

No. 219. Read the following Proceedings of the Board of Revenue, dated 1st June 1871, No. 2,220 :—

Read the following letter from R. K. PUCKLE, Esq., Collector of Tinnevely, to the Acting Secretary to the Board of Revenue, dated Strivilliputtur, 23rd April 1871.

I FORWARD, for the information of the Board, a copy of my preliminary Registers No. 9 of 1870 as against Contractor Ragava Chari, and Nos. 2, 3, 4, and 6 of 1871 as against Sub-Engineer Colquhoun. The prisoners were tried together before the Sessions Court, and were found guilty in two cases, the rest remaining over, and were sentenced, respectively, to two years' simple imprisonment and 25,000 Rs. fine, and 5 years' rigorous imprisonment and 25,000 Rs. fine.

2. The cases heard were the Ahtur and Pudukudi frauds, Nos. 2 and 3 of 1871; but as these are isolated cases, and only imperfectly illustrate the system of robbery that has been going on in this district, I will briefly relate some of the facts that I have been able to gather as to what has been done in the range in which Mr. Colquhoun and his contractor were employed. This range comprises the Tinnevely, Tenkarei, and Nanguneri Talooks, with a part of Otapidarum—an extensive tract of country, 100 miles from the Superintending Engineer, whose head-quarters are at Madura. The consequence was that Mr. Colquhoun was absolutely master of the position, and was enabled to misappropriate Government money in a manner that almost defied detection.

3. The enclosures show the connection between Mr. Colquhoun and a firm of contractors, of whom Ragava Chari was one. These contractors undertook the works on the Striviguntum anicut in November 1868, a month after I left the district on leave, and Mr. Colquhoun assumed charge of the range in which the anicut is situated on the following January. Both contractor and Range officer came from Madura, where they had worked together before, and the Range officer had no sooner arrived here than he began to dismiss the petty local contractors on various works to make way for his friends from Madura. In a short time he put the latter in possession of every work in his range, and managed to surround himself with no less than 14 Madura subordinates, who were all either active co-adjutors, or were so far in his power that they had no choice but to do as he wished. Every Overseer in the range was his own man, and besides the Estimate-maker, the Store-keeper, and many of the Maistries, there was a notorious Local Fund Overseer who used to be employed on works that Mr. Colquhoun could not get done as he wished.

4. There were many works going on in the range, sub-jails, choultries, bridges, markets, roads, a light-house, and Telegraph office, and the disastrous flood of November 1869 necessitated the repair of numerous irrigation-works, for which a special grant of nearly 50,000 Rs. was allotted to Mr. Colquhoun. This season of distress and misery was taken advantage of by him to put money into his pocket, and the works were starved to such a degree as will necessitate many of them being done over again. The general system pursued was to estimate for a larger amount than each work really required, to raise the rates for earth-work, to measure up unfairly or make no measurements at all, to submit supplementary

*Proceedings of the Madras Government, Revenue Department,
17th June 1871.*

bills over the amount of the estimate, and to charge heavily for damage alleged to have occurred while the work was in progress. Thus the estimate for the Ahtur channel was raised by 5,000 Rs., the rates were raised from 1½ Annas to 2 Annas a yard, a damage which never occurred was charged for to the extent of upwards of 2,000 Rs., and an extra bill was put in for 414 Rs. over the amount of the estimate; while the work was so badly done, that since my return to the district I have had to employ the villagers to clear the channel themselves at a cost of 500 Rs.

5. The Vagaikulam chuttrum, for which 3,800 Rs. were sanctioned from the Endowment Fund, was actually built for less than 800 Rs., and is so crazy a structure that the floor has sunk, the walls have cracked, and the roof is bending in.

6. The Tuticorin light-house fell down while in course of construction, and Mr. Colquhoun debited Government with a further payment of 500 Rs. on account of this work after he had seen it down.

7. Bricks for the Pudukottai bridge, at 6 Rs. a thousand, were rejected by Mr. Colquhoun when the work was under petty contractors, but when Ragava Chari took charge, he was allowed to work in these rejected bricks at 11 Rs. a thousand.

8. The Tinnevelly main channels were repaired, and the contractor claimed and received nearly 1,800 Rs. for damage that never occurred.

9. The Pudukudi head sluice was ~~filled~~ with sand, and a ~~cut~~ bed of the river had to be made to bring water to it. The villagers interested sent their men to the work as kudimaramut; but as it was somewhat heavy, they received 90 Rs. as batta. For this Government was debited with 845 Rs.

10. The Striviguntum tank was breached, and the estimate was not only raised by 700 Rs. but an additional bill of 1,000 Rs. for daily coolies, who were never employed, was debited to Government over the amount of the estimate.

11. The Arumugamangalam tank was breached and repaired on an estimate of 1,200 Rs., and on this a handsome profit was made. This, however, was not thought enough, so the estimate already completed was cancelled, and a new estimate was prepared for 2,400 Rs., and this amount was debited to Government, the takwari measurements in the original field book being altered to correspond.

12. Forty rain-fed tanks were breached in the Tenkarei Talook, and were partly repaired by the ryots at low rates or without payment; the whole of these were handed over to the contractor at 2 Annas a yard, and Government was debited with about 3,000 Rs. for work that was never done by the contractor and never was paid for by him.

13. The Nanguneri subsidiary jail, the Palamcottah Municipal market, and the Tinnevelly Municipal aqueduct, are all disgraceful works, condemned by Captain Oakes, who was sent down to investigate, and by every Revenue-officer who has seen them; but I will not enter into further details now, the professional view of the case being fully set forth in Captain Oakes's report, noted in Government Proceedings, No. 90, dated 13th January 1871.

ENCLOSURE No. 1.—Copy of Register of Preliminary Inquiry.

*Proceedings of the Madras Government, Revenue Department,
17th June 1871.*

This letter will be submitted for the information of Government.

2. Mr. Puckle's energy and ability in unravelling the combinations by which Mr. Colquhoun has been defrauding Government and injuring the people demand the highest commendation.

No. 220.

ORDER THEREON, 17th June 1871, No. 1,077. ✓

Miscellaneous.

THE Government entirely concur in the remarks of the Board, and desire that this expression of their high appreciation of his endeavours may be conveyed to Mr. Puckle.

(True Extract.)

(Signed)

D. F. CARMICHAEL,
Acting Secretary to Government.

To the Board of Revenue.

Exd. F. R. Bantleman.

has been defrauding Government and injuring the people demand the highest commendation.
(A true Copy and Extract.)

No 19-220

and desire that his exertions
of his high appreciation of his
endeavours may be conveyed to the public.

12 June 1871

Erskine

Acting Secretary.

To the Acting Secretary to Government, Revenue Department,

with one original Enclosure.

Copy to the Collector of Tinnevely.

Erskine G. A. Turton.

14 To the Acting Secy to Govt. Dept. 12/19

Rev 1871. Sept
Board of Revenue,
MADRAS. 17/183.

PROCEEDINGS, 1ST JUNE 1871, No. 2,220.

Received. 8 June 71
Yes. But I think
might be made a separate
communication of Mr. Buckles.
direct - if he has not
gone so somewhere
already. P

JUNE.
No. 2,220.

Public Works Contractor Ragava Chetty and
Sub-Engineer Mr. Colquhoun, - Letter from Col-
lector of Tinnevely forwarding certain docu-
ments in connection with misappropriation of
Government money by, and making certain re-
marks, submitted to Government.

The Govt. Secretary
in the remarks of the Govt.

17/183