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MADRAS RECORD OFFICE

GOVERNMENT OF MADRAS

Revenue DEPARTMENT

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Proceedings of the Madras Government, Public Department,
23rd January 1873.

No. 62. Read the following Despatch from Her Majesty's Secretary of State for India, to the Government of India, dated India Office, London, 6th November 1872, No. 26 (Sanitary):—

The despatch of your Excellency in Council, dated 1st July last, No. 6 (Sanitary), forwarding a copy of Dr. Cunningham's review of the reports of the local Sanitary Commissioners for the year 1870 has been considered by me in Council.

2. I trust that the orders recently issued by your Lordship's Government will ensure the more punctual submission of the annual Sanitary Reports under review.

3. Dr. Cunningham's review has been submitted for the consideration of the Army Sanitary Commission, and I forward, herewith, a copy of a Memorandum* which has been received from the Commission in reply.

4. I observe with great satisfaction the remarkable diminution in the number Deaths from cholera in the Central Provinces—

1869	...	60,000
1870	...	107

of deaths from cholera in the Central Provinces during the year under review as shown in Dr. Townsend's report.

5. I fully concur in the remarks of the Commission in paragraph 10 of their Memorandum, regarding the importance of Dr. Cunningham's statement regarding the increasing intelligence among the administrative authorities and natives as to the necessity of sanitary improvements all over India, as affording a most encouraging prospect for the general improvement of public health.

MEMORANDUM by the Army Sanitary Commission on Dr. Cunningham's review of the reports of the Local Sanitary Commissioners for 1870, together with the despatch from the Government of India on the subject.

This letter from the Government of India to His Grace the Duke of Argyll encloses a review by Dr. Cunningham of reports of Sanitary Commissioners which had arrived too late for notice in his 7th annual report for 1870.

The review is of considerable interest, and might be advantageously included among documents printed in the next India Office report, although it would have been better if the reports had been sent to Dr. Cunningham in proper time for his annual report. The Government of India have taken steps to prevent this delay in future.

2. In the Commission's previous minute on Dr. Cunningham's report, they endeavoured to point out the chief subjects of practical interest which it contained; and they now learn from the review that progress is being made in developing a system of registration of births and deaths by methods suited to local circumstances. Much requires to be done before the requisite degree of accuracy is attained, but the work is advancing, and may be safely left in the hands of the authorities.

3. Generally there has been a remarkable immunity from cholera among the civil population, although, as Dr. Cunningham shows, not to the extent in certain districts, at least, which previous defective statistical information had apparently established.

4. In the Central Provinces, however, there appears to have been a remarkable cessation of cholera. In 1869 there were nearly 60,000 cholera deaths, and in 1870 only 107 deaths.

Dr. Townsend, the reporter, has discussed the causes to which this great diminution may be assigned, and in so doing has contributed some important information to the general history of cholera. He allows fully the probable influence of the law of periodicity on the intensity of the disease, but the difference between the two years is so great, for India, that it is justifiable to inquire whether certain measures which have been adopted in these provinces may not have borne their part in this result.

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5. Since the epidemic of 1865, the principal religious gathering in the province has been suppressed, and the times of holding all other important fairs have been fixed when cholera epidemics are known to be of least frequency. Still in 1869 there were nearly 60,000 deaths. During this year, for various climatic reasons, the water supply had attained a maximum of impurity. Advantage was taken of the drought of 1869 "to clean out and deepen wells and tanks"—"everywhere improvements of this kind were carried out, and in some districts hundreds of new wells were sunk." As a consequence of these measures, together with abundant rainfall, the water was more plentiful and of better quality in 1870, and cholera had all but disappeared. Dr. Townsend connects the facts with each other by a series of interesting reasons bearing on the general questions of climate, subsoils, and rainfall, which are well-worthy of consideration. In the meantime (while bearing in mind the probable influence of more abundant food in 1870), the facts may be accepted, and also this other fact, that the local authorities are becoming more alive to the necessity of sanitary measures, and that such measures are being more or less carried out, as affording ground of hope for the future.

6. The deaths from small-pox in all the provinces were 81,563 in 1870, as against 219,901 in 1869.

7. Malarial fevers appear to have been very prevalent in all parts of the country particularly in the North-Western Provinces, where they are stated to have occasioned 322,000 deaths in 1870.

Dr. Plank, the Sanitary Commissioner for these Provinces, again refers to the connexion between this excessive fever death rate, and undue application of water for irrigation without provision for drainage.

8. Dr. Townsend's investigations in the Central Provinces appear to sustain the long entertained opinion that miasmatic poison may be imbibed in drinking water, as well as through the medium of the air.

9. As a result of the diminished susceptibility to epidemic disease in India during 1870, it is stated that the food supply was more abundant than during the epidemic year 1869. Considering the great difference in the mortality of the two years in the Central Provinces, it seems not improbable, as already hinted, that part of the 60,000 reputed cholera deaths in these provinces in 1869 might have been due to famine.

10. One of the most important parts of Dr. Cunningham's review relates to future sanitary progress. He states that there is increasing intelligence among the administrative authorities regarding the necessity for sanitary improvements all over India. He says that "in every province the question of sanitary improvement is assuming a practical importance both in the eyes of the authorities and of the people which it had not previously attained. Progress may be slow, but in estimating that progress the difficulties which attend sanitary administration in all countries must not be forgotten, nor those other difficulties of no small magnitude which are peculiar to this country."

Surely this experience affords every encouragement for anticipating improvement of the public health all over India at no distant date.

ARMY SANITARY COMMISSION, WAR OFFICE,
17th August 1872.

(Signed) J. J. FREDERICK,
Secretary.

No. 1.

Copy forwarded to the Government of Madras in continuation of endorsement,
No. 278-A, dated the 29th June last.

(By order of the Governor-General in Council.)

(Signed) J. GEOGHEGAN,
Under Secy. to the Govt. of India.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, REVENUE, AND COMMERCE (SANITARY),
2nd January 1873.

*Proceedings of the Madras Government, Public Department,
23rd January 1873.*

No. 63. ORDER THEREON, 23rd January 1873, No. 70.
Communicated to the Sanitary Commissioner, and to the Military and Revenue Departments.

(True Extract.)

Chief Secretary.

To the Sanitary Commissioner,
" Military Department.
" Revenue do.
" Inspector-General, Indian Medical Department.

Exd. J. Wright.

6 B2 of Rev. Des 31st Jan 73

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Cont. of 1873: 31st Jan 73

PUBLIC.

THE SANITARY COMMISSIONER

Dated Jan 73, 23rd.

Recd 1 29th

G. O., 23rd January 1873, No. 90.

JANUARY.
Nos. 62-63.

Communicating copy of Memorandum by
Army Sanitary Commission on 4th Jan 73
review of the reports of local sanitary com-
mittees for 1872 forwarded by the Secretary
State.

Am. 1873

31st Jan 73