**Chennai.3**

*Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred within him when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. Acts 17 v 1*

“Mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the midday sun!” Looking back, I must have been mad to venture out that afternoon, to leave the safety of the Headquarters building. It was very hot but I had reasoned that I was only going to be in the city for a few days and I did want to explore and take photos.

I was aware of the natives and their incredulity as I passed by wearing a sun hat and dark glasses. I must have caused great amusement to them.

Shutting the gates behind me and leaving the compound I headed for the main road. The side street was filthy dirty. Groups of men ate from stalls, indifferent to flies and horrible smells.

The turbaned drivers of the yellow three wheeled taxies accosted me imploring me to hire their vehicle but I waved a dismissive hand turning left into the hub-bub of the city.

I gazed in amazement, right and left, up and down. Hindu temples, wandering beggars ,”holy animals,” the constant bleeping of scooter and car horns in the melee of the city traffic was intoxicating. I tried to ignore the piles refuse, the dangerous pavements, the potholes and the awful stench.

I entered a book shop finding temporary relief from the overpowering heat. It was another world.

Security guards opened the door and greeted me before ushering me into a haven of air-conditioned luxury. I relaxed as I walked up and down rows of books, maps and other things, comparing prices, surprised and yet disappointed that it all looked so normal - just like “Smiths” in England!

Back in the hot dusty street, clutching my maps and envelopes, feeling a little pride at having negotiated my first purchases. I retraced my steps and found Thompson’s travel agents where I changed £100 to 6,500 Rupees. Feeling more confident, I located the post office situated on the ground floor of a large office block. It was bedlam! Stamps were bought in another room off a long corridor. After queuing to buy them I was directed to another queue. In the same room, where you had to pay for them. It was no surprise to find the mail had to be posted in another room further down the corridor.

Having completed my mission, I went out again, crossed the busy road finally returning to the compound and the cool of my room with thankfulness and relief.

My room was very basic having cement walls and ill fitting wooden shetters over glassless windows. A solitary bed placed in the centre of the room with its “mosquito net ties strung out to the window frames inviting unsuspected guests to hang themselves in a forgetful moment! The room did have one redeeming feature - a giant air conditioning unit.

ON being shown the room, the boys had taken pity on me. They had seen I was sweating profusely and had called for an electrician who had rewired the unit. There was only one disadvantage, when in operation it emitted a ghastly noise, rattling and rumbling, so you had to choose - be cool and deafened by the noise or bake and enjoy the quietness, whichever you needed most.

That evening I stood on the balcony, overlooking the street, wondering what the Lord had in mind for me in India.