M.R.O. 1—39,000—16-10-20.

MADRAS RECORD OFFICE.

Government of Madras.

Judicial DEPARTMENT.

G.O. No. 1458 Press
59-60 —Mis.—

Dated 28—10— 1959

Not to be folded or roughly handled

No. 59. Read the following letter from ST. L. M. GRENFELL, Esq., Acting Joint Magistrate of North Arcot; to T. PYCROFT, Esq., Chief Secretary to Government, Fort Saint George, dated Vellore, 14th October 1859.

1. On the 9th Ultimo, I received intelligence of a disturbance, accompanied by murder, having taken place on the 8th Idem, at Arcot, I proceeded thither without delay and endeavoured to ascertain the facts of the matter. I was given to understand that there was evidence to shew that 63 men had been absent from the Fusilier Camp on the 8th, and requested the Commandant of Arcot to detain them after the main body. This request he informed me he was unable, under stringent order from the Commander-in-Chief, to comply with. In obedience to a telegram received on the evening of the 11th, I proceeded to Madras on the morning of the 12th, with certain witnesses and returned to Vellore, on the 14th. On the 15th, certain prisoners arrived, and I commenced the enquiry on the 16th.

2. A parade had been held at my request in the Camp of the Fusiliers on the 10th, when four men as per margin* were identified by certain European and Native witnesses.

* Connell, Charles Brooks, Walsh, Robinson.

3. It appeared, however, that Connell was on duty at the time and never left the Camp; his attendance was therefore dispensed with. The names† of three others were given by one of the witnesses and they were added to the number of prisoners as was also John Brooks, who had been identified in Camp, but owing to a mistake in the Regimental number had not been apprehended.

† George Patterson. W. Patterson. W. Williamson.

4. I regret to be obliged to report that the investigation, though deliberately and carefully conducted in Court, as well as my antecedent and subsequent enquiries on the spot, where I invited all who could speak, to speak freely, has failed to elicit the certain origin of this degrading affair.

5. Of the twenty-two witnesses examined on oath and solemn affirmation, not one was able or willing to give evidence as to the cause of the disturbance or to identify the perpetrators of the murder.

6. The enquiries I have made, however, leave no doubt on my mind, that on the 6th Instant, some of the men from the Camp had been in the bazaar endeavouring to raise money or purchase supplies on their blankets and clothes, that the Natives refused to deal, and an ill-feeling was created; that this was increased by the conduct of the men on the 7th, and culminated on the 8th when the people banded together, and on some Europeans entering the town, they were met with an organised resistance and driven out of the bazaar. The news of this was carried to the barracks whence a party was ordered out by the Serjeant Major (apparently without any reference whatever to the Commanding Officer) which went down the bazaar accompanied by several men of the Fusiliers who were at the Canteen at the time. The Serjeant‡ who commanded this party deposes that, on passing through the street and coming to the Musselman burying gound, he was assailed with bricks from a large party of Natives, who, however, fell back as he advanced; and he found in a narrow lane leading out of the bazaar, two Natives there lying alive but severely injured. If this be true and there is no evidence to disprove it, the murders must have been committed before the fatigue party went down.

‡ 3rd witness.

7. The evidence of Captain Norton§ bears out the fact of the Natives having organised themselves, but it would seem that they allowed themselves to be disarmed when that gentleman spoke to them. It is very much to be regretted that an immediate report of the disturbance was not made to the European Officer and also that no mention should have been made of the occurrences of the 6th and 7th. One witness (Syed Momeen) deposes that he had made a complaint in person to the Police Ameen on the 7th, to which no attention was paid. The Police Ameen on his part as also the Cutwall deposes that he received no intimation of any ill-will existing between the Europeans and Natives. Into this I am now engaged in enquiring; both those functionaries have been removed from Arcot. There can be no question that they failed most disgracefully in the performance of their duties.

§ 2nd witness.

8. Three individuals lost their lives, one being apparently killed out-right. The 14th witness, Syed Raphael, deposes that he was sitting in a raised covered terrace with Ismail Alee, aged 70, Syed Kurreem Mohideen, aged 35, and Sheek Edayet Inaittoobah, aged 60; when six Soldiers rushed up in a state of extreme excitement, whereon witnesses Karreem and Edayet ran away, Ismail Alee being 70 years old was unable to escape, and without any reason whatever, the Soldiers set upon him and proceeded to beat him with sticks and bayonets until he fell. This appears to have been followed by a pursuit of Syed Karreem and Sheek Edayet who were the next victims, Syed Karreem the son of Ismail Alee being killed out-right and all being fearfully mutilated; all the Native witnesses who depose to the murder, state that the Soldiers had bayonets, but only one attempted to identify any one before the Court, and he pointed out the Serjeant of H. M.'s 44th Regiment who had come to Vellore with the guard.

9. The Detachment having left the place, it was impossible to discover whether any of the men who left the Camp had side arms or not. Had it been possible to pursue that clue, some light might have been thrown on the subject. On careful consideration of the evidence of the Natives and Mr. Assistant Surgeon Arnold, I am led to believe that the party by whom these atrocities were committed must have obtained one or two swords from some Native house, the rest having sticks. It would seem unlikely that men acquainted with the use of the bayonet would in such a time have used it to *strike* instead of to stab. This much of the Native testimony I wholly discredit.

10. Of the seven prisoners sent up from Madras, there was not a tittle of evidence to implicate any one in the taking of life or to shew that any one of them ever had any altercation with any Native. John Brooks is proved to have been drunk and to have been in possession of a sword which he took from the Bugler of the fatigue party, at the standing guard, which is about one hundred yards from the entrance to the bazaar (some of the party being then on their return to the barracks) under the orders of Major Raikes; with this he entered the street and was immediately knocked down by Serjeant Jophan, and the sword was wrested from him, this was after the bodies had been found in the street, to which place it would appear that Brooks never penetrated. For his riotous and disorderly conduct he has been sentenced by me to two months hard labour in the Jail at Madras.

11. The enquiry was held under great disadvantages. I have no doubt that had I had access to the Detachment Officers and men, I might have succeeded in eliciting more. On the side of the Natives there has been much reticence caused perhaps partly from fear and partly from a knowledge that they are to a certain extent blameable.

12. All the prisoners except John Brooks were released; it is most deeply to be regretted that the perpetrators of such a foul crime should have escaped detection.

13. I have had the honor to lay before His Excellency the Governor, my respectful protest against discharged men of the European Regiment being allowed to encamp where there are, in case of a disturbance, no means of coercion. It was evident that the Officers on the occasion of the parade on the 10th, had little or no control over the men, and I believe it was only the personal character and respect in which Major Raikes would seem to be held by the Regiment that prevented some further disaster on the day of the affray. I would further submit, that if large bodies of Europeans are under similar circumstances to be encamped in the District not less than seven clear days' notice should be given in order that a European Magistrate may be able to proceed to the spot. In the case of the arrival of the 2nd European Light Infantry, the first notice I received was, in a private letter from an Officer in the Camp. It will be obvious to Government that under such circumstances, the Magistracy, to whom no little responsibility attaches, are placed in a false position.

No. 60. ORDER THEREON, 28th October 1859, No. 1458.

Communicated to the Military Department.

(Signed) T. PYCROFT,
Chief Secretary.

Exd. F. Cartledge.

No. 1458 - 28 October 1859

Communicated to the Military Department.

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