

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 5
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.

The buggy was a new one and, praise Dykes, it stood the strain,
Till the Waler jumped a bullock just above the City Drain; 10
And the next that I remember was a hurricane of squeals,
And the creature making toothpicks of my five-foot patent wheels.

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, 15
Felt the brute's proboscis fingering my terror-stiffened hair.

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)