

MADRAS RECORD OFFICE.

Government of Madras.

Public DEPARTMENT.

G.O. No.	1285	Press Mis.
Dated	16-10-1967	

Not to be folded or roughly handled

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10/10/67

Proceedings of the Madras Government, Public Department,
16th October 1867.

No. 170. Read the following letter from the Officiating Under Secretary to the Government of India, to the Chief Secretary to Government, Fort Saint George ; dated Simla, 13th September 1867, No. 4507.

Home Department.

I am directed to forward, for the information of the Government of Fort Saint George, a copy of the Supplement to the *Calcutta Gazette* of the 4th instant, and, with reference to the subject of "Mortality among imported laborers in Sylhet," to draw the special attention of His Excellency in Council to paragraphs 5, 11 to 14, 20 and

• Pages 392—397.

† Pages 398 & 399.

25 of Dr. Brown's letter*, dated the 30th of June, and paragraph 2 of the letter†, dated 26th ultimo, from the Junior Secretary to the Government of Bengal, to the Commissioner of the Dacca Division.

SUPPLEMENT TO THE CALCUTTA GAZETTE, WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 4, 1867.

Mortality among imported laborers in Sylhet.

From R. BROWN, Esq., F. R. C. S., Civil Assistant Surgeon, to Dr. W. KEATES, Deputy Inspector General of Hospitals, Dacca ; dated 30th June 1867.

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your Memorandum, No. 176, of date 23rd May last, requesting me, in conjunction with the Magistrate, to draw up a full report on the mortality, &c., of the coolies imported into the tea gardens in Sylhet.

2. I propose, in the first place, to take into consideration the mortality in the various gardens where it has been in excess, the probable causes thereof, with the remedies, if any, adopted or proposed for its check, following the above by a few remarks of a general nature regarding the coolies, question, in relation to the health of those imported.

3. Although the garden which, above the others, shows the greatest mortality in the Sylhet District ought perhaps to be considered first, it, being one of a series of gardens belonging to one Company, had better be taken with them. I will, therefore, take first in order the Estate of Cherragong, belonging to Messrs. Jennings Brothers, as ranking next to the above in point of mortality.

4. The plantation of Cherragong, which contains an area under cultivation of about 350 acres, is nearly due east of the station, at a distance of ten miles ; there is a good road all the way, fit for cart and pony-traffic all the year round.

The cultivated part of the garden is remarkably open and free from jungle. There is comparatively little uncleared land, and it has been opened about eight or nine years. There is a swampy piece of ground, not far from the lines and the Head Quarters of the garden, situated to the west of the lines and residence of the Manager. Part of this swampy ground is cultivated for rice, but the major portion is uncultivated.

The cooly lines are partly situated on a flat topped Teelah of low elevation, but most of them are on a dry piece of ground below. These lines are nearly new, are most substantially built and well drained. Their form is that of the usual long barrack, partitioned in the inside.

Water is obtained from a stream at a short distance. There is also a tank near the lines, but, having been newly made, the water is not yet allowed to be used.

Medicines and medical attendance are provided for the coolies on a liberal scale, there being a resident Native Doctor and a visiting European Medical man. The Senior Partner of the Firm, Mr. C. B. Jennings, is most careful of his coolies, and carries out any suggestions made by the Medical Officer with promptitude.

5. As regards the mortality on the garden of Cherragong during the six months ending 31st December 1866, it appears to have been as follows :—

Total number of deaths during the six months	...	...	30
Total average strength of coolies	ditto	...	148·4
Percentage of strength	ditto	...	20·21

The following shows the deaths in each of the six months.

		DEATHS.					
		July.	August.	September.	October.	November.	December.
Men	...	7	7	0	3	0	0
Women	...	3	4	2	1	0	0
Children	...	2	0	0	1	0	0

As it is a matter of considerable importance to contrast the mortality among coolies from different parts of the country, the following is the proportion of the fatal cases as given by the Manager—

Bengal	...	...	...	...	...	6
North-West Provinces.	...	...	...	...	...	10
Madras	...	...	...	...	...	12

leaving two unaccounted for. The average strength of the different classes of coolies during the six months being—

Bengal	...	...	...	...	...	106
North-West Provinces	...	...	...	...	...	41
Madras	...	...	...	...	...	20

		Percentage of death.				26
Bengal	...	...	...	...	...	
North-West Provinces	...	...	...	...	...	5.66
Madras	...	...	...	...	...	24.39
ing the effects of acclimatization, and also in the						60.00

As showing the effects of acclimatization, and also, indirectly, the state of the coolies on land- ing, the following is the length of residence in the fatal cases :—

Above one year and under two years' residence, two men. Above six months, and under one year, ten women, fifteen men, and three children.

The diseases to which the coolies succumbed were chiefly fevers, diarrhoea, dysentery, and affections of the liver and spleen, usually ending in a chronic dropsical condition of the whole body. The causes, as far as known, of the mortality on this and the other gardens, will be con- sidered when the statistics of the others have been given.

6. I will now take up the gardens belonging to the Sylhet and Cachar Tea Company, now in liquidation. In one of the gardens, viz., Astergatch, belonging to the above, the mortality has been greater than in any other in the Sylhet District. During the six months from 1st July to 31st December, there would appear to have been four gardens kept up in the Sylhet Division of the above Company, as follows : Teelanuggur (Head-Quarters), Lullecherra, Astergatch, and Kolagool.

7. The gardens of the (late) Sylhet and Cachar Tea Company cover a large space of ground. The nearest to the Sudder Station is Teelanuggur, on the out-skirts of the property. It is situated about six miles to the east of the station, and is the last formed of the gardens. The next, as re- gards distance, is two miles further in a north-easterly direction from the above. Astergatch is twelve miles from the Sudder Station, and lies nearly north from Lullecherra. The cleared land, although extensive, amounting in all to 1000 acres on the whole division, bears but small propor- tion to the uncleared, which extends for miles, chiefly consisting of forest land and brushwood, between Lullecherra and Astergatch, and also round the various clearings. The roads on the property are all pretty good.

Since the failure of the Company, some seven months ago, work was altogether stopped for months, the coolies being allowed to go. As a consequence of this, the lines, &c., have, on the various gardens, fallen into considerable disrepair. Within the last two months, however, work on a limited scale has recommenced on the above gardens, most of the old coolies having returned. The lines have, as far as I have seen, been repaired to suit the wants of the coolies as far as required.

Before the break-down of the Company, there was employed, looking after the coolies, a Native Doctor, with a plentiful stock of medicines. The Civil Surgeon also visited, as re- quired.

At present there is, I understand, no medical attendance whatever for the coolies left.

8. The following are the medical statistics of the gardens :—

	Strength on the 1st July 1866.	Died in six months.	Percentage of deaths.
Teelanuggur	133	17	12.78
Lullecherra	221	19	8.59
Astergatch	116	27	23.27
Kalagool	57	3	5.26

The total number of deaths during the six months on all four gardens, amounted to 66 out of 527 coolies, or 12.43 per cent.

The districts from which the coolies are recruited, furnish the fatal cases in the following proportion :—

From North-West Provinces, died	42
„ Bengal	24

The strength of the coolies and the proportion of deaths to strength from the various districts is unknown, no return having been furnished. The residence in the fatal cases is described as follows :—

Residence of nine months (?) died	51
„ nearly three years (?)	15

The diseases from which the coolies suffered, correspond with those given as affecting the coolies on the Cherragong Estate.

9. The last of the gardens on the list which showed an exceptional mortality during the six months is that of the East India Tea Company, named Teelaghur. It is situated to the north- east of the station, at a distance of about three and a half miles. It has an area under cultivation of about 350 acres, and is pretty well cleared.

The total strength of coolies on the 1st July 1866 appeared to be.....	155
Total number of deaths during the six months.....	24
Percentage of deaths to strength.....	15.48

The fatal cases would appear to have been recruited as follows :—

From North-Western Bengal.....	15
„ Lower Bengal.....	9

The strength of the coolies from the different districts and the proportion of fatal cases has not been furnished.

The residence of the fatal cases appears thus :—

Over one year, and under two years.....	4
„ six months and under one year.....	12
Under six months.....	7
Over two years.....	1

The nature of the diseases from which the coolies suffered, corresponds exactly with that of the other gardens. A Native Doctor is kept, and the garden is visited by an European Medical man occasionally.

10. Having thus disposed of each individual garden in which the mortality was high as re- gards the medical statistics, &c., it will now be my duty, as far as I can, to explain the causes of mortality, taken generally as applicable to all the above gardens, and also particularly as applied to the separate ones.

11. The general causes of mortality among the coolies may be divided into those acting upon the individual before reaching his destination and during transit, and those affecting him after reaching the garden for which he has been recruited.

12. As regards the first part of the above inquiry, one of the most important matters con- nected with it is the class of coolies recruited for the Tea gardens, and this, of course, I intend

discussing solely from a medical point of view. Coolies are chiefly imported from the following districts in the greatest numbers :—

Chota Nagpore and surrounding districts, North-Western Bengal, North-Western Provinces, and Madras Presidency.

A few hill men and Assamese are also to be found on the gardens, but these are so few in number as not to be worthy of consideration in any inquiry like the present.

13. Among all the tea planters I have spoken with on the subject, there is but one opinion as regards the class of coolies which alone are likely to remain healthy and able to work, and those are the class called “Dhangers,” and are procurable in the districts of Chota Nagpore, Hazareebaugh, Sonthalea, &c., in any number (as a proof of this it may be stated that nearly all the coolies furnished by India to the Colonies are of the class mentioned). On looking at the statistics preceding, it will be seen that this statement is borne out by actual facts. The statistics, it is true, cannot be relied on as absolutely correct, but, making allowance for this, the contrast is very striking. It may here be mentioned that the coolies entertained as from the North-West Provinces, should more correctly be put down as from North-West or Hindustanee speaking Bengali (*sic*), a class inferior in physique to inhabitants proper of the North-West.

A glance at the mortality on the Cherragong plantation, should set the propriety of introducing Madras coolies as laborers on the tea gardens of this district at rest for ever.

14. The system of recruiting laborers has a very great deal to do with the mortality. Sufficient care does not appear to be taken that only healthy coolies are introduced. This cause of the excessive mortality is so glaring, that it is almost enough of itself to account for it. I have no hesitation in stating, as a result of my own personal observation and experience, that in 8-10 of the fatal cases, the coolies were suffering from serious organic diseases of the liver or spleen, or both, before their introduction to the tea districts. This statement is particularly applicable to those recruited from North-Western Bengal and Madras, from amongst whom the greatest proportional mortality occurred. That this is also the opinion of the tea planters themselves, may be seen from the following :—

Mr. Jennings of the Cherragong Tea Estate says :—“In my opinion the great cause of the mortality which exists on tea plantations is to be accounted for by, first, the coolies who died were in a diseased state before they left their own houses, and consequently broke down entirely, and gave themselves up after one or two attacks of fever, which generally ended in dysentery. This, along with the careless way in which they cook their food, is the only reason I can assign.” About the Madrassees, he thinks that, their not being able to procure the food they had been accustomed to operates unfavorably on them. He also says, “this damp climate is not suited to their constitutions, and once they get sick, they seem to make up their minds that they are going to die.” Again, “next to the above (Madrassees) in mortality, come those recruited from the North-West Provinces, and I am of opinion that the men who died so rapidly were in a diseased state at the time they were recruited, and, consequently, on their arrival here, it took but little sickness to carry them off. The coolies best suited for tea plantations are Dhangers and Sonthals. North-West men I consider useless during the rains here.”

15. Besides actual carelessness in passing unhealthy men, a system used to prevail, and may still continue, of in some way or other changing the coolies *en route*, and substituting either worn-out men, who were not likely to live very long, or else a class of regular “bounty jumpers,” who made a trade of enlisting as coolies and then deserting on arrival at their destination. I will relate one case which came under my own observation. On one occasion, when the East India Tea Company of Sylhet received a batch of coolies, I was asked by the Manager to examine several of them specially. I found two men incurably blind, and, from the appearance of the eyes, it was evident that the blindness was of long standing. It is absurd to suppose that these men could have been passed by any Medical Officer.

Again, Mr. Bell, of the Sylhet Cachar Tea Company informs me that he was at one time advised by a Cooly Contractor that a splendid lot of Dhanger coolies had been dispatched for him. On their arrival, not one of the class named could be found : they were all of another class. Al-

though it is a difficult matter to trace any of the cases like the above to a termination, none of the planters I have ever seen have any doubt about the fact that coolies are changed as above stated.

16. The mode of transit has, I consider, a good deal to do with the mortality. In a steamer there is often, in spite of the regulations on the subject, a good deal of over-crowding. I observed this frequently two years ago in Assam. The coolies are not allowed to land while the vessel is at anchor, and are, consequently, in a very dirty condition, and one predisposing to attacks of cholera and other affections of the bowels. As a set-off against the above, there is the one advantage of a comparatively rapid transit.

All the planters I know would prefer getting their coolies by native boats in small batches. The time occupied by the journey is, of course, much increased, but the coolies have a run on shore every evening, and also do their cooking there. It is found, practically, that the health of the coolies brought up in this way is better during the journey, and they are landed in better condition than when brought up by steamer.

17. It would conduce towards the contentment and better health of the coolies imported, if more complete families were introduced ; and the number of women sent, should, if possible, balance with that of the men imported. Coolies never, as far as I am aware, intermarry with the villagers in these parts.

18. At every station where coolies are landed in any number, there should be a commodious depot for their reception, until they can be taken to their destination. The want of this at this place has been little felt hitherto, as the planters, mostly being near the station, can readily remove their coolies at once on arrival.

19. Having thus landed the coolies in the garden which is to be the scene of his future labors, it may now form a subject of inquiry what elements of sickness he is likely to be assailed by in the plantation and district itself. Speaking generally, I do not think that the district of Sylhet is more unhealthy than most other districts of Bengal. It is jungly and wet, but those physical conditions do not necessarily make a place unhealthy. I have gone over all the gardens reported on, but have failed to find out any thing special either in the physical characters of the various Estates, or in the housing of the coolies, water supply, &c. Any defects observed were so trifling as naturally to preclude the idea that they could account for any excess in the mortality. I must, therefore, pass over everything relating to any particular garden, but, taking the whole as alike, try and discover what causes, if any, in the plantations themselves, as a whole, would help to account for the mortality.

20. One of the first causes operating on the coolies, especially the ones recruited from the North-West or Madras, is one of an intense feeling of disappointment. He finds that the glowing statements of the man who recruited him are all false, and that, instead of getting, as he was very likely told he would, 15 Rupees or so a month, for sitting for a few hours a day under the shade, he finds that he actually has to work for a living. That this feeling, by inducing a despondent state of mind, frequently acts as an incentive to disease, I have no doubt.

That the cooly is frequently deceived by designing recruiters is most undoubted, and I have become acquainted with numerous instances of it. I beg again to quote from the experiences of a tea planter of the district, as communicated to me and bearing on this point. “If you speak to such a man (one who wants work) and ask him why he came at all, if he was not willing to give an honest day's work for his pay, he will tell you he had been deceived and cheated ; that he had never handled a Koodalie in his life ; that the men with whom he had engaged assured him that in the tea districts, he or she would have nothing to do but sit in the shade of a tea tree during the heat of the day, plucking now and then, as it pleased them, a few leaves therefrom, and for this work they were to receive Rupees 16, or one gold mohur per mensem. One man will tell you that he was a silversmith or a Sonar by trade, another was a sweetmeat-seller, another a durzee, a kobewallah or professional singer, &c., &c., and that they all had been inveigled by that Shitan of a recruiter. Such men never turn out well ; at least 50 per cent. of them are a dead loss to the proprietor ; and such of them as are alive at the end of the three years take their discharge and return to their native homes not rejoicing, but broken-spirited and useless men.”

*Proceedings of the Madras Government, Public Department,
16th October 1867.*

as is alleged, 50 per cent. of the men so deceived are a dead loss to the employer, it appears to the Lieutenant-Governor that it would be well for the interest of the employers to insist that their Agents who engage laborers from the contractors' depots shall do all in their power to open the laborer's eyes to the real state of things before entering into an engagement with him.

9. This would be also an effective remedy against the importation of men, who, by their previous occupations and habits of life, are disqualified from work on the gardens.

10. It must rest with the employer by the exercise of his personal influence over the laborers to check their injurious habits, as described in paragraphs 21 and 22 of Dr. Brown's report.

11. With reference to the suggestion made in paragraph 23, for the construction of separate huts for the accommodation of the coolies, it is to be observed that the housing of the laborers in barracks has not yet been shown to affect their healthiness or rate of mortality.

12. The Lieutenant Governor fully recognizes the difficulty under which the planters labor from the want of efficient medical agency, referred to in paragraph 24.

13. His Honor observes with satisfaction that the mortality among the imported laborers on the plantations in the District of Sylhet is not attributed to any causes for which the local managers of the gardens are responsible.

14. His Honor desires that his thanks may be conveyed to Dr. Brown for his careful and interesting report.

No. 171. ORDER THEREON, 16th October 1867, No. 1285.

Under the circumstances brought to notice in the papers referred to in the foregoing letter, regarding the serious mortality which has occurred amongst the Madras coolies in the tea districts of Bengal, the Governor in Council deems it necessary to direct that the Protector of Emigrants and the several Protectors of Laborers will see that licenses are not granted, under Act No. V of 1866, to Contractors or Recruiters who may desire to engage laborers for the tea districts in question.

(True Extract).

Chief Secretary.

To the Protector of Emigrants.
,, Protector of Laborers in

How

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N^o 4577
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A. M. Harrington, Esquire
Offg. Secy. to Govt. of India

The Honble R. L. Ellis, C. B.
Acting Chief Secy. to Government
Fort St. George.

Chinda 13 September 1867.

Home Departt. Sir,

I am directed to forward for the information of the Government of Fort St. George a copy of the Supplement to the Calcutta Gazette of the 14th Instant. and with reference to the subject of Mortality among "imported laborers in Sylhet" to draw the special attention of His Excellency in Council to paragraphs 5, 11 to 14, 20 and 25 of Dr Brown's letter dated the 30th of June and paragraph 2 of the letter dated 26th ultimo from the Junior Secretary to the Government of Bengal to the Commissioners of the Saver Division.

I have the honor to be
Sir

Your most Obedt. Servant

A M Harrington

Offg. Secy. to Govt. of India

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PROCEEDINGS of the MADRAS GOVERNMENT.

Read the following letter from the Under Secretary to Government of India. Home Department.

(Here enter 13 September 1885)

Order thereon 16 Oct. /85 No. 1285.

Under the circumstances brought to notice in the papers referred to in the foregoing letter regarding the mortality amongst the Madras Coolies in the Tea Districts of Bengal, the Governor in Council deems it ~~expedient~~ ^{expedient} to direct that the Protector of Emigrants and the several Protectors of Laborers will see that Licenses are not

granted

[Handwritten signature/initials]

Public 1885 Sept

From 1 Oct 1885

Under Secretary to Govt of India

Home Department

No 4507

1138
1305 sep

Enclosure

No 1561

Forwarded to you under subject of the mortality amongst the imported tea coolies in Sept 1885

Order is that the same is being lettered to the Government to the effect that the receipt of the same is to be communicated to the Protector of Emigrants and also to the several Protectors in the provinces.

By the Protector of Emigrants
to the Secretary to the Government

granted, under Act No. V of
1866, to Contractors or
Recruiters who may desire
to engage laborers for
the Sea Districts in
question.



24 } Is the Probetor of Commercials
 10 " Probetor of Labor of all description

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No. 1285-

PROCEEDINGS OF GOVERNMENT.

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Dated

18/10/1914

10-6-20 *RT*



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(unclear)