

‡Does a Manila taxi-driver live this way?

EXPERIENCES OF A LONDON TAXI-DRIVER

I'VE BEEN driving a taxi now for nine years. And I don't think I'd change my job with anyone. Not for long. There are plenty of better jobs, as far as earnings are concerned. But none that I know of where a man is so completely free.

London is a difficult town to learn. It covers nearly seven hundred square miles, including the suburbs, with streets turning and twisting at all angles. It isn't a bit like a modern American city, laid out in neat, rectangular blocks.

When I presented myself for examination the inspector convinced me I knew nothing about the town in which I was born and raised. Altogether, I suppose I must have attended about twenty-five of these examinations, and that wasn't too bad. I met one man who had been up eighty times and still couldn't pass.

These examinations were oral. The inspector gave me the point of departure and the destination, and I had to take him over the route, giving the names of every street I passed through, and all the turns I made, sometimes even des-

cribing the appearance and giving the names of the buildings I passed on the way. The trouble was the inspector was always calling his cab in places I'd never seen and wanted to go somewhere I'd never heard of. Nine times out of ten he'd give me only the names of the buildings, without any street or even the district.

Well, at the end of three months I felt like a human directory; but I couldn't satisfy the examiners. At the end of six months, I knew just about enough to know how little I knew. Then they told me I could take a driving-test. After passing that, I passed a final examination on London covering my weakest points. I received my license and badge and went out with a cab the same night.

A taxi-driver sees without being seen, and so sees—well, a lot more than most people think. We see some strange things, especially at night, though to me the strange things are the ordinary things, the sort of things most folk take for granted. The very ordinary fact, for instance, that two human be-

ings can live almost side by side, one unhealthily rich and the other miserably poor; and that each knows the condition of each, and that both so take it for granted that neither attempts to do anything about it. At one in the morning, for instance, I'll set down passengers at a fashionable nightclub full of human beings with more money than they know what to do with; and then I turn the corner, and I'm in Trafalgar Square, not fifty yards away, and there is another group of human beings, without even the price of a bit of bread and cheese, lining up for the coffee dole.

Taxi-driving is a good job; but it's got its drawbacks, mind you. We don't get any wages, for one thing, simply commission—tips when we're lucky. In some companies the driver guarantees the proprietor a definite sum for the cab before he starts, or what we call the flat-rate system. We're not insured against unemployment, either. And if the cab breaks down, or there isn't one for us to take out, we get no compensation. We're usually paid a third of the meter-takings. That's the trade-union rate. No company pays less than that. Though some pay a lit-

tle more—especially if they're running old cabs and finding it difficult to get drivers. Of course our earnings fluctuate according to the weather and the time of year. But taking the average, I should say a cabman earns about the same as a truck-driver—about fifty to seventy shillings a week, say twelve to eighteen dollars in U. S. money. Nearly half of that is tips, as a rule. Without tips we'd hardly earn an errand boy's wages.

I know some cabmen who have bought their own houses and sent their children to secondary schools, and others who find it difficult to scrape up the rent for a couple of rooms. Most of the company's cabs are what we call double. There's a day driver and a night driver to each cab. But some may have cabs all to themselves and work twelve and fourteen hours a day, seven days a week. Once they let themselves in for the houses and things, they've got to find the money or kill themselves in the attempt. I know of more than one cabman who has done that.

Myself, I prefer to work eight or nine hours a day, six days a week, and let those have houses as wants them. I'd sooner do without luxuries and have more lei-

sure. For what's the use of a house, anyway, if you've got no time to live in it?

We need to be good drivers, especially in our London fogs. We'll be standing on the rank one minute in perfectly clear weather and the next a bank of fog will come rolling up and blot out everything. It's an uncanny sensation. Sometimes I'll be sitting on the cab quite stationary, but the rolling fog will give me the sensation of movement. I'll snatch at the handbrake in sudden fright, only to find it's full on. But even that won't convince me. I'll stamp on the foot brake and still feel I'm moving. Fog's the time the taxi-driver comes into his own. With his short bonnet and open driver's seat he can see so much better than the driver in the long-bonneted, powerful car that folks who hoot him out of their way in fine weather are only too

glad to fall in meekly behind and follow him. True, if the fog gets too bad, even taxicabs have to stop. But we're philosophical. We go inside the cab-shelter and drink tea and play dominoes, tell tall tales about jobs we've carried in far worse fogs than this one.

Cab-shelters are more expensive to eat in than coffee-stalls or Italian cafes. But the food is much better, and it's always freshly cooked, and that's more than can be said for many so-called better-class restaurants. Some of London's richest epicures go into a cab-shelter when they fancy a really good steak and chips, but we don't encourage visitors as a rule—at least, not sightseers. When people in evening dress come into a shelter to watch the lower classes eat, we never disappoint them!—
Herbert Hodge, condensed from Radio Digest.

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YAWS?

A PROFESSOR, lecturing at a medical school on a tropical disease called Yaws, noticed one of the students having a quiet nap. The professor shot at him: "Mr. So and So, what is Yaws?" The student, probably dreaming of the party of yesternight, replied: "Mine's a beer, what's yours?" (Collapse of the lecturer.)