, had much the same sort



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of job barely a week later, when he caught the *Aquitania* by five minutes at Southampton with a surprised and delighted American fare, having done the 78 miles in two hours and twenty minutes.

The biggest tip noted in taxi history is probably £20 and a diamond pin, but that was after the two thousand mile journey referred to earlier, which naturally called for an unusual effort on the part of the fare. A tip of seventy shillings on a six-and-sixpenny journey is no doubt proportionally the biggest ever offered—and taken. The passenger's generosity is more understandable when one learns that he had just stolen a safe. He hoped thus to ensure the driver's silence, but all he ultimately ensured was two months in prison.

Long waits by taxis for their fares are fairly common. Sometimes it will be as long as twelve hours when, say, a fare, telling the driver to wait while he calls on a friend, becomes unexpectedly absorbed in business, or even pleasure, and forgets he ever had a cab at all. There is then generally a row. The record wait, however, was achieved quite recently by a Bombay taxi driver named Syed. Syed picked up at the docks a visiting European whose boat had put in for a couple of hours and who wanted to be driven round

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Bombay. Upon returning, the passenger asked the driver to wait till he got the money for the fare ; he then went on board and failed entirely to reappear before the liner sailed, which it did half an hour later. Syed, however, expressing his complete faith in all Sahib<sup>s</sup>, told the bystanders that he had been ordered to wait and would continue to wait and in fact, settled down to do so. It was explained that the liner was bound for Australia and was not due back for weeks, but he was quite undismayed and merely reiterated his determination. He actually did eat, drink and sleep in his cab (religiously winding up his meter at intervals) for five days and nights, and probably would have waited longer, only at the end of that time he was arrested because his taxi licence had expired.

Men who drive for some companies have to write out reports of any defect which the cab may develop while out, and probably the most delightfully naïve report ever turned in by a driver now lies in the archives of a South London company. Apparently the taximeter had broken and the statement read : " Sir, Having picked up a gent in Piccadilly I took him to Hammersmith. The meter went wrong and at the end only registered 8d., much to the delight of the old — inside." The *naïveté* of the report lies in

the fact that the missing word was laboriously written out in full, though, as this is not a war book, I cannot reproduce it here.

The best verbal statement (in my opinion) ever made by a taxi man, was that put forward a few months ago by a driver summoned under the "Cruising Order" for "loitering" in Piccadilly. He explained with dignity that he was not loitering, he had merely "slowed down to bow to the manager of the Berkeley Hotel."

Taxis have had some queer passengers at different times. One driver picking up, as he thought, a party of children going to the theatre, was very fatherly and protective till he was told to take them to the stage-door and discovered he had on board the troupe of midgets appearing that week. He was inclined to be annoyed about it till he realized that he could now charge for each person separately, instead of two as one adult.

In contrast to midgets, the tallest man in the world, one John Van Albert, 9 feet, 3½ inches, came to London from Holland in May, 1924, and took a taxi from Liverpool Street station. He had to have the back part of the roof lowered and sat up through it, using the front part as an arm rest, and surveying London over the top. But certainly he was luckier than a coloured lady called the

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"Florida Giantess," who visited Paris the same year. She was a mere seven and a half feet high, but she was about that round as well. She got *in* the taxi without much difficulty, but after her trip could not get *out*. At long last the resourceful driver borrowed a tennis racquet, and using it as a shoe-horn, levered her out on to the pavement.

Among the strange uses to which a taxi has been put is that of acting as "travelling office" for a gentleman who was avoiding the police. He had for some while been running a profitable but illegal business of his own, but was at last detected and a warrant on a charge of fraud was taken out against him. He skipped off, however, before it could be executed, hired a taxi and proceeded to wind up his affairs with his clients by parking the cab at stated times on stated street corners and calling it his "office." He was hoping thus to get in all the money he could before flitting for good, presumably with a good "bilk" as a final gesture, but after a feverish week the police just got him and imposed upon him a more sedentary mode of existence for the next six months.

Another unusual use of a taxi, but of quite a different nature, occurred at the wedding of Miss Abby Rockefeller, daughter of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and the richest heiress in the

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world. After this ceremony, where probably the average of luxurious motor cars was about two per guest, the bride and bridegroom phoned up for a casual taxi off the rank and departed in it to the usual "unknown destination."

As regards accidents, every kind possible has occurred to a taxicab, and some that one would think were impossible. Here are a few. A taxi with two passengers and a driver has somersaulted down a thirty-foot embankment and fallen right way up with all occupants unhurt. A taxi in Sweden, driving with others to a race meeting on a frozen lake, Lake Hjelmar, got halfway and abruptly fell through the ice. In Blackpool, in 1923, an electric cable broke away from a tram standard and fell upon a taxicab, thus rendering it "live." As long as the occupants sat in it quite still they were all right, but the moment they tried to open the doors to get out they received the most terrible shocks. They had to stay there motionless for two hours (with, for some reason, the fire brigade standing by) till the current could be cut off. Throughout the whole time one of the passengers suffered great anguish. He was the hirer of the cab and was watching the meter, which the driver, a man of some presence of mind, had told him he dare not try to stop for fear of getting electrocuted.

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Taxicabs have been accidentally driven into practically everything there is, from lamp-posts to shop-windows, elephants (from a travelling circus), rivers, and railway trains at level crossings. One would think that this last type of accident was not very common, but the Canadian National Railways recently issued a list of all the accidents in which, during one single year, their trains had been involved with motor vehicles, and in it one reads that there were in 1928 actually forty-four cases of cars "accidentally driving into moving trains." To show that it was not entirely the train's fault, the next line records that there were in addition thirty-eight cases of cars "driving into *stationary* trains." The same amusing document adds that twelve accidents occurred from cars "parking too near the railway track" for picnics or petting; and one actually *on* the railway track "for a nap." In that same one year, no fewer than thirteen cars had accidents from optimistically "going for a drive along the track and meeting expresses"—these must have been pretty good accidents, too. And, finally, there was one extraordinary smash. It was the case of a man who tried to drive between two trucks when being shunted—and failed to make it. It looks as though neither car nor train journeys are dull in Canada.

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Everything that can happen to or in or with a taxi has, I feel certain, at one time or another happened. There have been fights, thefts and assaults in taxis; there have been writs served in taxis, arrests in taxis, and a surprising number of lunatics have been caught in taxis. For some reason or another when a lunatic escapes he always seems to go straight from the asylum to a taxi, either to ride in it, to try and drive it, or merely to play with it. They seem to exercise a peculiar fascination; indeed on one occasion in Paris, a few years ago, an elderly gentleman was so overcome by a sudden success at "bilking" a taxi that his mind became unhinged and he developed an absolute mania for getting free rides for no reason at all, except the fun of it. When he had worked up to securing regularly about £80 worth a month he had to be put away; probably for his own safety—for the drivers were getting to know him.

There have been sudden deaths in taxis and many suicides in taxis. There have been murders in taxis; at Glasgow some years ago a taxicab complete was one of the official exhibits in a murder case. There have been numerous proposals in taxis, innumerable kisses in taxis, there have been seductions in taxis and (in America) weddings have been solemnized in taxis, with the driver acting

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as a witness (official for once) over his right shoulder.

Babies, of course, have been born in taxis, but that is nothing when one remembers that a baby was not so long ago born in a London tube train in the rush hour. Before it could defend itself it was, I believe, given the names of Thelma Ursula Beatrice Evangeline, so that its initials should be a souvenir of its birthplace. A Lisbon taxi driver, however, holds the record in this line, for when one October day, in 1928, he found he had two passengers at the end of the ride instead of one he became so furious that a paternal policeman, who had joined the mix-up, suggested that he ought rather to rejoice at the arrival of a new little life (Tomas Andres Xerxes Ignacio, I suppose) no matter where it chose to arrive. The driver rejoined that that was all very well, but this was the third baby in two years that had chosen his taxi as a jumping-off place for Life, that he was getting fed-up with it and that his friends were making fun of him. He then drove off sullenly, after announcing that in future he was going to paint a red cross on his cab and call it the "Maternity Home."

On the other side of the picture is the occasion when a taxi driver, looking into his cab after a hiring late one night, found a



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complete skeleton inside. He had to take it, as per regulations, to the nearest police station, where the sergeant was much agitated as to whether to send it to the Lost Property Office or the Criminal Investigation Department. Ultimately it was claimed by a medical student, who probably left it behind for a joke.

One of the queerest things ever found in a taxi was at Blackburn in 1925, when a driver returning to his garage, looked inside the cab and saw asleep on the seat a strange bird, which was later identified as a great crested grebe. Now great crested grebes are not common at Blackburn and anyway don't use taxis much, so the driver was extremely puzzled by the whole business, the more so because he was positive his last fare had not had a great crested grebe as luggage and the windows had been shut ever since. However, he drove off to the police station to hand it in as "lost property" and have its description entered up on a deposit sheet. At the station the grebe woke up, looked around a while, decided the place was dull and at once started something by biting a policeman's thumb. When the commotion had died down the grebe was found to have winged off to the local park, where it settled down quite happily among the ducks and stayed there. One can only suppose it had

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had trouble at home and wanted to emigrate, but how and where and when it took the taxi still remains a mystery. It was known affectionately as "Bilker" for some months.

But perhaps the strangest thing that ever happened to a normal steady-going taxicab occurred in 1924 in an outer suburb of New York. A bull being led to market broke away and escaped into the main street, where the first thing it saw was a bright red taxi. This was too much for the bull, who put down his head, straightened his tail, and taking a running charge at the inoffensive cab, lifted it two or three feet. The two passengers inside tried to leap out but were too late; for the startled taxi was off down the road at its best and topmost speed with the bull in triumphant pursuit. The chase went on for some distance, the taxi no doubt glancing back nervously round its mudguards, from time to time, till at last a cross-roads was reached where stood a tall policeman on point duty. Now you can rarely startle the New York cop, and this one, having been a cowboy before joining the force, was even more phlegmatic than others. Drawing his night-stick and parking his gum, he rapidly considered beaming (a) the cab and (b) the bull as they went past; then a better idea came to him. Rushing into a shop as the

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terrified cab swept along hooting wildly, he grabbed a rope, made a noose, and leaping on the running board of another taxi (a yellow one) was driven rapidly in pursuit. Calling forth all his old-time skill, he whirled his home-made lariat round, lassoed the bull, and in a flash had jumped off the cab and twisted the rope a couple of turns round a lamp-post. After which, while bystanders soothed the red cab, he strolled back for his cap and his gum. A nice little story that—which ought to be called “When Bull meets Bull”—and one that is perfectly true. It *must* be, because it was in the papers.

ALREADY the familiar box-like form of the old London taxi is vanishing from the streets before the lower and slimmer models which first came in in 1929. This type, unless further sweeping changes are made in the Scotland Yard regulations, presumably will remain equally permanent for a good many years; for the strictness of the London "Conditions of Fitness" and the high quality workmanship of British built cabs make for a long life. It is not much of a prophecy to say that many of the new Beardmore cabs now coming on the streets will be being referred to in 1940 (or 1950 if re-conditioned) as "those obsolete ramshackle old wagons getting in the way of the fast North to South traffic through Savile Row." In spite of the demand for safety pre-eminently in public vehicles, it seems that there is almost an equally strong demand for a cab which need not be so strongly made and therefore is not so durable, a cab which being cheap, can be replaced in three

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or four years by a newer type, and whose low initial cost will reduce the hire purchase charges per week, and thus the running expenses. But this probably will not happen. Moreover, one can overdo the long, low, luxurious type of taxi. New York, for instance, has many marvellous six-cylinder taxis capable of over sixty miles per hour, but owing to the traffic congestion they rarely get a chance to do more than twenty-five, for which a couple of cylinders would suffice. And the extra length thus saved on every cab would be equivalent, as that bright weekly, the *New Yorker*, puts it, to eight miles of moving but congested traffic! As a result, the latest cabs now being introduced in that city, the Ford three-seaters, are only three-quarters the size. The small mobile taxi has its advantages.

Though the "1929" cab will doubtless remain much the same for some years to come, there are sure to be many modifications, minor improvements and changes in service. There has, for instance, been passed by Scotland Yard, a patent sliding roof called the S.O.S. which can be easily operated by the passenger from inside and locked in any desired position from full open to just a chink. For some while, only one cab, a Beardmore, was so fitted, but the summer of 1930 produced

several more. It is very likely that something of the sort will ultimately become a universal fixture, for the present type of roof needs improvement. It is most inconvenient for the public that a few drops of rain or a realization that it is more chilly than one anticipated, necessitates stopping the cab while the driver gets down and wrestles with the hood. Moreover, there is no intermediate position. The taxi driver, too, has to decide daily, in spring and autumn, whether to ply with hood up or hood down, and though it can be altered quickly, many a crawling cab loses a fare to a rival behind, because his idea of the weather was not the same as an intending passenger's. As a matter of fact, however, those who have studied London's traffic will tell you that there seems to be a sort of mutual understanding between taxi drivers about the seasons. One spring day all will have their hoods up and it is still winter; the next day, as if by telepathy, all hoods are down and summer has come.

In Vienna, cabs have recently been put on the streets with glass roofs, the idea being to exclude draughts and yet obtain all the sunshine. This innovation, however, is unlikely to be adopted in London. Scotland Yard would never permit it because of the added danger in case of accident, and anyone

who has been young can think of another reason why glass roofs would be unpopular with a large section of the public.

A more likely change in design which the future may see is concerned with taxicab doors. The doors opening on either side have been responsible for many accidents, much damage, and a great deal of delay when operating in crowded thoroughfares, and Scotland Yard has already passed a type of taxicab body which has the door in front by the driver's side. This is the "Cape" taxi, mentioned in Chapter XI, but at the moment there is only one of the type, painted sky-blue and fitted on a Morris chassis. It has been running round in London—largely for purposes of advertisement—for nearly a year now. Actually, it is a two-seater, but a very slight modification in design permits of production as a four-seater. It looks very smart, is luxuriously fitted up inside, and is, I believe, cheaper than the present bodies, so that one can easily conceive it as the standard London taxi in a quarter of a century's time.

A pleasing, though unimportant innovation, which is at last well on its way, is that of painting cabs in less sombre colours. Previously they were all dull nondescript browns and blacks, the monotony of which was only occasionally broken by a W. & G. orange cab. Now

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one is beginning to see reds, royal-blues, and chocolates, while some enterprising "mushers" have put a touch of colour on the interior metal work as well. Paris cabs are far ahead of London ones in this; the majority are painted some light pleasing colour, such as primrose, powder blue or apple-green, and lines are picked out in a darker shade or contrasting hue, which gives a pleasant effect and makes one want to ride. Not that English taxicab patrons mind very much what colour cabs they ride in, but bright paint does make the vehicles more conspicuous to intending hirers; and anyway, London already looks the more cheerful for it.

Some connection between taxicabs and wireless is in the future likely, though it is not quite certain what form it will take. Many experiments have already been made. Both at Liverpool and Nottingham during the last few years some taxi drivers have fitted up receiving sets inside their cabs to while away the rider's time—and perhaps to take his mind off the meter; but one cannot assume that there will be any great demand by the casual passenger for music on tap or talks on gardening during taxi rides. Possibly the B.B.C. with their avowed intention of giving the public what it *ought* to want, will try to make it compulsory. More important



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is the suggestion that the drivers' seats should be fitted with wireless to enable them to pick up calls, but this, of course, necessitates a central depôt, and would only be attempted by well-organized cab companies. Besides, it would be impossible in England until the American custom of phoning a cab company headquarters for a taxi instead of calling up the rank has been introduced. Experiments in the summoning of cabs by wireless were definitely made in Ohio in 1929. When a call came into headquarters it was relayed on the ether to the companies' drivers, and the nearest unhired cab took the order. Presumably steps would be taken to prevent rival cabs fitting similar receiving sets and "chiselling" (or snatching) the call, and also to determine which taxi is nearest, otherwise the intending rider might find himself the centre of some dozen of converging cabs. Experiments in England have been directed towards calling taxis from the rank by means of a frame aerial on the cab roof and a small switch-board beside the driver, but this apparently pre-supposes sending sets being in the possession of everyone needing a cab, which hardly seems feasible.

One necessary innovation which the next few years will see if the public's wishes are consulted, is the fitting of a hiring light to

show after dark whether a taxi is free. And by hiring light I don't mean a little blue spark like a turned down gas-jet which is only present on some cabs, and in three out of five cases is kept on whether the cab is hired or not. Taxi drivers insist that hiring lights are not necessary: that they are themselves looking out for fares, and if by any unlikely chance *they* don't see a prospective hirer, it is no good *his* seeing them. This is a fallacious argument. Taxi drivers often do *not* see fares, but can at the same time be attracted by a signal. There are, however, many shy people who don't like finding that they are signalling a cab occupied by someone else. And even if they don't mind this, failure on the taxi man's part to see their first tentative signal in the dark is often interpreted as the natural lack of response of an already hired driver. They therefore have to wait till they can see his flag—generally an impossibility till the cab is level with them, by which time only a stentorian shout or an "errand-boy" whistle will attract the driver. Some of us haven't the teeth for this last, can't even be sure of emitting an ordinary whistle in the excitement of trying not to miss the cab. The result is George loses a fare. A recent police order in New York is to enact that unhired cabs must display a red light on

either side ; but, though one or two London taxis now have an illuminated sign on the front of the roof, they are not popular. As soon, however, as taxi men realize that it is to their advantage, something of the sort will be universally introduced. My own feeling is that this will be along the lines of an improved taximeter, incorporating a light which will illuminate the flag when it is up and be cut off, or transferred to the dial, when the flag is pulled down.

That no form of two-seater taxi, however, or even single seater, will be introduced in the future is fairly certain. Single-seaters (as related in Chapter XIX) came in in Paris in 1924 with everything in their favour, flourished a while and died. As for two-seaters, they never materialized in London five years ago, even under the most favourable circumstances, and with a display of Home-Secretarial benevolence that was positively embarrassing. Nor must it be forgotten that the present four-seater is really the two-seater of 1907 which had to metamorphose itself in order to exist.

In spite of the tendency towards electrification on railways and in industry, it is doubtful whether electrical cabs will ever replace those driven by petrol. Desirable though they may be, in these days when the atmosphere of any town is clogged with

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exhaust fumes, no electric cabs have yet been successful, although many attempts have been made in both England and America from 1897 onwards. Indeed, the electric taxi will not flourish till a less unwieldy method of either generating or storing large reserves of power in a small vehicle, which must at the same time be free to run anywhere on the streets, has been discovered. Or, more likely, till science has perfected some way of picking up power from central generating stations, which does not necessitate cables, track or other material means of transmission, say through the medium of the air or the ether.

A move towards the amalgamation under one head of all traffic facilities has occasionally been foreshadowed as being likely to come about in time. But though London may in time see all her tubes, buses, trams and trains under one control, it is doubtful whether taxis will ever fall within any such merger. The taxi trade is far too independent a business, and moreover, caters for a very different public, whereas trams, buses and tubes, generally speaking, compete for the same public. It is remotely possible that the railway companies, already empowered to compete in the Road Transport and Air Transport areas, may ultimately seek to run their own fleets of taxicabs. It would certainly

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be lucrative, because, owning as they do their own station premises they would be in a position to forbid entry to any cabs except their own. It is, however, extremely unlikely—in 1930, owing to current rumours, the Great Western even issued a categorical denial of any such intention—for in the first place taxicabs, unlike air and heavy road transport, do not compete with the railways, and secondly, the seriousness of such a blow to the taxi trade would arouse enormous opposition and undesirable hostility.

A development which has a more assured future is that of the "air taxi." It is hardly within the scope of this book, for the word "taxi" is short for "taximeter cab"—i.e. a cab fitted with a mile measuring apparatus—whereas an air taxi is so called simply because it is hireable by the general public at any time and for any destination at a fixed charge per mile. The cost is by no means as heavy as one would think. National Flying Services, Ltd., who have ordered fifty-five three-seater Dessoutters and have a percentage of them already in action, charge but 9d. per passenger per mile. As long ago as 1922, a four- or five-seater air taxi could be hired at Croydon from British Air Lines, Ltd., for a charge per person of 10d. per mile by day and 1/6 by night. In 1924, the first Air Taxi booking

office was opened in London by Imperial Airways, where it was possible to charter at a moment's notice any kind of airplane to carry up to twenty passengers, the fee to any part of Europe being now as low as 5d. per passenger per mile. And a few months ago a German aviation company carried the "taxi" part of the idea a little further by instituting actual "ranks" of aerial taxis in special parking places in Berlin; any distance for 1 mark 10 pfennigs per mile.

Lastly, one must not forget that when London has at last realized—as other capitals have done—the transport value of a river artery, and the Thames is no longer given over solely to barges, "water taxis" may come to be as common as land taxis. Business men who live near the river in London's southwest area, and who now curse at traffic delays, would have no cause for similar complaint, and a far pleasanter journey. And if the new Charing Cross Bridge results in an improved business area south of the Thames, there should also be a demand for water taxis for ferry purposes. Ex-drivers of the now disappearing Charron cabs would be, of course, just the fellows for this service—though the fares would, I'm afraid, be higher than those originally charged for crossing the Styx.

DISCUSSION of the taxicab's future would be incomplete without an indication of lines along which development *ought* to proceed. In other words, since the taxi driver, descendant of the old "growler," has many complaints about his poor living and the lack of business, here are some suggestions, adoption of which might remedy his grievances. He would not be the same man without his grievances, but it may be safely left to him to find others. The odd thing about these suggestions is that it is in the taxi man's own hands to adopt them.

First and most important, every single taxi man should realize, as their leaders and representatives have done, that increase of business rather than increase of tariff is the only real way to greater prosperity. An indisputable mathematical fact, which no cab-rank politician can disprove, is that two riders at sixpence are better than one at ninepence.

Moreover, so long as a taxi is not a necessity of life, you cannot compel a man to take one. Therefore, increased business will only come

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—unless some revolution occurs in human nature—on the heels of increased service and increased publicity. For it is an axiom that good service keeps what business there is and even makes it expand itself, while good publicity brings in new business from outside.

The service the taxi trade offers on the whole is good, but they *must* remember they are servants of the public, and so ought naturally aim at giving the public what it wants. And it is in this direction that the public finds there is room for improvement, which in turn would surely lead to increased patronage.

In the first place, the driver is often not up to the standard of his cab. All that Scotland Yard demands is that a taxi man shall keep himself "clean and tidy," and in so far as their trade permits they do. But somehow the very same driver—and there are many such—who, on the ground that he likes to keep his cab as nearly similar to a private car as possible, will spurn the added remuneration he might get from having advertisements inside his cab, will at the same time see nothing incongruous in his wearing a battered felt hat with a nondescript scarf knotted round his throat and tucked under a filthy mackintosh. No one is asking him to dress himself *à la* Savile Row, but a peaked cap



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and uniform coat, like charity, would cover a multitude of sartorial sins. Does the taxi driver know that there are many private houses in Mayfair and Belgravia whose butlers look down upon those guests who come in taxis instead of in private cars, and such is the prestige a Mayfair butler possesses that it has probably lost many short rides to the taxi trade? I wonder if this attitude was not originally due to the fact that some drivers were so slovenly. Here, then, is a suggestion: let the taxi trade universally adopt a neat uniform and they will not lose by it.

Secondly, there are many people, not all of them women by any means, who, gentle souls, are scared off by the surliness, natural or fancied or even only anticipated, of the driver. God knows, long hours in all weathers at a chancy job isn't anything to laugh about, but drivers ought to realize that politeness is a marketable asset which costs nothing to produce; and by politeness I mean real politeness, not an obsequious welcome to a prosperous-looking rider, but a politeness that gives a cheery response to a cheery remark and can accept a twopenny tip with the same "Thank you" as a shilling one. I often wonder how much the uncivil and disappointed attitude, adopted by some drivers towards those fares taking only a short ride, has been

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responsible for scaring off those very persons whom the cheaper "sixpenny taxi" was intended to attract. Yet these same short-sighted gentry are the first to grumble at the non-appearance of the "promised" new business.

There is, again, a proportion of taxi users who are always apprehensive of having to tip drivers, not for the money involved, but for the way in which they are often made to feel extremely uncomfortable just before, during, and just after the giving; and could the taxi trade really remove this apprehension, it would undoubtedly benefit by an increased clientèle. For this proportion of, so to speak, sensitive taxi users is not quite negligible. It is significant that, in 1929, certain interests considered it so worth attracting that they actually contemplated the introduction of a new taxicab company, whose drivers were to be schooled in politeness and were to refuse absolutely to accept tips. The proposal never came to anything, probably because it was realized that once the tipping system has taken root anywhere it can seldom be eradicated. Men will give and men will take, whatever their wage may be, and ultimately the tips are reflected in the wage scale. For where a tipping system exists, then, however variable the tips, they must have a certain average per

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week, which is additional wage pure and simple, and sooner or later the employer takes it into account, which is a *reductio ad absurdum* of the whole tipping idea. I give an instance from another walk of life: The gentlemen's cloakroom attendant of a certain well-known hotel ballroom *pays* the management £5 per week for his job, and takes all the tips. That is to say, the public not only pays the wages of one of the hotel's employés, but, in effect, pays the hotel management £260 per annum for providing a necessary service that should be inclusive in the dance charge. Again, in New York the cloakroom concessions at the big hotels and restaurants are owned by a syndicate of business men. They supply the attendants, pay them a fixed wage, and take all the tips they collect; they even provide them with a uniform designed to prevent the concealment of any of this money. In other words, when you give a cloakroom girl half-a-dollar because you are the last and she looks tired, or merely because she's pretty, it goes into the pockets of the Jews, the Argentines and the Greeks, none of whom are pretty.

Once tips are calculated and recognized as wages the whole idea goes by the board; and so, too, with taxis. No one can maintain that the public likes tipping, and if what the

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majority of drivers say is true, they don't either. Why then should two parties conduct a bargain in a manner mutually repugnant? So here is another, though I admit, highly debatable suggestion: Let every single driver guarantee a "no tip" journey and, unless exceptional services have been rendered, keep his word; then the public would, I think, stand for a fare increase, and there will, moreover, soon be greater numbers using taxis.

Another province which taxis might well, I think, exploit, is the provision of a guide service for visitors and foreigners. There are many taxi men who know a lot about London's history and associations; there are a fair number who can speak French or German; there are very many more who would willingly learn both history and languages could they but have some chance of turning their knowledge to profit. The language question has already been widely taken up abroad. Berlin drivers wear red armbands signifying their ability to speak English or French; while Paris drivers have approved recently the idea of language tests. Only the other day the president of Copenhagen's leading taxicab association stated that 50% of his membership, after training in spare time schools, now spoke English, French or

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German. Even in Stockholm language examinations were taken by many taxi drivers in anticipation of the influx of visitors for the Industrial Arts Exhibition of 1930, and the resultant armlet denoting this qualification was found extremely lucrative.

London alone lags behind, but in the near future it is quite possible that some similar scheme of badges for drivers who are interpreters, and, in time, qualified guides for the show places of London as well, may be introduced. It would, at any, rate be assured of good publicity; the idea of a taxi driver having a "Language Proficiency" examination will not be overlooked by the humorous Press. And, after all, at the present low scale of fares the taxi is an ideal way for a foreigner to see a city, provided the driver is a man who can explain it to him in his own language. This idea, of course, is not quite new. In 1911 a Taxi Couriers' Association was formed which for five guineas per day of ten hours or a hundred miles, undertook to supply a cab with a driver who was a qualified guide and interpreter. It did not catch on at the time; the taxi man's business was then still expanding so much in the ordinary way that he was not bothering to explore new avenues. But conditions have now changed, and I should think it would be a good move for

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the taxi world if they tried to reintroduce something of the sort in the near future.

Another suggestion is that the rank telephone service should be improved.\* More ranks ought to be on the telephone (though this is not primarily in the power of the taxi men to bring about), and prompt answers should be given to clients ringing up, even if it is only to tell them that no cab is available. This last is important, both because many futile waits with a "No reply" at the end makes the public loth to use rank telephones and the Telephone Service loth to instal instruments on other ranks; whereas the taxi trade's aim should be to get every rank of half a dozen cabs or more connected by telephone and to induce every cab user to acquire the phone-for-a-cab habit.

While on the subject of ranks, there should be many more one-cab standings, particularly in or near busy streets, than there are at present, and they—in common with all ranks—should be marked with a sign to denote that a standing exists there. This would be a great benefit to the public, and an even greater one to the taxi man, saving him both the petrol he uses in "crawling" and also

\* Only one rank in the whole of the E.C. London district at present has the telephone—Temple Station, Embankment—and none in the City proper.

his constant fear of infringing the "Cruising Cab" order.

All the above are suggestions for increased service: the other root from which prosperity springs is increased publicity. In these days of competition, every business that is not going to go under must advertise and advertise regularly. But suggestions for advertising present greater difficulties, because unlike any other business there is little incentive but that of pride in his work to make a taxi proprietor spend money on publicity for his cabs. He prefers instead to concentrate on cutting down expenses, and till every proprietor and owner-driver can be brought into line, perhaps he is right. To explain, let us take for instance the case of a company which provides its drivers with uniforms, paints a monogram on its cabs, supplies flowers inside, and puts advertisements in the papers extolling their pre-eminence, which in a word does everything to render their cabs attractive and make more people use them. If it were a shop it would soon receive a return in increased business, but this is not so in the taxi trade. The smartest and best-advertised taxi on the rank will not get a job before the dirtiest, if the latter is the first cab off: nor, generally speaking, has the English public (in contrast to the American) acquired the

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habit of picking a pleasant looking taxi cruising in the street in preference to a less pleasant one. In other words the extra expense does not pull its weight in increased returns, and so it is not good business to incur it. In the old leisured days riders would wait for a smart hansom and a driver with a button-hole; nowadays everybody seems in too much of a hurry to pick and choose, or perhaps the war has taught us to put up with the second-best.

From all this one can see that the only form of publicity which will be any good must be conceived on very broad lines, and must treat the whole taxi trade as one complete business; that is to say, it must constantly suggest taxi-using to the at present non-taxi-using portion of the public, and must continue to point out the advantages and the capabilities of the taxi to as wide a circle of potential passengers as possible. In short it must be run upon the model of the "Eat More Fruit" campaign, only applied to taxicabs.

Something was certainly started in this direction: The Cab Proprietors' Council, though it represents only about half the cabs in London, opened a publicity fund (with a voluntary subscription of 10/- per plate per year) and took space in evening papers to



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popularize taxi riding, and also issued leaflets to show how cheaply taxi runs could be made in and around London; but the response was most disappointing, barely a quarter of London's cabs bothering to support it. In the meanwhile Mr. Nicholls, the editor of *The Taxi World*, has on his own initiative got out a little booklet of illustrations of the different facets of taxi service, interleaved and brightened by taxi jokes, for distribution by drivers to customers. So, too, has *The Green Badge*. But these are small battles; a big campaign is needed, and it is upon a crusade of up-to-date publicity that I suggest the whole taxi trade should embark if it wants to prosper. To be frank, they are fools if they don't.

It may have been noticed that all the suggestions made in this chapter have one thing in common. That is, in order to put them into effect with the minimum of trouble and expense and the maximum of resultant value, there must be *one central authority representing the whole taxi trade*. As things are, unfortunately, there are about six—two associations of cab proprietors, two of owner-drivers, and two unions of drivers, one of which even is a mere offshoot from a big trade union, with whose other half million members the cabbies have practically nothing in common; and it is this multiplicity of associations

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which is the real stumbling block to progress. It is admitted that the different sections of the cab trade have varying aims, but it seems they are in danger of forgetting that they have any aim in common at all. The result is that everybody pulls different ways and the wood cannot be seen for the trees. Small wonder that eight thousand London taxis have no representative on the Traffic Advisory Committee, while four thousand buses have two. Small wonder that an increasing number of streets are being closed to unhired cabs; that taxis rather than other vehicles get prosecutions for traffic crimes; and that profitable ranks are removed as dangerous obstructions, often only to be replaced by bus stops or parking places for private cars. Small wonder that so many proprietors and drivers hardly consider it worth while being attached to any association. Small wonder that it is increasingly difficult to raise money for an advertising campaign when there is a large proportion of drivers who are so independent that they refuse to pay for it, but are not above sharing in its benefits.

What, in the humble, but settled opinion of one outsider, the cab trade really needs, is to reorganize all existing associations, cut loose from the unwieldy Transport and General Workers' Union, and form one big federation

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to which proprietors, owner-drivers and journeymen will, and *must* for their own benefit, belong. Within this federation they will form three separate sections, with sub-committees to represent and guard each specialized or conflicting interest, the owner-drivers' policy, of course, swinging, as it were, between the two others according to whether they are affected as owners or as drivers. All disputes between these different sections can, and ought, thus to be settled internally; but the main federation itself will have one central committee which will authoritatively represent the taxi point of view to all external bodies whatsoever. Speaking then, as it will be doing, for the whole trade, it will be able to secure adequate representation of interests both in parliament, before commissions, and on committees. It will be able to pursue, and what is more important, have more power to put into effect, a definite policy regarding cruising cabs, the increasing of the number of ranks and the marking of them, publicity campaigns, unfair prosecutions, smartness of cabs and drivers and hiring lights. It will be able to tackle with authority such vexed questions as tipping, fare scales and the limitation of the number of licensed cabs or licensed drivers. It will be able to save on the trade's present four-fold office expenses

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and to secure financial benefits from the wholesale buying of supplies—at present about £50,000 a year is lost to owner-drivers of the cab trade in the retail price profit of petrol alone. It will even in time be able to deal with such possibilities as the establishment of one Taxi Drivers' Benevolent and Financial Assistance Fund, instead of several (some of them not above suspicion), and the provision of a central club or cab headquarters combined with, say, a booking bureau for taxicabs from which one may engage a cab for a stated journey at a stated time, instead of taking one's chance off the nearest rank, and which may even arrange for the quick transfer of cabs from temporarily poor areas to areas where there is a sudden demand. It will, in short, present to all outside parties, poms and powers, a united front. It will—if it comes into being. But first it must overcome the innate grumbling-cheerful, surly-friendly independence of George the London taxi driver.

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