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TAMIL NADU ARCHIVES

GOVERNMENT OF TAMIL NADU

Revenue DEPARTMENT

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GOVERNMENT OF MADRAS.
PUBLIC DEPARTMENT.

9th March 1877, No. 306.

Sanitary.

Read the following paper :—

No. 33. *From Surgeon-Major W. R. CORNISH, F.R.C.S., Sanitary Commissioner for Madras, to the Chief Secretary to Government, dated Madras, 6th March 1877, No. 179.*

I HAVE the honor to report, for the information of His Grace in Council, that, in accordance with verbal instructions received from His Grace and Members of Council, I proceeded to Cuddapah on Friday evening the 2nd instant.

Mr. Price, the Acting Collector of the District, was good enough to meet me on Saturday morning and to show me two parties employed on relief works.

2. The first gang we saw was employed in strengthening the bund of the large tank above the town of Cuddapah. This gang consisted of about 900 men, women, and children. They had been paid according to the new rates (calculated on 1 lb. of grain per diem for an adult) for about ten days. The gang contained a fair proportion of able-bodied men and women. We had them mustered in rows and examined them carefully. In all this gang there was scarcely one who had any superabundance of flesh. The younger women, who in ordinary times are plump and fleshy, had mostly lost these characteristics, while the growing lads and girls were deficient in muscle, and looked as if they were but scantily fed.

3. According to my observation the earlier signs of defective nutrition were present in a considerable proportion of the persons employed in this gang. As the recognition of these signs is of great importance to officers employed on famine operations, I will here mention the more important of them :—

- (I.) The disappearance of fat and of the normal rounded appearance of the trunk and limbs.
- (II.) Softness and thinning of the skin from the absorption of fat usually found in the subcutaneous tissues. The skin is felt to be but loosely attached to the parts beneath.
- (III.) Softness and flabbiness of the muscles. This can be best ascertained by flexing the arm so as to induce a contraction of the biceps muscle. If the softness remains while the muscle is in a state of contraction, it is a sign that the texture of the muscle and its contractile power has been impaired.
- (IV.) "Anæmia," or general impoverishment of the blood. This condition of the body is very generally present in all cases of deficient nourishment. The unprofessional person can recognize it by the pallor of the face and lips and by a peculiar clearness of the white of the eye. If the eyelids are turned down so as to show the lining membrane which comes in contact with the eye, this will be seen to be quite pale and

almost bloodless, whereas in a healthy subject it is of a delicate red color. In this condition the tongue is almost always coated in the centre with a white creamy fur, and the edges of the tongue show marks of indentation by the pressure of the teeth.

(V.) Where the distress and bad feeding have been going on for some time, there is seen, especially in the women and growing children, a peculiarly sad expression of face, and the curved lines in the skin running from the side of the nose to below the angle of the mouth become very distinct and prominent.

4. The first three of these indications of bad living were evident in about 75 or 80 per cent. of the people; and the characteristic anamia in about 50 per cent., while the drawn expression of feature noticed under sub-paragraph V was present, perhaps, in about 25 per cent. I did not take the particulars one by one, but noted the proportion in regard to a few here and there, which seemed to represent fairly the general condition of the whole. I may state that all the gangs of this party were inspected.

5. The conclusion I came to was that these people were far below the normal strength and condition of the laboring poor in this country, and that they would not be able to do task-work on the present rate of wages, and that any attempt to extract work on an inadequate scale of food would most seriously affect their vitality.

6. In regard to the effect already produced by the reduced scale of wages, there has not been sufficient time to arrive at any definite conclusions. For the first effects of a reduced wages scale we must look to the condition of the old and infirm and to the young children, that is, to the *dependents* of the laborers who are incapable of earning a living for themselves, and who have to subsist on the portion of food that can be spared by the bread-earners. These classes are not to be seen on the relief-works. If we desire to know how it fares with them we must seek for information elsewhere.

7. Having inspected this gang, Mr. Price drove me out to a site close by the old Military Cantonment of Cuddapah, and about two miles beyond the town, where he is making arrangements for the erection of a relief-camp to accommodate in the first instance about 500 persons who may be incapable of labor at relief-works, and who may be fit objects for the receipt of cooked food. The site of the camp is convenient of access. There is an abundance of good water, and the proposed arrangements of the camp appeared to be quite satisfactory.

8. As Mr. Price contemplates the construction of camps of this class at the head-quarters of each taluq in his district, a short-description of the camp may here be noted.

The ground chosen in this instance is in the angle of junction of two streams, and the choice was determined upon chiefly with reference to the existence of good wells and a plentiful water-supply. The soil is alluvial, and has recently been under cultivation. The camp will consist of ten huts (75x14) and each hut is supposed to be sufficient for 50 persons. Besides the huts there will be a grain-store, kitchen, police, and medical officer's hut, detached hospital, latrines, &c. The camp will be enclosed by a deep trench and raised bank protected by prickly-pear, so as to keep the people from wandering about the country. In the neigh-

borhood of this camp there is an abundance of prickly-pear, and Mr. Price proposes to bring some "fatigue bullocks" on an adjoining piece of ground and to employ the women and children of the camp who are capable of light labor in preparing the prickly-pear leaf for fodder. The arrangement seems to be convenient, and will, I hope, be successful in every way.

9. In the preparation of the ground for this camp about 800 persons were employed on the reduced scale of payments. The materials for the huts are all collected, and the work will be finished it is expected by Saturday the 10th instant.

10. The physical condition of the gangs on this work was in no way different from that already detailed in regard to the people employed on the tank. A few new arrivals had brought children in so miserable a plight, that we had them at once transferred to the hospital in the town.

11. In regard to the rate of wages which at the present price of grain gives Annas 1-5 to an adult man and less in proportion to women and children, I may remark that the Superintendent of the Cuddapah Jail has informed me that his present contracts for feeding the adult hard labor prisoners in jail involve a daily expenditure of Annas 2-8 per head, or nearly double the amount fixed upon for the relief-work wage. The people, although they do not refuse the wages or decline work, are tolerably unanimous in their expressions that the wage is insufficient to give them their food and to keep up their strength, and this opinion is very general also amongst the native officials, who understand the habits and customs of the people; and amongst the European Officials whom I met, there was no doubt at all as to its insufficiency. The practice in force here is to pay once a week, but with so small a wage, and with so many hungry recipients, I think it should be paid every second day at least.

12. In the compound of the Civil Dispensary, Cuddapah, some sheds have been run up for the reception of destitute persons found by the police in the streets. There is one hut for small-pox people, which was quite full, another for cholera patients, nearly empty, and a third for those exhausted by privation. This latter ward was full of old people and young children, about 20 in number, many in a hopeless or dying condition.

13. In the afternoon of Saturday I inspected the Civil Dispensary with all its separate buildings, the jail and prisoners, and a relief-house in the outskirts of the town.

14. The jail contained close on 400 prisoners, and it was striking to note the difference in the physique of those recently received into jail, as compared with convicts of a longer date. The condition of many of the prisoners who have been convicted of grain robbery and dacoities is very low, and a considerable mortality may be expected amongst the recently imprisoned. Major Tennant, the Inspector-General of Prisons, has furnished me with some figures in connection with this low condition of the recently imprisoned, which go to show how seriously the health of the people has been influenced by privation in the past year. He finds that in the months of *December* and *January* the deaths amongst convicted prisoners in all the jails was in the annual ratio of 40 and 60 per thousand respectively for each month, while among the "waiting trial" or "unconvicted," the mortality for the same period was in the ratio of 432 and 246 per thousand. If he could show also the strength and mortality of convicted prisoners below three months on jail

rations, as compared with the results regarding those imprisoned for longer periods, the contrast would be yet more marked as regards the influences of regular and sufficient food and of long privation.

15. The Cuddapah poor relief-house is mainly an effort of private charity, but has recently been assisted by a Government grant-in-aid. The building is a choultry on the outskirts of the town. Relief was commenced in October with 150 poor, and the daily numbers subsequently went up to 1,500, which included a considerable number of Mahomedan "Gosha" women. Efforts have been made to confine the relief here as much as possible to the local town-poor, and some of the Municipal Commissioners give much of their time and attention to the selection of proper objects of charity and to the supervision of the daily distribution of food. Each applicant for relief, after inquiry into his or her circumstances, is granted a numbered ticket, entitling the holder to share in the food distribution. The food (a mixture of cooked raggy and cholam in the proportion of three lbs. of grain, one measure, for five persons) with curry, &c., is distributed at sunset, and at the time of my visit there were more than 700 ticket-holders waiting for their daily dole; of this number nearly 300 were Musulman women and children, including about 50 "Goshas." The people sat in rows according to their castes waiting the arrival of the food. It was at once evident that the more marked effects of famine were to be sought amongst people of this class, rather than in the people who had strength to work on relief gangs. Here were gathered the old and infirm, helpless widows, deserted wives with large families, and children of all ages, and the condition of almost every one present testified to the discrimination of the managers of the charity in the selection of cases for relief.

16. I am sorry to have to report that a large proportion of the 700 were very far gone in privation. As regards the old and very young, I should judge that 30 per cent. of them will be with difficulty kept alive for the next three months. The wailing of the infants (peculiar to famine-stricken children when the bowels are affected) and the subdued and saddened aspect of the women was just like what we hear and see everyday in our Madras camps. The number of children unable to sit upright and the attitudes unconsciously assumed by them in resting constituted a true picture of famine as it deals with the young.

17. The arrangements for the distribution of food were carried out in a quiet manner and without confusion. As a rule the people take their portions away with them, but some of the younger children had no little pots for their curry, and in that case received their allowance in the hollow of their two hands, and lapped it up eagerly on the spot.

18. I desire especially to bring to the notice of Government that this relief for the local poor in the town of Cuddapah has been organized and maintained by private charity. A grant-in-aid of the value of local contributions has now been passed, and so far as I can see the Government contribution will be economically expended. I have called the attention of M. Iyasawmy, the Civil Surgeon and Vice-President of the Municipality, to the desirableness of making arrangements for giving either a little more food at the single meal, or feeding certain of the more indigent twice a day. As soon as the relief-camp now under construction by the Collector's Department is ready, there will be no call for the Cuddapah relief-house to give food to strangers, and with a "grant-in-aid" I have no doubt the charitable

gentlemen of Cuddapah will continue to make revision for the town-poor as they have been doing for the past three or four months. That there should be so many in want of relief in the small town population may be taken as an indication of much privation and distress in other parts of the district.

19. While the food was being distributed inside the choultry enclosure there assembled outside the gates more than one hundred women and children clamorous for relief. Provision to some extent is made for these casual applicants by cooking 10 measures (about 30 lbs.) of grain beyond the quantity assigned to the ticket-holders. Among these casual applicants were many, who, one could see at a glance, were in a condition of great peril for want of a sufficiency of daily food. Their circumstances were inquired into and tickets issued to those whose necessities were considered great.

20. The conclusion I draw from these facts is that relief-camps in the several taluqs of the district for the issue of cooked food will not be established prematurely, and I quite agree with Mr. Price as to the necessity of their being promptly sanctioned, to enable him to provide for the hapless during the next two or three months.

21. I have stated that in the Cuddapah Town relief-house the committee of native gentlemen have decided to give a mixture of cholam and raggy as the food best suited to the wants of the people. These grains are at present slightly cheaper than rice, and as these grains are the staple food of the people, and most wholesome, I should recommend their use, so long as they can be used in the Cuddapah relief-camps with a saving of expense.

No 34.

ORDER THEREON, 9th March 1877, No. 306.

Communicated to the Revenue Department.

(True Extract)

Chief Secretary.

To the Revenue (Famine) Department.

- .. Public Works Department.
- .. Board of Revenue.
- .. Surgeon-General, Indian Medical Department.
- .. Collector of Cuddapah.

Exd. T. O'Connor.

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PUBLIC.

To THE REVENUE (AMINE)

DEPARTMENT.

Local March, 9A.

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G.O. 90, March 1877, No. 306.

MARCH.
Nos. 33-34.

Summary. Summary Commission's observations
on the condition, &c., of the Relief Camps at
Cuddalore, communicated.

2/14/50
27/10/77

11/3/77 J.H.F.
13 March 77