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[Despatch Abstract.]

Local Museums & Show Rooms

Stating that on financial and other grounds the establishment of a number of — is not practicable at present; Copy to the G. O. S.

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G.O., &c., Nos. 751, 752, 17th December 1897.

DECEMBER.

Local Museums and Show-rooms.

Stating that on financial and other grounds the establishment of a number of — is not practicable at present. Copy to the Government of India.

GOVERNMENT OF MADRAS.

EDUCATIONAL DEPARTMENT.

Read—again the following paper:—

G.O., No. 515, Educational, dated 24th August 1896.

ABSTRACT.—Communicating to the Revenue Department, the Director of Public Instruction, and the Superintendent, Government Museum, remarks of the Government of India upon the proceedings of the Art Conference of 1894 so far as they relate to practical arts and museums; and requesting certain Collectors and the Superintendent, Government Museum, to favour Government with their opinion on the suggestions relating to local museums and show-rooms.

Read—also the following papers:—

From the Collector of Coimbatore, to the Chief Secretary to Government, dated 18th September 1896, Dis. No. 3176-Rev.

In reply to G.O., No. 515, Educational, dated 24th August 1896, I have the honour to state that I do not think any craft except weaving practised in this district is of sufficient importance to render the establishment of a show-room or local museum necessary.

2. There is a good deal of weaving carried on both in cotton and silk, but although I think some good might be done if it were possible to make the artisans consult permanent types of cotton fabrics, I doubt whether a local museum would be much frequented. Coimbatore would be the proper place for the museum of cotton fabrics, but as the centre of the silk-weaving is Kollegal, it would be of little use to do anything for the silk-weavers in any other place.

3. I do not know whether the establishment of museums can be held to fall under any of the sub-sections of section 95 of the Local Boards Act, but in any case I would not recommend that the local museum, should be under the control of local bodies, but under that of the Collector.

(Signed) H. BRADLEY,
Collector.

From the Superintendent, Government Museum, Madras, to the Chief Secretary to Government, dated 28th September 1896, No. 846.

With reference to G.O., No. 515, Educational, dated 24th August 1896, I have the honour to express my views in connection with the suggestion relating to local museums and show-rooms referred to in paragraph 5 of the letter from the Government of India printed therewith.

2. The resolution of the Lahore Art Conference, 1894, with which I have to deal was to the effect that "in all places at which there are distinct local industries, small museums, or more correctly show-rooms, should be established in which type collections, illustrative of those industries, should be placed and kept up. That they should be under the supervision of the local authorities, but be inspected periodically by the Superintendent of the provincial museum, without whose approval no objects should be kept permanently as types."

3. I may, at the outset, express my decided opinion that no museum, however small, can flourish under amateur management, even if subject to the general control of a professional museum officer with power to make inspections, which must of necessity be few and far between.

4. In 1843, General Cullen proposed to form a small museum in each Collectorate under the care of the Collector, the Medical officer and Engineer, in which might be stored specimens of the various economic products of the districts. Eight years later in 1851—the year of the Great Exhibition—the Honourable the Court of Directors expressed their approval of the "establishment of a central museum at the Presidency" and of local repositories in the interior. In 1855, museums were established at Bellary, Coimbatore, Cuddalore, Mangalore, Ootacamund and Rajahmundry, managed by a committee composed of the principal residents of the respective localities, and in connection with the central museum. In the Minutes of Consultation, No. 214, Public, dated 16th February 1855, it is noted that "it must be borne in mind that the Honourable Court, when according sanction to the partial establishment of such museums, desired that they should be considered chiefly as repositories for the collection and transmission to the central museum of the interesting objects afforded by their respective localities." I am unable from the records at my disposal to trace the brief career of these local museums, which, however, appear to have died a natural death from want of funds, skilled supervision, practical scope and other causes.

5. My object in referring to these historic details is to show that the organization of small local museums or show-rooms is no new idea so far as the Madras Presidency is concerned, but a scheme which has been put to the test and failed.

6. My policy in the direction of the Madras Museum, which has been carried out during the last eleven years, has been to organize it on a geographical basis and make it fulfil the requirements of a reference guide to the natural history, arts, industries, economic resources, archaeology, &c., of Southern India. And, in a lecture printed with my annual report, 1895-96, I stated that "I have clearly mapped out in my head a scheme which will be put into action, now that increased space is placed at my disposal, for the development of a section, already existing in a rudimentary state, devoted to the illustration of the economic resources and industries and the establishment of what I would call an economic and industrial museum." In reviewing the annual report Government expressed its thorough approval of my "view that the technical and economic side of the museum should be extended and developed as far as is possible. District officers have it in their power to render the Superintendent material assistance in this direction." The scheme referred to above has since been put in action, and the arrangement of the art and industrial galleries of the museum new buildings is fast approaching completion, so far as existing material is concerned. Much remains, however, to be added hereafter in order that the collections may constitute an exhaustive index to the arts and industries of Southern India; and I am strongly of opinion that the development of the Madras Museum, with the assistance of District officers, who might do much for it in consultation with the Superintendent in acquiring typical samples of local arts and industries, &c., is of greater importance than the establishment of small local museums.

7. The question of the maintenance of indigenous arts and industries at a high standard of excellence is almost beyond the scope of the present letter, but it is one in which the art and industrial sections of the Madras Museum should be directly concerned, and I shall refer to it at length in my forthcoming monograph on cotton fabrics, which afford a melancholy example of industrial decline, the course of which no small museum or show-room at Madura, Tanjore or other district centres could retard.

8. It seems to me that, at any rate in the Madras Presidency, the exhibition of local industries in the manner proposed by the Lahore Conference would serve no really useful purpose such as would justify the cost of their establishment and maintenance. To take, as an example, Tanjore mixed-metal ware. The exhibition of this ware in a small museum or show-room in Tanjore, where the industry is perfectly well known, would do very little, if any, good to those engaged in the industry, who

should be able to protect their own interests without State aid. But I have often wondered that the Tanjore metal-workers, Trichinopoly pith-modellers, Vellore brass-workers and others do not, as is done in some of the big cities of Northern India, have stalls on the railway platforms, especially in the cold weather, for the sale of their wares, mainly to itinerant "globe-trotters." The establishment of such stalls, under some organised arrangement by which only the sale of articles of recognised merit was permitted, would, it appears to me, be more practical and efficient than museums or show-rooms, which might be established in the cities.

4. Of course, a large show-room in Madras would contain the best specimens of work in the Madras Presidency. The details that would doubtless be given as to place of manufacture would enable dealers in the articles to go direct to the workmen.

5. I would, therefore, suggest that Government be informed that the formation of a show-room as part of the Madras Central Museum seems to be the most desirable arrangement.