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# MADRAS RECORD OFFICE

## GOVERNMENT OF MADRAS

Revenue. DEPARTMENT

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Dated 29 28-5-1874 196—.

*Not to be folded or roughly handled*

No. 1,034.

PROCEEDINGS OF THE BOARD OF REVENUE, dated 4th May 1874.

Read the following letter from W. H. COMYN, Esq., Acting Collector of Tinnevelly, to J. CROSE, Esq., Secretary to the Board of Revenue, dated 25th April 1874, No. 222 :—

REGRET to have to report, for the information of the Board and Government, the outbreak, in the Vilatikulam Division of the Ottapidaram Taluq, of a disease of a grievous and apparently novel character, which has also, though confined within certain local limits, assumed the proportions of an epidemic.

2. The matter was first brought to the notice of Mr. Locke, the Treasury Deputy-Collector, probably in consequence of the tabulation of Vital Statistics being under that officer's supervision, in an Arzi, dated 13th instant, by the Tahsildar of Ottapidaram, in which he reports that he had, on the same date, received a report from the Curnam of Pillayarnattam, attached to the Ettiapuram Zemindari, stating that between the 23rd March and 8th April thirteen persons (five males and eight females) had died in the village from a disease called கண்ணீர்குடி கலகயாகிய வாந்தி, which, being freely translated, means vomiting caused by unquenchable thirst, and that ten more persons were attacked with the same symptoms. The Tahsildar, at the same time, reported that he had sent, in a Yadast to the Vilatikulam Deputy-Tahsildar, directing him to proceed at once to the village, make inquiries, and report upon the nature of the disease, etc., and had, moreover, sent orders to the village-officers to submit daily reports on the subject.

3. Immediately on receipt of this report, the Deputy-Collector wrote a letter, No. 1,183, dated 15th instant, to the Head Assistant Collector, within whose division the village in question is situated, detailing the facts and requesting him to cause immediate inquiry to be made as to the nature of the disease, in view to medical help being sent to the sufferers as soon as possible.

4. On the same date, the Deputy-Collector sent an order to the Tahsildar directing him to forward the Curnam's original report and all reports received on the subject. This report was accordingly sent to the Deputy-Collector, and reached him on the 22nd instant; and subsequently, a further report was sent from the Curnam stating that two more persons had died on the 9th instant, in the same village, from the same disease which, in this report, is termed கண்ணீர் குடி வாந்தி, which means "vomiting caused by drinking water."

5. On the 22nd instant, the Head Assistant Collector replied to the Deputy-Collector's letter of the 15th, and wrote from Vilatikulam. This letter was received by the Deputy-Collector yesterday, and a copy was sent me by that officer on the same day. A copy of this letter, with enclosures, is submitted for the Board's perusal, as it tells us how matters stand. From paragraph 3, it will be seen that the disease is not confined to Pillayarnattam, from which reports were sent to the Deputy-Collector, but has unfortunately extended to several other villages, causing in all sixty-seven deaths.

6. The Head Assistant Collector, before leaving Tuticorin, had consulted Dr. O'Leary regarding the disease, and had supplied himself with medicines made up for distribution ; and, from his letter, it appears that he has been treating persons attacked with the disease at Vilatikulam, but, as isolated cases were reported as occurring in other villages, he requested that a medical subordinate might be deputed to proceed to the spot.

7. It appeared to me, however, that, looking at the novel and unascertained character of the disease, the extent of its ravages, and the great consequent mortality, it would be of very little use to send out a mere medical subordinate, such as a Dresser would be, but that the very best medical aid, skill, and experience available were required to deal with the outbreak in a satisfactory manner. Immediately, therefore, on receipt of Mr. Boyle's letter yesterday afternoon, I went up to the Zillah Surgeon Dr. Rickard, and, having consulted him in the matter and shown him the papers connected with the case, directed him to proceed, without delay, to Vilatikulam with a supply of medicine, and, after having visited the affected villages and inquired carefully into the cause of the outbreak, the nature of the disease, and other circumstances connected with it, to report results and apply for such further aid as, in his opinion, might be necessary.

8. At the same time, I placed the Dresser attached to the Collector's Office at the Zillah Surgeon's disposal, and directed him to start for Vilatikulam without loss of time. Both the Zillah Surgeon and the Dresser started last night, and are, in all probability, by this time at Vilatikulam, and in consultation with the Head Assistant Collector, who, for the present, remains on the spot. Meantime, Dr. Rickard's local duties are being performed by Dr. Cook of the 24th Regiment. By the above arrangement, the Dresser, who is an intelligent man, will be able to carry out any method of treatment and measures of relief which may be initiated by the Zillah Surgeon; and I hope shortly to be able to report that the virulence of the epidemic has abated, and that no further mortality has occurred.

9. From paragraph 5 of the Head Assistant Collector's letter, the Board will observe that the disease is supposed to have originated in, and spread from, Ramnad, and is attributed to a variety of causes; but, as to whether it is of purely local origin, or has been communicated in some way or other from other places, I am, from the information before me, unable to venture an opinion. The medical officer at Tuticorin is, from the information at his disposal, inclined to the belief that the epidemic is a form of intermittent fever; but, as this opinion is founded merely on reports received from the Sub-Magistrate, it can hardly be depended on. The Head Assistant Collector states that the disease is locally known as தண்ணீர் குடிநோய் or "thirsty sickness;" but, in the absence of all reliable diagnosis or trustworthy information as to its origin, symptoms, progress, duration, and the like, it would be idle to speculate as to its exact nature, or the name by which it should be called. On these points, no doubt, light will be thrown when we receive Dr. Rickard's report. In the meantime, I may remark that it does not appear from Mr. Boyle's letter or from other sources that the sickness is caused by actual *want* of water to drink, but rather by the excessive gratification of inordinate thirst produced by conditions of which as yet we are ignorant.

10. From paragraph 1 of Mr. Boyle's letter, it appears that, until the receipt of the Deputy-Collector's letter of the 15th instant, he was kept in complete ignorance of the outbreak of this serious illness occurring in his division; and I have requested him to call upon the Tahsildar and local Sub-Magistrate to explain why they did not keep him and me informed of what was going on under their very eyes. The Tahsildar, it is true, reported the matter as soon as it came to his knowledge to the Deputy-Collector, but he was none the less bound to communicate at once with his immediate superior the divisional officer; and it does not yet appear what action the Vilatikulam Sub-Magistrate and Deputy-Tahsildar took on receipt of the Tahsildar's original Yadast.

11. The first intimation I received of the matter was yesterday, when copy of Mr. Boyle's letter was sent to me, except that a day or two previously the Deputy-Collector mentioned casually that the sickness had been reported to him, and that he had sent for information. Mr. Locke explains that he wrote to Mr. Boyle in the first instance, as that gentleman was at the time out in the district, not far from the scene of the outbreak; and there is no doubt that Mr. Locke acted with all possible promptitude; at the same time, I have pointed out to him that he should have immediately communicated with me as head of the district, or, at least, sent me a copy of his letter to the Head Assistant Collector, with whom he communicated in the first instance, and with the best of motives, in order to save time.

12. I have now called on the Head Assistant Collector to submit a full report on the outbreak of this disease and all the circumstances connected with it, and, on receipt of this and the report of the Zillah Surgeon, I shall be in a position to submit more detailed and reliable information on the subject to the Board of Revenue. In the meantime, I hold myself in readiness to proceed to the spot, should anything occur to render my presence at Vilatikulam necessary.

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ENCLOSURE No. 1.

From J. A. BOYLE, Esq., Acting Head Assistant Collector, to S. R. LOCKE, Esq., Deputy-Collector of Tinnevelly, dated Vilatikulam, 22nd April 1874, No. 94.

YOUR letter, No. 1,183, on the subject of the epidemic sickness in the Vilatikulam Division surprised me considerably, as I had received no information of the outbreak.

2. Having, however, since then received full reports from the local Sub-Magistrate, and having made inquiry in the neighbourhood of these afflicted villagers, I find that the epidemic is sufficiently serious to require the immediate adoption of measures preventive of its extension.

3. The list per margin of the villages attacked shows that in some the epidemic, which is locally known as the "Tanirkudi novu," or thirsty sickness, has been disastrously severe. Isolated cases are also occurring in other villages, and, I think, it would be well that a medical subordinate should be deputed to compound and distribute medicines from the centre of Vilatikulam.

| *Village.* | No of Deaths. |
|---|---|
| Pillayarnattam ... ... ... ... | 18 |
| Solamalayanpatti ... ... ... | 20 |
| Sangurni ... ... ... ... ... | 16 |
| Vilatikulam ... ... ... ... | 3 |
| Sengalpadi ... ... ... ... ... | 7 |
| Mandikulam ... ... ... ... | 3 |

4. Before leaving Tuticorin, I consulted Dr. O'Leary as to the inferences to be drawn from the symptoms described in the Sub-Magistrate's reports, and he is inclined to the belief that the epidemic is a form of intermittent fever, not differing in any essentials from those frequently prevalent in this country. I enclose a copy of the instructions given by him, and the form into which I have thrown them for popular circulation. They might usefully be published in the District Gazette. He also supplied me with some medicines made up for distribution, and these I am now endeavouring to distribute where they are required.

5. The disease is said to have originated in, and spread from, Ramnad, and it is attributed variously to the heat of the weather, the shortness of the water-supply, and the ill-effects of eating new cumboo grain, which is heaty and unwholesome if eaten before age has mellowed it. Probably, these causes combined have originated this outbreak of sickness; and it is not to be wondered that a season of such general drought should, in this district, produce some disease.

6. In this town, I have just seen and treated seven patients who have been suffering from the fever for from three or four to twenty days. But the presence of a professional doctor would do far more than amateur efforts can produce to check and cure this epidemic.

7. My small stock of medicine will soon be exhausted, and I beg that the medical officer sent will provide himself from Palamcottah with the necessary drugs, as the Tuticorin dispensary cannot afford to supply this neighbourhood. I think it would also be well if you communicate with the Collector and Zillah Surgeon on this subject, that they may adopt such preventive measures as will effectually check the spread of this serious sickness.

(True Copy.)

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

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ENCLOSURE No. 2.

*Directions for using the Medicines.*

WHEN a person is attacked by fever, he should take at going to bed one of "the fever powders." The following morning let him take one of the "purgative powders" stirred up in a little water, and after the bowels have been moved, let him commence with the "quinine powders," taking one three times a-day stirred up in a little water. When diarrhœa sets in, let him take one of the "astringent pills," two, three, or four times a-day, according to the severity of the purging. Should there be looseness of the bowels at the commencement of the fever, the "fever powder" and "purgative powder" should not be taken, but the sick man should commence taking the "quinine powders" at once, and he may, at the same time, take one of the "astringent pills" night and morning. The above doses are for adults. For youths under fourteen years of age, half the above doses should be given, and for children under six years of age, one-fourth of the above doses. The diet should be confined to conjee, pepper-water and rice, and weak mutton or chicken broth.

(True Copy.)

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

ENCLOSURE No. 3.

*Directions for Treatment of Patients in the Tanirkudi Novu.*

ON the first attack of the fever, the patient must take one fever powder at night in half ollock of water. Next morning, if his bowels are not open, he should take one purgative powder in half ollock of water; if he is attacked by purging, he should take two or more pills, until the purging is checked. As long as the fever lasts, and until the patient is recovering, he should take the quinine powder regularly three times a-day in half ollock of water.

2. The patient may be allowed to drink as much liquid as he desires; but care should be taken to keep up his strength, and not to starve him. If he drinks water, it should either be pure good water, or, if that cannot be had, the ordinary village water should be boiled, skimmed, and drunk when cold; but milk or conjee-water or pepper-water or mutton or chicken broth are all better than plain water. The patient should be kept well covered at night, and as cool as possible by day, but not exposed either to the sun or wind. The principal thing is to keep up his strength by checking the purging and by nourishment. The doses prescribed are for adults; youths should receive half quantities and infants quarter.

(True Copy.)

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

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SUBMITTED for the information of Government.

2. The action taken by the Collector appears to have been judicious. The Board await the detailed report promised.

3. Mr. Comyn's letter, with its enclosure, will be communicated to the Surgeon-General, Indian Medical Department, and the Sanitary Commissioner, with the request that they will favour the Board with any suggestions they may have to offer in regard to the nature of the disease and the best mode of treatment.

(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 Tinnevelly.

Exd. F. R. Bantleman.

Received 19 May 1874.

Board of Revenue,
MADRAS.

PROCEEDINGS, 4TH MAY 1874, No. 1,034.

Encl.

APRIL.

No. 1,034.

*Disease*—of a novel character attended with thirst and vomiting.—Letter from Collector of Tinnevelly reporting outbreak of — in Vilatikulam Division of Ottapidaram Taluq, and stating measures adopted to prevent its extension, &c.—mitted to Government, and communicated to Surgeon-General, Indian Medical Department, and Sanitary Commissioner.