

Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936)

## 22 *Municipal*

*"Why is my District death-rate low?"*

*Said Binks of Hezabad.*

*"Well, drains, and sewage-outfalls are*

*My own peculiar fad.*

*"I learnt a lesson once. It ran*

*"Thus," quoth that most veracious man:—*

It was an August evening and, in snowy garments clad,  
I paid a round of visits in the lines of Hezabad;  
When, presently, my Waler saw, and did not like at all,  
A Commissariat elephant careering down the Mall.

I couldn't see the driver, and across my mind it rushed  
That that Commissariat elephant had suddenly gone *musth*.  
I didn't care to meet him, and I couldn't well get down,  
So I let the Waler have it, and we headed for the town.

5

The buggy was a new one and, praise Dykes, it stood the strain,  
Till the Waler jumped a bullock just above the City Drain;  
And the next that I remember was a hurricane of squeals,  
And the creature making toothpicks of my five-foot patent wheels.

10

He seemed to want the owner, so I fled, distraught with fear,  
To the Main Drain sewage-outfall while he snorted in my ear —  
Reached the four-foot drain-head safely and, in darkness and despair,  
Felt the brute's proboscis fingering my terror-stiffened hair.

15

Heard it trumpet on my shoulder — tried to crawl a little higher —  
Found the Main Drain sewage-outfall blocked, some eight feet up, with mire;  
And, for twenty reeking minutes, Sir, my very marrow froze,  
While the trunk was feeling blindly for a purchase on my toes!

20

It missed me by a fraction, but my hair was turning grey  
Before they called the drivers up and dragged the brute away.  
Then I sought the City Elders, and my words were very plain.  
They flushed that four-foot drain-head and — it never choked again!

You may hold with surface-drainage, and the sun-for-garbage cure, 25  
Till you've been a periwinkle shrinking coyly up a sewer.  
*I* believe in well-flushed culverts. . . . This is why the death-rate's small;  
And, if you don't believe me, get *shikarred* yourself. That's all.

1886

(From *Rudyard Kipling's Verse*. Definitive edition. London, 1940)