

MADRAS RECORD OFFICE.

Government of Madras.

Rulalie DEPARTMENT.

G.O. No. 310

Press
~~Mis.~~

Dated

26-3-1936

Not to be folded or roughly handled

No. 118. Read the following letter from N. R. POGSON, Esq., Government Astronomer, to the Chief Secretary to Government, Fort Saint George ; dated Madras, 19th March 1866.

I have the honor most respectfully to solicit the favorable consideration of Government under the extraordinary and trying circumstances now attaching to my position as Government Astronomer. It is more than five years since I assumed charge of the appointment, and though entitled to a month's leave in each year, I have not been able to avail myself of the privilege for a single day since my arrival in the country ; nor do I see how I can ever do so under the existing conditions of the establishment. The obstacles to my so doing are two-fold ;—first, the difficulty, or rather impossibility, of finding any one to act for me during my absence ; and secondly, the inadequacy of my very small salary to permit of the most trifling addition to my ordinary expenditure, in these times of high prices of every thing that is necessary to ensure health in India. There is, also, a third point to be considered, viz., that Native Assistants qualified for the increased demands of modern science cannot be found, owing to which I have been unable to fill up the vacancies occasioned by the death of two, and the resignation of a third, on the list of the old establishment. This last difficulty will be best treated of before the two previously mentioned.

2. Nine Native Assistants were formerly sanctioned, and so long as the highest requirements of the Observatory demanded little or no greater proficiency than would be met with in any ordinary office clerks, viz., fair writing and arithmetic, which was the case when the use of two old Meridian instruments, a Transit and a Mural Circle, were the sole astronomical duties of the observers, such provision was sufficient, and the Astronomer had ample time to assist in, and superintend the reduction and publication of, the observations made by the Natives. Now all is different ! The old instruments have been superseded by a fine Transit Circle, the use of which requires far greater skill and dexterity on the part of the observers ; and the Astronomer has been provided with two large Equatorials and other modern instruments, the use of but one of which would occupy every minute of his time, if fairly worked. The Observatory is then equipped with good modern instruments by leading makers, but, for want of proper assistance, they have to lie comparatively idle, or the publication of the results must be discontinued ; while either alternative is discreditable to the establishment, and a serious loss to astronomical science. Prompt publication of results is of the first importance, and indeed, an Observatory which merely accumulates records, without rendering them forthwith available to the scientific public, is perfectly useless and deserving only of abolition. Two experienced Natives now work the new Transit Circle, and a third attends to the Magnetical and Meteorological observations ; the rest are mere writers, and no new Native hands worth having are obtainable from any quarter. The aid of one intelligent European would speedily enable me to proceed with the publication of past observations, as well as to make more satisfactory use of the new Equatorial and other instruments ; but no amount of additional Native assistance would be of the slightest use for either purpose.

3. In regard to the difficulty of finding a person able and willing to act for me when absent on leave, it is not to be expected that any one would be disposed

to undertake so onerous a duty without remuneration or other advantages, and when residence at the Observatory is an indispensable condition involved. My own labors must, of necessity, be wholly suspended during such interval, and whatever continuous series of observations I might be engaged in must be subjected to an awkward and most objectionable break. If, however, a trustworthy and clever European were attached to the establishment, he would of course act for me at any time, for a greater or less period :—the routine of the place would proceed without interruption, but merely at a reduced rate during my absence, and any continuous series of observations would be carried on unbroken, and its value thereby greatly enhanced. If, by further application to the Home Government for the grant of an English Deputy Astronomer, this most urgently needed favor could be obtained, the very distressing and serious position of the Government Astronomer under present conditions would be thereby relieved, and the establishment placed upon an efficient footing, which it never can be until such aid is conceded. For the low pay which such an Officer must, however, be contended to accept, only the services of a rising youth could be expected, but in science such are often far more valuable and energetic than those of an older person. A payment of Rupees 200 per month at commencement, rising by degrees to a maximum of Rupees 300, would secure such assistance ; and a bungalow, as formerly suggested to, and sanctioned by, the Madras Government, might be erected in the Observatory compound, for the accommodation of the person appointed. This would be indispensable for a stranger, and desirable under any circumstances ; but it so happens that, my own eldest boy having shown an early taste for Astronomy, and having requested me to enable him to adopt it as a pursuit (unfortunately the least profitable he could have selected, as well as one of continuous hardship and self-denial), if the Government would sanction his appointment to the proposed office of Deputy Astronomer, the additional building arrangements would not be required for some years, if at all during my own term of service in Madras. I need not urge how doubly acceptable and agreeable such family co-operation would be, or how conducive to the interest and reputation of the Observatory in a scientific point of view. At the Observatories at Greenwich, Liverpool, the Cape of Good Hope, Pulkova, Berlin, Altona, Hamburgh, Brussels, Harvard College U. S., and several others, such family relationship between the Principal and his Head Assistant has invariably been found productive of the best results, and has been the rule rather than the exception. As on the former occasion of my making application for a European Assistant, I intend his services and those of three best Natives, to be instead of the nine upon the original establishment ; and, as before suggested, the well directed ambition of a rising English youth for scientific distinction amongst his European confrères, would accomplish more than an unlimited number of inferior Native Assistants.

Lastly, in regard to the salary now attached to the post of Government Astronomer—a point upon which I feel great reluctance to touch—I shall only presume to suggest to Government the wide difference between the expenses of Indian life in the time of my predecessors and of later years ; that the amount, sounding large to untravelled English ears at Home, is soon found to be only equivalent to a very much smaller salary in a more temperate climate ; and that the Astronomer is

(if he does his duty fairly) the hardest worked and least remunerated Head of any Department in the Presidency. A single man may live respectably upon the pay, but it is not one of the conditions of the post that the Astronomer shall lead a life of celibacy, and if, as in my own case, he happens to have a numerous flock to maintain and educate, partly in India and partly at Home, his condition must be one of continual anxiety and difficulty as to how to manage at all. The complaints previously urged in regard to his not being able to take the annual regulation leave are further justified by the circumstance that it is impossible to get change of air and scene with a family, without incurring great additional expense, while for such there is manifestly no provision. I should be extremely glad to secure for myself and my successors any improvement which the Government might be considerably disposed to allow in regard to salary, and were the request purely personal, I should also plead the fact of my having made no less than twenty discoveries of celestial objects—five new planets and fifteen new variable stars—in addition to twenty years arduous exertion, as evidenced by my numerous published observations and calculations, in various European scientific journals, since the year 1846 ; but as I am seeking an increase of official pay in which I have only a passing interest, I am well aware that such matters cannot have the slightest claim to consideration, although I venture to hope that they may be permitted to have some weight in realizing the other favor sought, viz., that of the assistance of my son in the proposed capacity of a Deputy Astronomer.

No. 119.

ORDER THEREON, 26th March 1866, No. 310.

Ordered that a copy of the foregoing letter be forwarded to the Right Honorable the Secretary of State for India, with the recommendation of this Government that, on the grounds therein so strongly set forth, the Government Astronomer may be allowed the aid of a European Assistant on a salary of Rupees 200, and, also, that Mr. Pogson's salary may be raised from Rupees 672-13-4 to Rupees 800 per mensem.

2. A copy of the letter to the Home Government will be forwarded to the Government of India, with a request that the Governor General in Council will communicate to the Secretary of State his views in regard to the increase of salary proposed for the Astronomer at this Presidency.

(True Extract).

Chief Secretary.

To the Government Astronomer.

Exd. J. H. Burns.

Public Department.

PROCEEDINGS of the MADRAS GOVERNMENT.

Read the following letter
from the Government Astronomer
(Received 19th March 1866)

Order thereon 26th March 1866 A. 310.

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the foregoing letter be forwarded
to the Right Honourable the Secretary
of State for India, with the re-
commendation of this Government
that, on the grounds therein so
strongly set forth, the Government
Astronomer may be allowed the aid
of a European Assistant on a
salary of Rupees 200, ~~to be granted~~
~~increased to a maximum of~~
~~Rupees 500 per annum, with auth-~~
~~ority to appoint his eldest son to~~
~~that post.~~ and also, that Mr. Pogson's
salary may be raised from
Rupees 672-13-4 to Rupees 800 per
annum.

24th of the letter to the

Public Office to Aug 21/26 - 11/10/1866

Public 1865. Department.

No 310.

PROCEEDINGS OF GOVERNMENT.

Dated 26th March 1865.

106/125
presented to the
Govt. of India
with a request that
the Govt. General
in Council will
communicate to the
President of the
Council of State
his views on the
subject of the
proposed
to be introduced
in the House of
Commons.

The Govt. Secretary despatch 28/3