

coarse, fat, leg of mutton, underdone; potatoes, hot without and hard within, gritty cabbage, and hot-water soup.»

Those rare coaching inns which did supply good food made sure that the traveller had little of it. Such landlords of those days worked a pretty



racket with the coach proprietors concerning the time permitted for meals. Twenty minutes was allowed for dinner and not a minute more. Net result was that the hapless passenger found himself confronted with inexplicable delays in the dining room and considered himself lucky if he was left enough time to get beyond the soup. The coach-guard too, helped things along by bawling *Time's up* considerably before the authorised twenty minutes, for which service he was compensated by free, rum and hot water.

Floods, broken equipment, act of God, King's enemies, thieves, cut-purses, and general inefficiency were considered normal hazards of a coach journey of any distance. The Christmas season added to these in that the coachman was usually drunk and ended by tipping his unwilling cargo into the ditch—or as one instance is recorded, even bemusedly pulling his horses round and proceeding blithely in

the opposite direction, despite the curses and entreaties of his passengers.

The seasons in England appear to have changed slightly since the early nineteenth century, and heavy snow at Christmas time was more the rule than the exception. A snowed-up coach might look most picturesque and jolly on a Christmas card. But in actual life it was a dangerous predicament for the occupants. The freezing hours spent waiting for assistance to be dug out often led to serious illnesses, and sometimes death.

To travel on a mail-coach was even worse, for the guard's one and only consideration was the mails—the passengers had to shift for themselves as best they might. Mail-coach drivers, in their zeal for the prompt delivery of their mails, often tried to push on in weather that was quite impossible, occasionally with fatal results to all on board.

Guards of coaches passing through towns and villages set up a shocking clamour on their posting-horns. Few could play them properly and when a number of coaches were moving in a town at the same time each guard vied with the other on the amount of noise he could make. There were, however, certain recognised coaching tunes and to hear them all played together was enough to shatter the nerves of the strongest. Villagers were invariably rudely awakened on the passage of a coach at night.

*Jolly coaching Christmases of the Christmas card, and of novels, are just so much humbug.*

