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MADRAS RECORD OFFICE

GOVERNMENT OF MADRAS

Revenue. DEPARTMENT

G.O. No. / B.P. No.	19.	Press / Mis.
Dated	3-6-1874	196 .

Not to be folded or roughly handled

1/19

No. 1,132.

PROCEEDINGS OF THE BOARD OF REVENUE, dated 15th May 1874.

Read the following letter from W. H. COMYN, Esq., Acting Collector of Tinnevelly, to J. GROSE, Esq., Secretary to the Board of Revenue, dated 1st May 1874, No. 232 :—

I HAVE the honour, in continuation of my letter No. 222, dated 25th April 1874, to submit copies of reports received from the Head Assistant-Collector, and the Zillah Surgeon, on the subject of the so-called epidemic in Ottapedaram Taluq.

2. From these reports the Board will observe that the virulence of the disease is abating, medical relief has been and is being afforded, and that the disease will probably die out as soon as the rain, which has been threatening the neighbourhood, comes down and cools the atmosphere.

3. Mr. Boyle seems to be of opinion that the disease, which he calls an epidemic, originated at Ramnad, and has travelled south. I do not know whether any outbreak of this disease at Ramnad has been reported from the Madura District ; but in this district it seems to have appeared only in localities where black cotton soil prevails, and has attacked only the lower classes, Brahmins and other high caste people having been free from it.

4. It can hardly therefore be termed an epidemic, which is a disease generally prevalent, but not dependent on any local morbific cause, and which attacks all persons alike. It is rather an *endemic* disease, or one to which the inhabitants of a particular locality are peculiarly subject, and which, for that reason, may be supposed to proceed from local causes. Dr. Rickard, with whom I have had a conversation on the subject, is clearly of opinion that the disease is not infectious, but is one which is liable to break out, as it were, spontaneously where certain ascertained conditions exist. He does not attribute it to any malarial poison, on the contrary, he reports that the sanitation of the villages he visited was very good, and the water-supply sufficient and pure, and it was in one of these villages, Pillayarnattam, that the disease first broke out, and where it was most fatal in its effects.

5. The symptoms of the disease, which seems to be a kind of fever, attended with vomiting and involving dysentery, are described in Dr. Rickard's report, and he is of opinion that the sickness is produced by long daily exposure to the sun, remaining for a long time without food, and then eating new cumboo grain, which is notoriously unwholesome and indigestible. I believe that these conditions combined, are the cause of the sickness ; and new cumboo being cheaper than old, the poorer classes purchase it, and as it is the poorer classes that have been visited by this disease, it is fair to presume that this cumboo diet has helped to induce its attack.

6. I have received a report from the General Charge Deputy-Collector, stating that sickness of a similar character has broken out in the neighbouring taluq of Sattur, and there again the conditions are identical—the disease only appearing on black cotton soil, only attacking the poorer classes who eat new cumboo grain, and leaving Brahmins and other rice-eaters alone.

7. The Deputy-Collector has promised a further report, and I have in the meantime called upon him to make careful inquiries as to the progress of the disease, and to let me know whether the services of a Medical Subordinate are required to check it in the taluqs under his charge.

8. The Dresser attached to the Collector's Office remains at Vilatikulam, or in the neighbourhood, and has received instructions from the Zillah Surgeon regarding the treatment to be adopted. He has also been directed by Dr. Rickard to report to him any peculiarity he may notice in the disease. I hope soon to hear that his treatment has been successful, and that there is no further cause for anxiety.

9. The season has been an exceptionally hot one, and the heat is more intense in black cotton soil than in other localities, and though in the villages visited by Dr. Rickard the water-supply was reported to be good, it is not so in all parts of the taluq. A sum of Rupees 400 has been placed at the Head Assistant-Collector's disposal from Local Funds for deepening wells, etc., and improving the water-supply in places where it may be deficient.

10. The Head Assistant-Collector has already communicated with the Sanitary Commissioner on the subject, and I have received a letter from Dr. Cornish, suggesting the propriety of my

despatching the Zillah Surgeon to the scene of the outbreak ; I had already anticipated the course suggested by the Sanitary Commissioner, whose letter reached me after Dr. Rickard's return.

11. I shall now send a copy of the Zillah Surgeon's report and of the Head Assistant's letter to the Sanitary Commissioner, and shall do myself the honour of reporting to the Board such further particulars of this disease as may from time to time be required.

ENCLOSURE No. 1.

From J. A. BOYLE, Esq., Acting Head Assistant-Collector, to W. H. COMYN, Esq., Acting Collector of Tinnevelly, dated Kytar, 29th April 1874, No. 100.

I HAVE the honour to submit the report called for in your letter No. 378 of the 25th instant, received yesterday, on the subject of the epidemic which has prevailed during the last month in the north-east division of the Ottapedaram Taluq. I submit this report without the delay which would be occasioned were I to await the preparation of elaborate statistics on the subject, for the reasons that very accurate statistical knowledge is not so much required as general information of the character and causes of the disease; and that it is doubtful whether trustworthy figures will ever be collected from ignorant and unobservant village officials.

2. This epidemic locally known as "Tannirkudi Noyi," or the water drinking disease, is said to have commenced its ravages in the Ramnad country, and in crossing our border, appeared first in a serious form in the village of Pillayarnattam, a small crowded hamlet, containing only 661 inhabitants, just three miles west of Vilatikulam. Here it remained from the latter end of March for a full month, and between the 23rd March and 15th April there were no less than eighteen victims of the fever.

3. The poor villagers were filled with a superstitious fear. In the sudden outbreak of a virulent and unfamiliar form of disease, they saw the angry influence of a deity; and not knowing the source any better than the remedy of the epidemic, they called it Vadakkati Ammal, or the goddess from the north, and folded their hands in patient submission to the attack of the plague. No help was sought, not even was information sent to the Local Sub-Magistrate who was absent from his head-quarters, but was working in a village some ten miles away. And it was merely in the ordinary routine of furnishing the monthly "Births" and "Deaths" Return that the Village Curnam bethought him of telling the Tahsildar that thirteen villagers had died in a fortnight.

4. The report passed in the ordinary course from the Tahsildar to the Treasury Deputy-Collector where first it attracted attention, and was sent to me for inquiry.

5. It is much to be regretted that a whole month elapsed between the outbreak of this sickness and its report to the local officers. There is little doubt that the plague might have been stayed earlier, and that several lives might have been saved if we had known of it before. What is merely natural stolidity in a village official, becomes culpable want of intelligence in a Tahsildar ; and I cannot but regret that the fact of thirteen deaths in a fortnight in one village of his taluq seemed to the Tahsildar such a natural occurrence as not to be worth reporting to his divisional officer.

6. As for the Deputy-Tahsildar of Vilatikulam, he had absolutely heard nothing about it.

7. The villagers had decided that the epidemic was the stroke of Vadakkati Ammal, the unknown deity, and had put up wreaths at the head of their streets and patiently waited until the evil should pass away. They did nothing, because they knew not what to do. They gave no medicine, for they knew not what to give ; and they told nobody of their trouble, because they believed that it was a god only, and not man that could help them.

8. When I received intelligence on the 16th of the disease from the Treasury Deputy-Collector, I went to Tuticorin and having informed Dr. Oleary of what was wanted, I took a small parcel of drugs with me and went on the 20th to Vypaur by steamer.

9. The disease had hardly touched the coast villages ; but I saw one sick man in Vypaur who had taken the fever in another village, and had come home to recover.

10. In Vilatikulam there were many sick, and I saw and treated about a dozen who were in all stages of the fever. There had already been three deaths when I got there, and one man, who was in a hopeless state when I arrived, died under treatment ; but with the exception of one poor woman who was very weak and much reduced by fever, and who, as I am informed, refused to take the medicine I gave her, there were no more fatal cases. All other cases treated recovered, and some were undoubtedly very ill indeed. It is therefore creditable to Mr. Oleary's skill that he was able to prescribe remedies that proved effectual, without having had the opportunity of diagnosing any cases.

11. Of the present state of things you will receive fuller accounts from the Dresser now in charge, and from Dr. Rickard than I can give. I accompanied Dr. Rickard on the 25th to Pillayarnattam where the disease had worked itself out, and to Chittanenaikenpatty where there was only one bad case. I shall leave it to Dr. Rickard to pronounce upon the character of the disease, but I may say that in all cases observed by me, fever and diarrhœa combined were the principal and only serious symptoms, and that they both proved amenable to simple remedies—small doses of quinine and chlorodyne, etc.

12. I have been told on all sides during the last few days that the disease is abating, and I think there can be little doubt that it only required to be treated with proper remedies. A small village finds itself being decimated by an unknown sickness and becomes a prey to sheer terror, which at once doubles the number of victims. Added to this is the dreadfully foolish practice of starving the sick, that is an axiom of native treatment, and it is impossible to conceive a more fatal cause in this disease in which consuming thirst showed the severity of the fever, and diarrhœa was constantly present to drain all the strength from the system. It was therefore my first effort to feed the sick ; and I found in nearly every case the relatives willing and anxious to obey instructions in preparing broth and nourishing diet for their patients.

13. The Sub-Magistrate of Vilatikulam writes to me to-day to say that there have been no more deaths in that town ; but that one death is reported from each of two villages at a mile's distance ; and that the Dresser is going to treat patients in them. There has been within the last week a considerable change in the weather. Thunder showers have fallen generally, and the temperature is not so high as it was early in the month. But this is a very hot trying season, and it is not to be wondered that a measure of sickness prevails in parts of the district.

14. I cannot but think that the disease is now fairly grappled with and will yield to steadily applied remedies. Here and there a village may still supply a weak and sickly victim ; but we shall have no more sweeping strokes through a village, if timely warning results in the early application of medicines and wise treatment.

15. In case the disease continues to travel, as it has hitherto travelled towards the south, I think it would be wise to post a Dresser to Ottapedaram to move through the neighbouring villages. I heard of a case in Copumpatty ; but though my camp was there for three days, no sick were brought to me for treatment ; and in Ettiapuram they knew nothing of it.

16. Simple directions published in the District Gazette, and especially advice to feed the sick and not to starve them, will be useful to those who find themselves face to face with the disease; but as I said before, I think the worst phase of it is past, and we may soon hope for a clean bill of health. When the statistical returns come to hand, I will address you again on this subject.

(True Copy.)

(Signed) W. H. COMYN,
Acting Collector.

ENCLOSURE No. 2.

From Surgeon F. M. RICKARD, Zillah Surgeon, Tinnevelly, to W. H. COMYN, Esq., Acting Collector of Tinnevelly, dated Palamcottah, 30th April 1874.

I HAVE the honour to inform you that, in accordance with your orders, I left Palamcottah on the evening of the 24th instant, and returned again on the 28th April 1874. During this period I visited the following villages—Copumpatty, Pillayarnattam, Chittanenaikenpatty, Vilatikulam and Ottapedaram, and made all inquiry into the matter, and from personal observation, obtained as much information as possible concerning this *quasi* disease Tannirkudi Noyi.

2. At Pillayarnattam, where the disease was but a few weeks back very rife and destructive, I could find no new case, and saw only a few people who were supposed to be convalescing from this disease.

3. At Chittanenaikenpatty I saw and treated three cases—one, a man aged about 55 years, and the other two, both women of about 40 years. These three cases, as I learnt, had been much worse, but that they were now improving. The man was exceedingly weak and emaciated, but as I discovered other causes for his condition, I could not attribute it to the disease (Tannirkudi Noyi). The two women were both suffering from dysentery, though not of an acute character. This (dysentery) seems to be the termination of the water thirst disease, and in many of the fatal cases, has been the direct cause of death.

4. At Vilatikulam I saw three more cases of the so-called disease, but found that two of them, both women of past middle age, were suffering from simple diarrhœa; the third, an old woman of eighty years, was shown to me, as a case, in which the symptoms of the epidemic disease were well marked; but I could not do the old woman the injustice of saying that she suffered from anything else, but old age and infirmity.

5. It will be thus seen that I had no opportunity of observing a typical case, and can only arrive at my conclusions from general information obtained, and from such of the cases as had been attacked and were now convalescent.

6. The so-called disease, Tannirkudi Noyi, signifying "water drinking disease," cannot, in my opinion, be classed as a disease, it being only a symptom of other and more serious maladies. The patient is at first attacked with fever, remittent in character, and sickness of such intensity, that water even is not retained on the stomach. This emesis soon abates, and thirst takes its place, and the patient pleased at being able to retain water on his stomach, drinks large quantities to the utter exclusion of any thing in the shape of food. This of course has its consequence in the shape of dysentery which soon sets in, and if not at once treated, very quickly carries off the patient. It is at once remarkable, as well as true, that no Brahmin or other high caste people have suffered in any way from this disease. The generality of the persons attacked, or, I may say, the whole of the sufferers, belong to the lower classes, who earn their living by cotton picking, which necessitates their exposure from early morn till sun set, during which time they take no food, and eat only on their return from work, or once in 24 hours. I may here remark on the range of the thermometer; I took observations three times in the day, and note below the result:—

8 A.M.	Thermometer	86·
12 A.M.	Do.	98
4 P.M.	Do.	91·4.

7. The application of a clinical thermometer to the persons of the attacked showed no higher range than "blood heat," though it must be remembered, as I before stated, I saw no case at its worst.

8. In the treatment of these peculiar symptoms, as in the generality of sickness, the friends of the sufferers adopt their usual method, viz., starvation, which I need scarcely say does not assist in the cure. I left 1st Class Hospital Assistant, P. Nulliah Naidoo, at Vilatikulam with medicines, and requested him to give me further information, and report to me any peculiarity he might notice in the disease.

9. I must here remark that the sanitation of the villages visited was very good, and the water-supply sufficient and pure.

10. In conclusion, I cannot attribute this outbreak to any malarial poison, and am of opinion that the long daily exposure to the sun and being so long without food, and that food being for the most part new cumboo, are the causes of this peculiar form of sickness.

11. The natives themselves of course attribute the whole of this disease to a certain goddess (Mauree) from the north, and say that medicines will not do as much good as Pongals.

(True Copy.)

(Signed) W. H. COMYN,
Acting Collector.

SUBMITTED for the information of Government, in continuation of Board's Proceedings, dated 4th May 1874, No. 1,034.

2. Copies of the letter and enclosures will also be communicated to the Surgeon-General, Indian Medical Department, the Sanitary Commissioner, and the Collector of Madura. The last-named officer will report whether there has been any similar outbreak at Ramnad or elsewhere in the district.

(True Copies and Extract.)

Acting Sub-Secretary.

To the Acting Secretary to Government, Revenue Department.
,, the Surgeon-General, Indian Medical Department.
,, the Sanitary Commissioner.
,, the Collector of Madura, with Board's Proceedings, dated 4th May 1874, No. 1,034.
,, the Acting Collector of Tinnevelly.

c

N°. 1597.

Revenue 1874. Separate

Board of Revenue,

MADRAS.

PROCEEDINGS, 15TH MAY 1874, No. 1,132.

Dupt 16 May/74

Encl.

Received 18 May.

MAY.

No. 1,132.

Disease—of a novel character attended with thirst and vomiting.—Tinnevelly Collector's letter forwarding further report on outbreak of — in Ottapedaram Taluq, submitted to Government. Copies of Collector's letter and enclosures communicated to Surgeon-General, Indian Medical Department, Sanitary Commissioner, and Collector of Madura. Last-named officer to report whether there has been any similar outbreak at Ramnad or elsewhere in his district.

N° 19 Recorded 2d June 74