

MADRAS RECORD OFFICE.

Government of Madras.

Indicial DEPARTMENT.

G.O. No. 1380	Press ~~Mis.~~
<i>34-38</i>	Dated 3.9.1918

Not to be folded or roughly handled*ms*

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*Proceedings of the Madras Government, Judicial Department,
3rd September 1866.*

Read the following papers :—

No. 34. From the Coroner of Madras, to the Chief Secretary to Government, Fort Saint George ; dated Madras, 14th August 1866, No. 17.

I have the honor to report, for the information of His Excellency the Right Honorable the Governor in Council, that, at an Inquest held before me in the Penitentiary at Percamattoo, within the limits of Madras, on the 10th instant, touching the death of Taker Etam, the Jury, after returning as their verdict "Died from natural causes, to wit, from Cholera," made the following observation :—"The Jury beg the Coroner to bring to the notice of Government that the arrangements for night in the Penitentiary are such as to enable a Prisoner wishing to conceal his illness to escape observation for several hours or until morning, when the Cells are thrown open, thus, in some instances, from delay, rendering the cases almost hopeless before admission into Hospital."

Referred to the Commissioner of Police, for report, in communication with the Medical Officer in charge.

FORT SAINT GEORGE,
20th August 1866.

(Signed) J. GROSE,
Acting Under Secretary.

No. 35. From the Commissioner of Police, to the Chief Secretary to Government, Fort Saint George ; dated Madras, 24th August 1866, No. 85.

I have the honor to return letter, No. 17, of the 14th August, from the Coroner of Madras, forwarded to me, for report regarding the presentment of the Coroner's Jury, that prisoners attacked with Cholera during the night at the Penitentiary are able to conceal their illness.

2. I also forward a letter from the Medical Officer of the Penitentiary on this subject.

3. It would seem from Doctor Harris' letter that the remark of the Coroner's Jury was in no way apposite to the case on which it was founded, since the deceased had recovered from the attack of Cholera which seized him in the Wards, and some days afterwards was seized with a second attack, while still in hospital, from which he died.

4. Still, if a prisoner attacked in the Wards at night chooses to conceal his illness, there is no doubt that he *can* do so until day-light next morning ; nor do I see how this can be prevented, without sacrificing a primary rule of Jail discipline and safety, viz., that of locking up prisoners at night. Indeed, under almost any conditions, a man can conceal the commencement of the disease during the hours of darkness if he wishes to do so.

5. It is admitted that existing arrangements provide for the immediate conveyance of patients to Hospital if they *ask* for relief, and I do not see how more can be done. With reference to the 1st clause of paragraph 2 of Doctor Harris' letter, I have introduced the dry earth conservancy system into the Wards, and it must rest with the Convicts themselves to carry out this arrangement efficiently and satisfactorily.

6. I take this opportunity of informing Government that Cholera first appeared in the Penitentiary on the 23rd July, when a European prisoner was

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attacked and died. There has been no other case amongst the Europeans. Twenty-six cases have occurred in all since that date. There have been 14 deaths; 8 have recovered; and 4 remain under treatment.

7. Every precaution has been taken. Coal tar has been lavishly used in the latrines. Macdougall's powder and other disinfectants have been used in the Wards, which have also been thoroughly fumigated with burnt straw. Seven-wells' water (the best in Madras) has been procured. The short sentenced Magisterial prisoners in Nos. 3, 4, and 5 Wards, in which a large majority of the cases occurred, have been moved into tents pitched within the Jail enclosure. The disease never seems to have obtained any actual hold on the Penitentiary, but the cases have dropped in at intervals. There has been no fresh case since the 21st instant, and I sincerely trust the disease is now disappearing.

8. I beg to request attention to paragraph 3 of Doctor Harris' letter, pointing out that the bodies of prisoners dead of cholera are sometimes kept so long as 16 hours before the Coroner assembles his Jury, a delay which must be most dangerous to the inmates of the Penitentiary. According to the English

Statute II of 4 Edward I.

Law, dating from the remote reign of Edward I, the Coroner must hold an inquest on the bodies of all prisoners dying in prison, "that it may be known whether they died by violence or any other unreasonable hardship;" but if this provision of the Law cannot be set aside in Cholera cases, measures ought certainly to be taken to prevent the possibility of any such undue delay. A report is always sent to the Coroner's office forthwith, and if (as frequently happens) there is no person there competent to act on the report, the messenger proceeds to the private residence of the Coroner's Interpreter, who takes the necessary steps to inform the Coroner and to summon the Jury. I have before now urged on the Coroner's notice this defect in the working of his Establishment, but without effect.

From Surgeon W. H. HARRIS, M. D., in Medical Charge, Madras Penitentiary, to the Commissioner of Police, Madras; dated Madras, 2nd August 1866, No. 65.

With reference to your Memorandum, No. 267, dated 21st instant, forwarding a letter from the Coroner to the Chief Secretary to Government, regarding the night arrangements of the Prisoners in the Penitentiary, I have the honor to state that the observation of the Jury, after returning their verdict touching the death of Taker Etam, is, in my opinion, quite irrelevant and uncalled for, as far as the death of this prisoner is concerned. Taker Etam was admitted with Cholera on the morning of the 6th August—"Collapse incomplete." He recovered from the attack, and on the 8th his disease was changed to "Dysentery"; on the evening of the 9th he vomited a worm, and during the night symptoms of a fresh attack of Cholera set in, and he was re-admitted, under this head, on the following morning. The night arrangements in the cells, therefore, had nothing whatever to do with the second attack of Cholera which caused this prisoner's death.

2. With regard to the night arrangements, I am of opinion that they are somewhat unsatisfactory, but I do not see how they can be well improved, with due regard to the discipline and safe custody of the prisoners, unless great expense were incurred in the construction of night privies in all the cells; and if the men are determined to conceal their illness, no amount of vigilance, short of placing a sentry in each cell, would prevent it. As long as the prisoners are able to make known any sudden attack of illness during the night, and obtain immediate admission into Hospital by doing so, as under the present arrangement, I consider the responsibility of concealing their illness rests entirely with themselves, and it is quite superfluous to make any material change in the arrangements.

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3. It may not be entirely out of place to mention, in connection with inquests on Cholera patients, that it sometimes happens that the body is detained for many hours within the walls of the Penitentiary, until it has been "viewed" by the Jury. In one instance, during the present epidemic, more than 16 hours elapsed from the death of the patient to the holding of the inquest, and I am of opinion that the other inmates of the Jail are exposed to considerable additional risk from this cause.

Lazer, died July 25th, 1-45, P. M.,—inquest not held until following morning.

4. I have already submitted a representation on the subject of inquests on deaths from Cholera at the Penitentiary to the Principal Inspector General, Medical Department.

No. 36. ORDER THEREON, 3rd September 1866, No. 1380.

The Governor in Council observes that the existing arrangements in the Penitentiary provide for the immediate conveyance to Hospital of patients asking for relief, and that it is not practicable to do more.

2. The dry earth conservancy system, which is stated to have been introduced into the Wards of the Penitentiary, should be stringently enforced.

3. The question raised in the last paragraph of the foregoing letter has already been disposed of in G. O., of this date, No. 1378.

(True Extract).

Secretary to Government.

To the Commissioner of Police.

" Coroner of Madras.

" Acting Government Solicitor, for the information of the Advocate General.

Exd. J. H. Burns.

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From John Vaughan Esq^r
Coroner of Madras

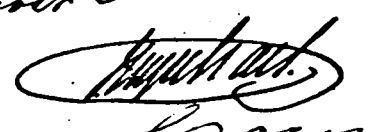
To
The Honourable A. S. Subramaniam
Chief Secretary to Government

Sir,

I have the honor to report
for the information of His Excellency The
Right Honourable The Governor in Council
that at an Inquest held before me in the
Penitentiary at Perambalur within the limits
of Madras on the 10th Instant touching the
death of Jaker Etam the Jury after returning
as their verdict "Died from natural causes
to wit from Cholera" made the following obser-
vation "The Jury beg the Coroner to bring to
the notice of Government that the arrange-
ments for night in the Penitentiary are such
as to enable a Prisoner wishing to conceal his
illness to escape observation for several
hours or until morning when the cells are thrown
open thus in some instances from delay render-
ing the cases almost hopeless before ad-
mission into Hospital."

Witness my hand
at Madras
this 11th day of August 1866.

Madras
Coroner's Office }
11th August 1866.

I have the honor to be
Sir
Your most Obedt Servant

Coroner.

Indian 1867. Department.

No. 1380.

PROCEEDINGS OF GOVERNMENT

Dated 3 September 1865.

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