

13. Wine or Poison

Every Indian must be aware of the British love for alcohol.¹ No other race can consume as much alcohol as the English or behave in such a beastly manner after getting drunk. Here, even the person who earns fifty paise a day goes to the liquor shop once or twice a day. As soon as you step out of the house you will get to see how much alcohol they can consume. There are public houses all along the roads. I have already described these liquor shops, now I shall talk about the effects of drinking.

There are many educated people in England and nowadays the British are also earning a lot by exploiting other nations. Then why does England have so many poor people? And why are the poor so miserable here? It is not possible to provide an immediate answer to these questions. But gradually one can see, hear and understand that this unavoidable poverty is the result of consuming alcohol and it is under its effect that the poor people of this country behave in such a beastly manner. Previously, this habit was so rampant here that one would often come across rich people or members of the royal family rolling on the roads after getting heavily drunk. Fortunately, now this vice is much less prevalent among the gentry and we hardly come across them behaving in such a horrible manner. But among the poor it is same as ever. It is said that after getting drunk, the French talk a lot, the Germans sleep and the English fight. And truly, once drunk, they lose their conscience as well as human attributes. The poor people of England, once drunk, hurl horrible abuses, beat up their wives and children, and even kill them at times.

¹ Most of the Indians travelling to England have focussed upon this evil of English culture. Nineteenth century worldview of the Bengali society looked upon alcoholism as one of the greatest evils and a sure route to doom. Public drinking being absent from our society, it was something which struck the Indians hard when they came across it in England.

A few months back the newspapers and magazines of this country were largely engaged in a major campaign regarding the wretched condition of the poor and the reason behind it. During that period, there were such horrifying reports on ill effects of drinking that it sent shudders down the spine. I do not want to exaggerate anything in this book; rather I shall describe this abhorrent matter in as little words as possible. And in order to let you know what the British themselves think regarding this evil, I am presenting an excerpt of a true incident as recorded in the popular newspaper, 'Daily News'.

The lower class British people earn enough; yet they lead a very miserable and abominable life. The two main reasons behind it are their habit of excessive drinking and extravagance. Such an enormous number of people drain out their money on alcohol that it seems that none will ever be able to save them from their miserable predicament. Moreover in London and other cities the temptations are so widespread that it is not surprising that the feeble-minded poor would give in to the addiction of alcohol. Even those who do not have money for food or clothes, pawn whatever little they possess to buy drinks. Living the way they do, an entire family squeezed in a single room in East London and other areas, it is not at all surprising that they would be enticed by the resplendent alcohol shops. Brandy, gin, beer come at a much cheaper price than other luxury goods. So the poor can enjoy this seeming pleasure for a low cost and gradually give themselves up to these. Often, they rush to these attractive shops displaying rows of liquor bottles and consume this poisonous nectar to forget the sorrows and hardships of their wretched lives. Among the middle class too there are many who initially visit these shops once in a while but then become such an addict that they do not have any other option but to succumb to these 'public houses'.

The poor of this country wastes one-fourth of their income just on alcohol. Saturdays are particularly horrible here. The poor people get their wages on this day and visit the public houses. As long as they have money to spare they linger here. The earnings of a public house on Saturdays exceed the collective earning of all the other shops along the same road. If you take a look inside, you will see a frightening crowd of masons, labourers, porters, sweepers and all other low class people shouting and drinking. Alas! If they had not wasted their money here and instead spent it on food and clothes for their wives and children who are hungry and clothed in rags, much of their hardship would have lessened. Not just men, but even women can be found drinking. Grandmother, mother and daughter with a baby in her lap can be found drinking together in a public house. The octogenarian grandmother behaves like a young girl and the infant is just two months old. All of them, except the baby are so heavily drunk that it will not be an exaggeration to call them dipsomaniac. Here you see four generations at a line in a liquor shop and each of them looks awful and dirty. At times the mother pours some gin down the throat of her baby and says; 'let my baby too get a taste of this.' At this, the already inebriated father laughs hideously and appreciates his wife, saying, 'well, well'. Such horrible and frightening scenes are not to be seen anywhere apart from England.

At midnight, on a Saturday if you visit a public house in a poor neighbourhood, you will find the shopkeeper trying to forcefully evict the inebriated ones out of his shop at the closing time. Drunken men lay on the floor here and there – either unable to get up or not wishing to. Gradually, after being shoved out of the shops, these wretched ones walk down the road in faltering steps. Some fall down on their way and hurt their faces and heads. And once they reach home after many attempts, they instantly pick up a fight with their equally intoxicated wives.

Some spend their nights on streets; and if any of their kin or the poor wife does not take them home, they often die out of cold.

The saddest part here is that the poorest are the worst alcoholics. It is not possible to pen down the detestable and horrifying incidents that constantly occur here as a result of their alcoholism. If you enter the by-lanes of East London after the shops are closed, you will come across such horrible scenes which are impossible to even bear sights of. One can see women lying about and rolling here and there, their features almost distorted, all either shouting in a filthy language or singing; and drunken men embracing each other in a ghoulish manner. When a man and woman meet, the situation becomes more appalling. It begins with quarrels and abuses and ends in fights or even murders. In certain places, you can hear terrible screaming from one of the nearby houses. Perhaps the drunken husband, after beating his wife, had pushed her down the stairs or smashed her head with a stick. The half-dead wife groans in pain and the neighbours cry out 'murder'. Their shrieks pierce the silence of the night and aims straight at the heart. Here you can see women in frenzy; some madly running after their drunken husbands. A few women can be found lying in a pool of blood, unable to move by themselves. They scream their hearts out. After watching such scenes it seems that these people are inhuman. But this is not the end, worse things happen here.

Many wealthy men having lost all their money under the influence of alcohol are finally forced to live among the poor. Many educated men such as doctors, clergymen, teachers et al, too fall prey to this evil and become so degraded that they are eventually forced to sell matchboxes worth a penny or two on the roads or go begging to make a living. Blessings of *suradevi* have ruined many a rich men in such a way that they are now reduced to almost begging on the streets under the guise of selling flowers or singing. In some places, men, women

and children of a family are forced to live in a single room which is so filthy that it resembles a kennel or a pen. It is not possible to keep a track of the number of wealthy and middle class people reduced to this wretched and helpless state. And among these alcoholic destitute, there are women who once belonged to rich and noble families.

The news or sight of the poor makes us genuinely sad but the rich British people stay detached from them. They are busy in the pursuit of their selfish interest and pleasures and do not bother to care about the hardships of these unfortunate ones. They do spend a lot of money in various good deeds but they do not help the poor. Often they are ignorant of the latter's problems because all such horrible incidents happen only in the locality of the poor and never in the areas inhabited by the gentlemen. I have also mentioned earlier that the upper class British men hate the poor. Even those of middle station do not pay any attention towards them. Such great influence of alcohol is not found in any other country of this world and therefore nowhere among the poor can one find such beastly people. Particularly, in no other country women get drunk in such an obnoxious manner. Unfortunately today, alcohol is corrupting even a sacred country like India. Nowadays, the rich men of our country are getting drawn towards alcohol. Even the educated young men do not hesitate to imitate the British habit of drinking. I hope they become conscious after reading this section and take it as a warning.

Many people say that without alcohol it is not possible to remain healthy in England. I completely disagree with it – drinking is just a habit. Nowadays, one can find a number of British men who do not touch alcohol. And the rate of drinking has considerably reduced among the rich gentlemen of that country. This has not harmed them in anyway, rather it has helped them. In many houses here, the guest is offered liquor and cigar just as we offer beetle leaf and tobacco in our country. It might offend the host if the guest refuses it. So an Indian has to drink

at times even against his wishes. But that does not mean that one has to start drinking or get drunk after reaching England. The aforesaid custom of welcoming one's guest by offering him a drink has greatly reduced among the educated class of England and the habit of drinking is also reducing among the people. If, even then the educated young men of our country indulge in this habit, it is a matter of grave sorrow.

14. Interior region of England – Farmers and Landlords - Weather

Just as the buildings and factories cover the cities of England its villages are beautifully adorned with greenery all around. As soon as you leave the city you will see lush green fields on both sides of the road separated from each other by hedges, its beauty enhanced by an occasional big tree. Consistently monotonous sight vexes human minds. A look at these trees, few and far between makes me think that the Almighty had placed them as such to spare us that monotony. Far off one can see few huts of the farmers. Apart from those, every other visible object is green – the place seems to be covered with various kinds of plants, shrubs and creepers. Look around this place from a raised area and the entire place will appear the same. As far as you can see you will find only vast expanse of green fields. There are no forests here but some patches which are full of useful plants such as “root”, “clover”, “hop”¹ etc and small bushes. At times you can also find a narrow yellowish stream flowing through a serpentine course. It makes the adjoining fields extremely fertile and hence there is a dense growth of grass there. Huge cows, sheep and various other cattle graze about, ruminant or simply play around here. In England cattle are so healthy

¹ Both hop and clover are herbs which have been brought to England in 16th and 19th century respectively.

and strong because there is a lot of fodder available for them. Various types of food grains and vegetables, chiefly, barley, wheat, potato, cauliflower etc. occupy the major portion of the cultivated land here.

When we visit these fields, far away from the crowd, we forget the beauty of the British cities and discuss the comely beauty of nature that we find here. Whichever way we look, we can see greenery all around. Such sights are delightful and soothing to our eyes. These green stretches of land covered with plants and climbers are called 'meadows'. Apart from the meadows, one can also see some uncultivated land here. The British call them 'commons'. Men have not yet destroyed the natural beauty of these places by agriculture or constructions. Here the surrounding is quiet and lonely; only one or two horses can be seen grazing at a distance but no other animals. These 'commons' are not similar to the uncultivated forestlands of our own country. There are no wild animals here and while walking through this one need not be scared of snakes or any other creature. Only grass and some small wild plants grow here and the soil is very hard and uneven. Previously, almost the entire land of England was as tough as these areas. I am thrilled to even think of the amount of patience and hard work that the British must have required to make this land arable: but the forbearance and perseverance of the British have helped them achieve success in this difficult task. In every century they turn hundreds of acres of more inferior forest lands into beautiful fields and eventually cultivate them to yield various kinds of produce.

While strolling through the fields you might face a spell of rain every couple of hours. But the landscape looks so beautiful after the shower that we are not bothered by that inconvenience. The grass looks fresher and greener. On the small leaves, there are water droplets, just about to trickle down. When they shine, they look bright like pearl strings. As the

sun re-emerges from the clouds, the fields look brighter. Small white and yellow flowers on the grass look more beautiful as they reflect the sun rays. Sometimes you can see breathtaking scenes forming in the grey sky overhead. The sky is most of the time covered with dull, dark clouds, some moving at a speed and some others still. Gradually the clouds in motion come and envelop the stable ones. Almost immediately the latter slide away and appear to rise their hoods in the manner of trampled serpents. Quickly, another cloud comes to occupy the vacant space. Like this, one after the other, the clouds cover the entire sky in layers similar to stairs. Shortly, another group of clouds resembling a huge grey elephant move swiftly across the sky. The layers of cloud scatter and rush here and there and eventually, this huge cloud bursts into rain, disturbing the beautiful sight.

The huts in rural parts of England look extremely poverty-stricken. From a distance, they remind me of the shacks of the farmers of our country. These huts have walls made of mud and wood and a very low thatched roof. The rooms are extremely narrow with a few small windows. A very thin wall separates the two adjacent rooms. In winters a very large family has to somehow cramp themselves within two such rooms. When I think of the way they live in winters, I feel depressed. They make a big fire within the house around which they dry the damp clothes of their children. Again when there is continuous rain or snow they cannot go out. The air within the rooms becomes unhealthy due to the smoke from fire and damp vapour of the wet clothes; yet they have to inhale that for hours. The farmer who stays in such a hut earns about rupees thirty a month. He has to pay an annual rent of rupees forty or fifty for his hut, and provide food and clothes for his four or five children and his wife. Yet, this small hut is very clean with all its objects neatly arranged. The fireplace is strongly built with iron. At least one of the rooms has an old 'carpet'. Some houses use decorative wallpapers and hang a few pictures on

the walls. There are some well-polished wooden cots and a table. On one of the shelves is the Bible. Sometimes they also have other religious books, fictions or even books on farming. Actually, these huts of the poor Englishmen possess more items, whether necessary or not, than many middleclass homes of our country. Unlike the houses of Indian farmers, these houses do not have any broken doors or windowpanes, foul smelling drains, heaps of cow-dung, or other dirty things scattered in the vicinity. If you visit the house of a British farmer at about nine or ten in the morning, you will find the mistress of the house already extremely tired after her hard work, yet she does not show any apathy to work. She will bathe her small children and dress them up in clothes that she herself has washed with care. After that she will feed them, send the elder ones to some nearby school and put the younger ones to sleep. Then she will concentrate on her household chores. Again in the evening, around six or seven o'clock, you will see that the master of the house has returned home after the day's hard work. He then takes his evening tea and bread with his family. Later, he relaxes on one of the cots and his wife and children sit near him. The wife sits and stitches while talking to her husband and the children either listen to their parents' conversation or play among themselves. Though they are not educated, I feel both pleased and amazed at the discipline that I see in their everyday life. Such neat and well-maintained cottages are almost never seen among our farmers.

The villages here are bigger than those in India. Many of them have a population of five to six hundred people. The condition of the houses and roads in these villages are better than those in India. In every village there is a small, tidy inn in which a person can spend a few days comfortably. We come across a number of concrete buildings here. Even the houses belonging to carpenters, blacksmiths and other such workers are made of bricks with roofs of red tiles. These houses with gardens at front as well as back are much better than the huts of the farmers. They

own a greater number of things than the farmers do and their belongings are also more expensive. Everything is clean and neatly arranged. But the sad part is that, like the city dwellers, the villagers too are very fond of food and drink. They blow up their money on meat and alcohol.

The agricultural setting in England is starkly different from that in our country. In India, the farmers take land on lease from the landlords and then cultivate. But here, there is a class of people who buy a large portion of land from the big landlords and then employ farm workers for a fixed salary. This class is called the 'farmer' and the land occupied by them is known as 'farm'. There are many kinds of farms here, some grow crops, some keep dairy animals and deal with only milk and milk products and still others keep hens, sheep, horses and other such animals. The farms are very clean and they work in a systematic and disciplined way. Some farmers are in charge of about hundred acres of land for which they have to pay a duty to the land-owner and a 'tax' to the government. Some even take a lease of about four hundred acres of land and cultivate them. The farm labourers work only during the day. They get a salary for it but have no rights over the land. It is the farmers who take care of the field and enjoy the profit that they get from its produce. They live in splendid houses which have a portico in the front and are surrounded by beautiful gardens and huge trees. The interior of the house is beautifully decorated and there is no lack of furnishing or other items within. Most of the farmers live very lavishly like the rich business men. They are quite educated and intelligent and their wives are also equally intelligent and efficient in domestic chores.

In the farms, there are separate spaces for cows, horses, sheep, hens, etc. and these are clean and well ventilated. Almost all the farms have big stables where horses, cows and other animals are kept under proper care. In some of the farms, these animals are kept in stables for about six months at a stretch and are given nutritious food. Almost all the domestic animals of

England are bigger and healthier than those in our country. Abundance of fodder, proper care and fresh air make them so strong, stout and huge in size. Here the sheep are so big and furry, that an Indian at first sight cannot recognise them as sheep. The cows here are bigger than those found in the hilly region of our country and produce about ten to twelve litres of milk every day. The most commonly visible horses in and around London are bigger and healthier than even those belonging to the rich men of our country. Some of the horses here are so huge that they seem to belong to the family of elephants. Around London, the horses that are found are about seven and half to nine feet tall and they are so huge that their Indian counterparts appear no more than colt in comparison. Here they take very good care of the farm animals. As such they are of a superior breed than those found in other countries; added to it, the British devote their maximum effort towards the health of their cattle. Horse races and animal fairs are organised quite frequently here. This too prompts the British to take greater care of their animals in a scientific way.

Here, most of the farm works are carried out by machines instead of human beings, cows or horses. Ploughing the fields, drawing harrow over land, threshing of crops or weeding the land – all these are done by machines in a faster and better way. Use of these machines has reduced man's hardships considerably. It also saves a lot of time. And taking all expenses into consideration, it is cheaper than farming manually. Sadly, our farmers are ignorant about these machines and our landlords are least bothered about these. Even if they are aware about these, they do not have the urge to change the age-old system of farming. A job that requires a month in India takes about ten days here. Like every other thing, the British take an active interest in agricultural science as well. It is their constant endeavour to improvise in this field of knowledge as well. The study of agriculture too requires scientific knowledge, intelligence and experience

like every other branch of study. Since land here is not as fertile as that in India nothing can be grown here without much effort. Had the British farmers not used innovative machines and methods of farming to make their soil worth cultivating, nothing probably would have grown here.

Though the farmers and the farm workers¹ seem quite happy, the condition of the poor is worsening day by day in this country. I had said earlier, the cultivators do not have any right over the land; they only toil like labourers here. In spite of earning well enough, they do not have enough money for a comfortable living due to their extremely extravagant nature. Though the Indian farm workers do not work or earn as much as the British ones, they are much happier. They do not consider consumption of alcohol and meat to be the most indispensable part of life and hence do not lead a beastly life as their British counterpart. There is a constant rise in foppery in England. Even the farm workers spend all their money on fresh meat, bottled liquor and various other luxuries that appeal to their senses. Also there is a constant rise in the number of big farmlands. The farmers are buying up parts of the commons and putting a fence around them. So gradually these are either reducing in size or vanishing completely. The farm labourers are therefore not left with any means of keeping their chickens or pigs etc. In this way, since they do not have any right over the land, physical labour is the only option left for earning their daily bread. At times, even their wives and children have to work in the fields in order to earn. Agriculture is following the footsteps of industries and therefore nowadays the farm workers show all the faults and troubles which are generally found among the industrial workers.

Most of the land here is owned by the aristocrats such as the duke, the earl, etc. They distribute and lease out land among the farmers. But these land owners are not like the

¹ Since the author uses the term farmer for landowners, I use the term farm worker for those who do the actual job of farming on those lands.

*zamindars*¹ of India, especially, the *zamindars* of Bengal, who are only tax collectors for the British government. The landowners here are quite rich and they donate money for a number of just causes. They are also more educated, progressive and industrious than those in our country. Since only the eldest son inherits the property in England, their properties do not get divided as in our country. Rather, instead of reducing in size, their property increases with time. The darker side of this system is that land here is owned by only a handful of people only who understand just their own interest. Though they engage in charity, they are not sufficiently well disposed towards the poor people. This can be easily understood by looking at the class distinction and the condition of the poor in this country. The landlords stay in London only for three to four months in the summers and spend rest of the year in their own places, in the palatial houses, surrounded by big gardens.

There are quite a number of prosperous cities of various sizes in England among which Liverpool and Manchester are known to most of the Indians. Cotton imported from various countries reach Liverpool first. From there it is sent to Manchester where they are spun into garments. Those clothes then come back to Liverpool and from the port there, they are exported to various parts of the world. Nowadays, any ordinary cloth or *gamchha*² has the stamp of Manchester on it. Hence everyone knows about the cotton made in Manchester. Manchester can be called an industrial town. There are huge factories set up in all parts of the town. The machines run throughout the day making various kinds of sounds. I have heard that there is no country in this world where the thread or cloth made in Manchester is not available.

¹ The atrocities of the Zamindars was one of the growing concern of that period. Krishnabhabini shows enough awareness of the agricultural system of both the countries to undertake a comparative analysis of it.

² A kind of coarse but thin cotton cloth used in India, particularly Bengal, for drying oneself after bath or a wash.

Liverpool is a very big city. It has an approximate population of six lakhs and resembles London in many ways. It is situated in the north of England, close to the sea, on the bank of the river Mersey. It has a number of huge docks which are surrounded by numerous godowns for storing cotton, resembling the walls of a fortress. It seems that entire cotton of the world is brought here. About six miles of Mersey River is crowded with ships. During winters, hundreds of masts of these ships waiting in the harbours look like a dense forest. These ships bring various kinds of merchandise and wealth from different parts of the world. A look at those makes one feel that all the wealth in this world had been created just for England. This city is famous for its trade and commerce; that is what has made it prosperous as well. Most of the places here are as big and rich as London. All the large cities of England have a great propensity towards alcohol but Liverpool is said to be the place in which the most heinous and shameful incidents take place under its influence. I have seen that in this country, those places which thrive with industry, commerce and wealth, are most affected by the evil of drinking. I have seen in England that alcoholism is more prevalent in those cities which are more prosperous because of industries or trade and commerce.

I had mentioned elsewhere that this country is famous for peat coal and iron mines. From Buckingham to Wolverhampton, in the north of England, about twelve miles stretch of land is full of coal mines and iron factories. This part of England always looks black due to smoke and coal. Therefore the British have named this place 'black country'. This world does not have a place more astonishing. A look at this 'black country' or reading about this is enough to make one realise how hard working and tolerant a British person is. It also tells the reason behind England's prosperity. Just as the cities of Manchester and Liverpool are full of threads, cloth mills, cotton and cotton storehouses, lots of dresses, etc., this place is has two very useful things

for mankind – coal and iron. Since England has prospered a lot due to coal and iron, these two are also known as ‘black gold’.

Both the ground beneath and the sky overhead is black in this ‘black country’. For many miles underground there are deep mines with various layers formed due to digging. It is difficult to even imagine such a thing. And when you see them the astonishment is too great to be expressed. If you revisit this place at night, it appears quite frightening at first. At night, bright flames leap out of the huge furnaces in the iron factories resembling a volcanic eruption. Their noise can be heard from a great distance. Flames emitted by those hundreds of chimneys shoot upwards through the dark sky and look like red feathers of a dancing peacock. Looking at the heaps of burning hot iron it seems that the world is about to end in a great fire. A dense cloud of smoke overhead reflects the burning furnace and looks brighter. Those bright masses of smoke gather together and float above us like clouds. At the same time the sound of wind blowing, clatter of machines, din from the blast furnaces and the loud noise coming from this huge iron hammer almost turns us both blind and deaf. One feels like running away from this *patalpuri*¹. If you go near this place in the morning you can hear the similar sounds but you will not find that terrifying vision of the night. It is hard to believe that such appalling activities are the basis of British prosperity and that these are the most important constituents of British trade and commerce. We understand the great influence of coal and iron in our life only after coming here. This place does not seem fit for human habitation but miners, blacksmiths and such people stay here only. Sun shine or moon light almost never penetrates their huts and it is very difficult to

¹ This can be loosely translated as the netherworld. According to the Hindu cosmology, there are three *lokas* or worlds, *swarga* or heaven, the abode of gods, this earth and then the *patala*, the underworld which is generally considered to be ruled by the demons or *danavas*.

understand how they continue with their lives in such a place that has no scope for beauty or any kind of relaxation.

Like many other things, climate of England is fascinating as well. England is known to have a cold climate but unless one lives here, one cannot understand properly how changeable it actually is. This place experiences various types of seasons but it is difficult to foretell, when winter shall end and spring begin and for how long the summer will continue. Since this is an island, sea breeze blowing from all sides does not let the climate to be one of extreme winters or severe summers like France, Germany and other neighbouring countries. Yet I have not seen such horrible and fluctuating climate anywhere else. Due to the presence of the Atlantic Ocean in the west, there is continuous storm and rain coming in from that direction and at times, bitter cold winds blow from the north and the east. Except for two to three months, rest of the year in this place is very difficult for the ailing or weak persons. And if the foreigners visiting this place do not take proper care, they too can easily fall sick. But along with so many evils, there are some positive elements as well. Though the climate is ever-changing it is not unhealthy. Since the British grow up in this extreme type of climate, they turn out to be very tough and do not hesitate to undertake difficult tasks. British sailors, since they are born in such a country, learn to overcome all difficulties and sail on the seas for days and nights, exploring various countries. Such a challenging environment makes the British tough, strong, capable and industrious. It is said that if a person can tolerate this insufferable British climate for a considerable period of time, he can easily live in any country of the world.

In England, the seasons follow the order of summer, autumn, winter and spring. But a few summer days can get as cold as the winter ones while some days in winter can be similar to

autumn season. Rain and storm can upset life in any time or season of the year. People here always live in the fear of cold and difficult days.

June, July and August are the summer months of this country. During this time, about fifteen to twenty days are as hot as the month of *Ashadh*¹ in our country. Rest of the time is quite cool, like the months of *Kartik*² or *Agrahayan*³. During this period nights are very short. Within a span of twenty-four hours, night hours are only from four o'clock to eight o'clock and towards the end of June, there is light in the sky throughout the night. Coming here from India, one feels surprised to see evening setting in at about nine or ten o'clock and the day break by one or two o'clock. But it does not remain so for long. Gradually, as the day time decreases, our amazement also subsides. In England, summer is the season of happiness. During these months, trees bear fresh leaves, flowers and fruits and make the villages, cities and towns of England look beautiful. This is the time when everyone enjoys. Many people who work as hard as a donkey through the year take rest during this period.

September, October and November are the autumn months here. But it is very different from the season of *sharat*⁴ of our country. Towards its end, the season becomes quite depressing. Nature loses its splendour. Trees look sad without any leaves and flowers. Heaps of dried leaves can be found beneath each tree and every gush of air sheds more leaves. So much of change within a span of these three months leaves us quite shaken. Day breaks at seven, reducing its duration and evening sets in around five or six o'clock. Cities once again put on their sombre look and prepare themselves to embrace the harsh winter. People leave their summer

¹ It is the third month of the Bengali calendar corresponding to mid June to mid July in English calendar.

² It is the seventh month of the Bengali calendar corresponding to mid October to mid November.

³ The eighth month of the Bengali calendar, falling in the period of mid November to mid December.

⁴ The season immediately following the rains in India is called *sharat*.

amusements and concentrate on their own jobs. Those who come to visit England now return to their respective homes. November is a terrible month as there is dense fog and this is the beginning of winter here. December, January and February are the actual winter months. This is a difficult period as nature is extremely hostile: severe cold, dense fog, occasional drizzling and snowfall - all these together make human life thoroughly miserable. Often, in January and February, almost everything freezes - roads freeze and become as hard as stone and at times water kept in earthen pitchers freeze and the pitchers crack. During this period there is a great crisis of water. Water that is there in the house freezes into ice and has to be melted for use again. Sometimes water freezes in the underground pipelines that supply water and cut off domestic water supply. Some winters are so severe that the even man-made water tanks in the gardens freeze. The British entertain themselves in various ways even in such freezing climate. When the entire surrounding including the roads and fields gets snow-covered, becoming very slippery and as hard as stone, the young men put on their skating shoes and meander about the area. Some of them rush speedily through these snow covered roads in a kind of a vehicle that has no wheels. On some of the nights, there is a lot of revelry here. Men, women, girls and boys, carrying their torches, go for walks together in a happy spirit over some frozen lakes or canals, Their voices and laughter can be heard from a long distance.

Every year winter is not equally severe here. Had it been so, the British people would have found it very difficult to live. I do not need to mention that it is impossible to live here in a house without a fireplace. While going out of the house, people need to wear layers of warm clothing so that their limbs do not become numb due to the freezing cold. Some parts of England face such severe winter that if people sit outdoors, parts of their body or the entire body might get frozen. Winter days are extremely short, mornings begin around eight or nine o' clock. And

by three or four o'clock, evening sets in. Days are mostly cloudy. The sun either remains invisible, or even if it is visible, it appears so cold and dull that it is as good as not being there. During the winters here, you need to burn a lot of oil and wood and also need warm clothes. At times when the entire surrounding freezes, the labourers have to stop their work. Therefore in this season the poor people suffer a lot.

March, April and May are months of spring. March, which is the spring season here, is actually colder than *magh*¹ in India. Throughout March there is a strong wind. Cold wind penetrates our skin despite all the layers of our clothing and rattles our bones. These are at times accompanied with a rainfall and snowfall. By April the severity of winter reduces. Yet even then the temperature is as low as or even a bit lower than the winters in our country. There is incessant rainfall in April, similar to the rainy season of India. Farmers start cultivation in this period. New plants grow. Days become longer and the nights, shorter. Sun becomes more visible and its brightness gradually increases. England seems to get a new lease of life. May is the actual month of spring here. This is the time when the entire flora looks fresher, decked up in green leaves and flowers of various colours. The towns and villages look brighter. Entire vegetation, including huge trees and small grasses are beautifully adorned with flowers in bloom. Whether you visit a garden or a field, a town or countryside, everywhere you will find an abundance of flowers. But sadly, such beautiful flowers exist only for a couple of months. In the months of May and June, a pleasant breeze blows and the sun rays are soothing. Every country has its share of happiness and sorrow. Here too the people suffer a lot in winters, but they forget all that as they enjoy a pleasant summer.

¹ *Magh*, the tenth month in Bengali calendar refers to the period between mid December to mid January, which is the coldest time of the year in India.