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MADRAS RECORD OFFICE

Government of Madras

Public Works. DEPARTMENT

G.O. No.	655	Press
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No 187. Read the following endorsement of the Acting Chief Secretary to Government, Public Department, dated 20th February 1875 —

From C T LONGLEY, Esq., Collector of Salem, to the Honorable D. CARMICHAEL, Acting Chief Secretary to Government, Fort St. George dated Salem, 18th February 1875, No 49

As directed in G O, No 20, of the 7th January 1875, I have now the honor to submit a report from the Zillah Surgeon on the type of fever said to prevail at Samulputty, and which necessitated the temporary closing of the station Dr Pearse's report is so full and exhaustive that there remains very little for me to add

2 I entirely concur with the Zillah Surgeon that the type of fever has been exaggerated Native officials located in the taluq are always more or less inclined to make capital out of the fact that the Uttengeri Taluq, in which Samulputty Station is situated, has a bad reputation for fever. The division officer, Mr LeFanu, writes as follows —

"In the recent case of the Uttengeri taluq officials, who were ordered (by the Collector) for change from Uttengeri to Harur, the moment their complaint was acceded to they repented them of it, and the Dresser informs me that it was only on Monday last that they proceeded to Harur, and then unwillingly."

3 The move above alluded to was necessitated by the fact that fever (not of dangerous type at all) had been so prevalent at Uttengeri, and so large a percentage of the clerks were on sick leave, and others applying for leave, that the work of the taluq was seriously impeded, and I have, in consequence, removed temporarily the office to Harur The great object in applying for leave was to get away to some large town, like Salem or Tripatore, and to effect this object a good deal of malingering has been attempted in many departments, and the fact of one of the Station Masters at Samulputty sleeping out in the cold night air to get a fever, proves that the Railway Department was no exception With the warm dry weather fever has now almost entirely disappeared, and I should think traffic might be carried on as formerly at Samulputty.

From Surgeon-Major R E PEARSE, Zillah Surgeon, Salem, to C T LONGLEY, Esq., Collector of Salem, dated Salem, 26th January 1875, No 34

AGREEABLY to G O, No 1 of 2nd instant, forwarded with your letter No 7 of 11th instant, I have the honor to report, for the information of Government, that I visited the station of Samulputty in company with Head Assistant Collector on the 15th instant, to investigate the causes of the recent reported severe out-break of fever amongst the Station Masters at that place, which had led to the closure of the Railway Station there

2 The inquiry naturally resolved itself into the following heads —

1st —The sanitary condition and general health of Samulputty during the past few months
2nd —The condition of the station and the Station Master's quarters as likely to affect the health of the person residing there

3rd —The past and present state of the other Railway servants at this station

4th —The special characters (if any) of the fever which attacked the Station Masters requiring such frequent and rapid changes

5th —The remedial measures pointed to by the existing condition of affairs

3 For some months past the whole Uttengeri Taluq, in which Samulputty is situated, has been suffering very severely from intermittent fever, so much so as to necessitate a temporary removal of the Tahsildar's head-quarters from the town of Uttengeri to that of Harur This

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ut-break of fever is, I believe, solely attributable to the character of the country as affected by the very heavy rains of the past year. The tract of country in which Uttengeri, Samulputty, and numerous other hamlets and villages lie, consists, roughly speaking, of a sloping stretch of land trending in an easterly or south-easterly direction towards the pass at the end of the Javadi hills (through which the Pennar flows), intersected in parts by tributary streams but more frequently still by slightly elevated ridges having marshy ground at their bases, and thus of necessity forming centres of miasmatic poison after heavy rains, such as occurred during the recent monsoon, aided, as regards both Samulputty and Uttengeri, by the people having selected the base of the reverse slopes as the locality in which to build the whole or a large portion of their town, and, above all, to sink the well which serves for the general water-supply of the place.

4 Samulputty consists of two hamlets, one about a couple of hundred yards south-west of the Railway Station, called Arulnaikumpatty, and the village of Samulputty proper, about half a mile from the station in a northerly direction. Of these two hamlets Arulnaikumpatty is much the smaller, consisting of only about thirty houses, or rather huts of the usual mud and thatch character, and was, when I saw it, in a most insubstantial condition, many of the houses out of repair, all too closely packed together, and the interspaces between them overgrown with a dense rank vegetation and littered with filth and dirt of every description, indeed, the wonder is, not that fever should be found there, but that it should ever be absent, and yet in spite of this, at the time of my visit, there were about three cases of fever in the village, in a population which may be roughly computed at from 120 to 150.

The deaths reported to have taken place during the past few months are five in number—one a Railway Pointsman, and the rest members of his family, so that all having occurred in one family it may fairly be inferred that local or endemic causes must have been present, tending to render fatal in this particular case a disease which in all other cases was not so. What the particular cause may have been I was, however, unable to determine.

5 The larger village of Samulputty proper consists of ninety-five houses, all mud huts, with a population of 312, situated, as before stated, on the reverse slope of a long ridge and at the lowest point thereof, the village itself being fairly clean for a native hamlet, but as wild castor-oil was planted thickly round the entire place it was well-nigh impossible for a breath of wind to blow through it.

6 As the people are often afraid of a European in these petty places, and unwilling to give much information, generally carefully concealing the existence of sickness or at least keeping the sick themselves out of the way, the Tahsildar and Hospital Assistant attached to the Head Assistant Collector's department were despatched a day in advance to make a house-to-house inspection and report to us on arrival.

From these inquiries and observations it would seem that there were one or two people in every house almost, who either had been or still were ill, they themselves called their fever "dengue," but judging from the sick I saw (and they were not a few,) I should say it was ordinary intermittent fever, but having in this particular locality, owing to its lying so very low and being so damp, a marked tendency to complications of a rheumatic type, in any case the fever is of a very harmless kind so far as danger to life is concerned, not a single death having occurred in this large village for four months past in spite of there being one or two sick under every roof.

7 The water-supply of this village is very bad, there being only one well and that badly situated, thus, running nearly north and south and above the village is a ridge of land having at the foot of its front slope low ground, which at the southern extremity becomes a regular swamp, the water then sweeps round this southern end of the ridge and enters the corresponding low ground on the rear slope of the ridge at the northern extremity of which and on the same side of which is situated the village, the well itself being at the north-east angle of the village, and thus of necessity being largely diluted with marsh water, tapping so to say, as it does, this stretch of marsh land, its pollution being still further augmented by the inevitable drainage into it of the impure surface water of the village, which lies on a higher level than the well. Can it be wondered at then that such water should breed disease?

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6th March 1875*

8 I next examined the Railway Station itself and the room assigned to the Station Master. The station is small, consisting merely of a booking office out of which the Station Master's room opens and a lumber, luggage, or store godown with the usual latrine at the end, the ventilation of the Station Master's room is very defective, consisting only of a small arched opening 3 feet by 2 feet, at its greatest diameter, cut in the wall facing the platform, and even this small space is still further reduced by the arch being filled in by reticulated tile-work occupying more than half its area, the room is 12 feet square, and can only be described as dark and ill-ventilated, but not more so than any ordinary native dwelling house or sleeping apartment, I cannot therefore attribute any special liability to illness to this cause.

9 The yard in rear of the station needs cleaning up and putting in order, some of the walls being dilapidated, and surplus vegetation beginning to spring up, but still at the time of my visit there was nothing in its condition that could be strictly speaking called insanitary and prejudicial to health.

10 The water-supply is abundant and good, there being two wells, one a large square well containing 16 feet of water, at the time of my visit, of good quality, and being used both by the lower class of people and for Railway purposes is constantly being drawn, and so is kept well aerated and pure. The second well, which I was told was that used by the Station Masters and other caste men, is in the compound of the Engineer's bungalow, facing the station, it is a deep well having 15 feet of water in it when seen by me, and that water clear, pure, and sweet to the taste. In brief then the Station Masters are far better off for water than the villagers, and should, so far as water affects the question, have suffered less and not more than their neighbours.

11 Under the third head, viz, the past history and present state of other Railway servants at this station, I arrived at the following results—

Porters, three—Of these one has been at Samulputty eight years, during which time he has had frequent mild attacks of fever, but has never had to go away on sick leave. A second has been here one year and has had one attack, but is well now, and the third has been only two months at this station and has not yet suffered at all.

Pointsmen, two—Of these one has been here nine years, and, though often suffering from fever, has never been so ill as to require leave of absence, the other man has only joined two months and has escaped entirely as yet.

Sweeper woman—Residence one year. Has had fever from time to time, but no leave.

Coolies—Of the four coolies whom I was able to collect all had been at Samulputty for years (four to six) and had suffered from fever from time to time, this year worse than usual they said, but when seen by me certainly had not the appearance of mere recovering from severe illness. One pointsman is said to have died from fever as recorded in paragraph 4.

12 In view of the above facts one is compelled to arrive at the conclusion that the fever of Samulputty, judging from villagers and Railway servants alike, though common enough, is not of a severe or dangerous type. In not a few cases it had caused enlargement of the spleen, but generally it would seem to have been but a mild quotidian fever.

13 I now turn to the most important branch of my subject, viz, inquiring into the special character of the fever which was stated to have attacked the Station Masters at Samulputty, requiring such frequent changes and ultimately the closing of the station.

14 It was evident that mere want of ventilation in his room could not account for the Station Master being so differently affected by the fever to every one else, and so far this was the only condition yet discovered which could be supposed specially hurtful to him, whilst in many points, water especially, he had a decided advantage over most of those around him.

15 In the letter from the Traffic Manager, dated 10th December 1874, G. O., No. 1 of 2nd instant, it is stated that seven Station Masters had been attacked by jungle fever and rendered unfit for duty in one month, this statement, regarded from a professional point of view, was simply incomprehensible, as it gave but an average of 4½ days to each man. Whilst the severer types of jungle fever, so far as I have observed them in this district, all have a period of incubation which

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would render it impossible for that number of men to be attacked, prostrated, and relieved within the time specified, again, the illness must have been either slight or severe, if slight, they had been unnecessarily moved, if severe, how came it that seven serious cases in succession could be moved at a moment's notice? It was evident then the matter required explanation.

16 Under the circumstances, and looking to the importance of the question, I considered myself justified under the provisions of the G O, No 1, deputing me to inquire into the matter, to call upon the Railway Apothecary in charge of this portion of the line to explain the necessity for his placing men on sick list at this extraordinary rate, and to produce his books in support of his statement. The Apothecary was somewhat unwilling to produce his books to one who was not a Railway official, but I told him I would accept the responsibility of his act, a procedure in which I trust I shall be held to have acted rightly, as the evidence was absolutely necessary to the inquiry.

17 The statement that seven Station Masters had been sent away all in one month he met by a flat denial, and his books certainly bear him out. I went carefully through his Nominal Register, which shows all admissions and discharges, and find the record for the year 1874 stands as follows —

Station Masters entered on sick list during the year 1874 at Samulputty Station

Names	Admitted	Discharged	To duty or otherwise
Rungiah	3rd January 1874	11th January 1874	
Sufier Hussain	20th April	29th April	
Ramasawmy Moodelly	1st August	3rd August	For duty
Mahomed Gouse	13th October	16th October	Do
Lutchooman Row	10th Nov	16th Nov	Do
Sevaramiah	9th Dec	11th Dec	To Madras
			Do
			Do

SOORAMUNGALUM RAILWAY STATION,
25th January 1875

(Signed) HUSSAIN BEG,
Apothecary, Madras Railway

18 I do not of course desire to impugn the accuracy of the Traffic Manager's statement that seven men were removed from Samulputty in one month, but it could scarcely have been on the ground of illness, the Apothecary, who is up and down the line once or twice a week, never treated them and never recommended their removal as proved by his register, and the counterfoil of his telegraph book, for it is his duty to report the illness of a Station Master who requires to be relieved by telegraph (so that immediate arrangements may be made), preserving the counterfoil, and this evidence is absent also. Further, the Apothecary states that those whom he did attend were suffering from ordinary intermittent fever of the type prevailing alike at Samulputty and adjacent stations.

19 In view then of the result of my inspection of the locality, of the condition of the Railway servants and other inhabitants of the adjacent villages, and of the evidence both oral and documentary produced by the medical officer in immediate charge, I am compelled to the conclusion that though the Station Masters at Samulputty have suffered from fever, it has not been a special disease, but simply the ordinary fever which has for months past and still is prevailing throughout the whole Uttengeri Taluq, and which may, moreover, be expected to last for a couple of months longer.

20 Samulputty is a most unpopular station, and there can be no doubt the Station Masters, especially if as frequently happens they are caste-men, resort to every possible means to get away from the place. One man (Ramasawmy Moodelly) in the above list is known to have deliberately exposed himself to heavy dews at night and sun by day, besides eating unwholesome food, with the express object of getting fever and so being removed, if one man will do this what may not others have done? How this should be checked it is beyond my province to discuss.

21 Lastly, I have to speak of the remedial measures which seem applicable to the case. After the description of the country and probable causes of the fever contained in the earlier

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graphs of this report, it will be evident that little can be done to prevent this fever from prevailing generally at certain periods of the year, due as it is to the malaria produced by the configuration of the country and character of the soil when acted on by a heavy rainfall. The experiment of introducing some trees of the *Eucalyptus Globulus* into some of these marshy plots might be encouraged, and cultivation in the low lands, tending to bring these swamps gradually under the plough, would certainly be encouraged. Much I believe might also be done by selecting more favorable sites for village wells and closing the old ones up, for without this it is useless to open new ones. From the evidence of the medical subordinates who have treated the disease, the Revenue Officers, and the people generally, there is little doubt that the type of fever has not been severe, and yielded very readily to treatment, thus, if we cannot prevent we can at all events relieve the disease, and, I believe, both shorten its course and obviate many of its after effects by a free distribution of the various cinchona alkaloids through the agency of the revenue village authorities in the affected localities, this has to a certain extent been done already, might, I consider, be advantageously persevered in. Sending medical subordinates to the spot (except in particular cases) I do not advocate, they soon knock up, whilst, on the other hand, a well organized system of distribution of bark, quinine, and allied substances, can always be kept up as circumstances may seem to require it.

FORWARDED to the Public Works Department with reference to the orders in that department, dated the 2nd January 1875, No. 1.

(Signed) D. F. CARMICHAEL,
Acting Chief Secretary

188 ORDER THEREON, 6th March 1875, No. 655

RAILWAY, No. 22.

It appears from these papers that the fever reported to have prevailed at Samulputty, and in consequence of which the station was authorized to be temporarily closed, was not of a type more than ordinarily severe, and that its effects on the Railway staff have been exaggerated. Under these circumstances the Agent and Manager will probably be in position to recommend the speedy re-opening of the station for traffic.

2 The measures proposed by the Zillah Surgeon for improving the sanitation of the neighbourhood will be considered in the Public Department.

(True Extract.)

Colonel, R E,
Secretary to Government.

the Public Department
Consulting Engineer for Railways.

and S T Austin.
are Copies

ST. Department
Proceedings of the Board
Read the following

Endorsement from the
Public Department

{ H. E. dated 20 Feb 1912

It appears from
these papers that the
fever reported to have
prevailed at Samul
partly and in consequence
of which the station
was authorized to be
temporarily closed, was
not of a type more
than ordinarily severe,
and that its effects
on the Railway Staff
have been exaggerated.
Under these circum-
stances the Agent and
Inspector

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It will probably
proceed to re-
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opening of the station
traffic.

The measures proposed
the Zillah Surgeon
improving the sani-
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bourhood will be
considered in the Pub-
lic Department.

l.m.w.

N 187-188

To. Public Department
" Cong. Eng. & Co.

Oct. 9-3-75.