M.R.O. 14—18,000—27-6-24

MADRAS RECORD OFFICE.

Government of Madras.

Revenue DEPARTMENT.

G.O. No. 579 Press ~~Mis.~~

153-157

Dated 8 — 8 — 1867.

Not to be folded or roughly handled

Proceedings of the Madras Government, Revenue Department, 8th March 1867.

No. 153. Read the following Proceedings of the Board of Revenue, dated 26th February 1867, No. 1,183.

Read the following letter from the Collector of Coimbatore, to the Secretary to the Board of Revenue, dated 2nd February 1867, No. 39:—

1. I have the honor to inform you that Mr. Overbury returned from Collegal in the middle of November, and about the end of that month proceeded to the Neilgherries on privilege leave. He was to have appeared here on the 21st ultimo for examination, but did not do so, as he is unwell with fever contracted in Collegal, and has been recommended by Doctor Furnell, Medical Officer at Ootacamund, to the Deputy Inspector General of Hospitals at Trichinopoly, for sick certificate from 20th idem. His services on special duty in this district may now be dispensed with.

2. I beg to forward a report received from him regarding his operations in Collegal for the relief of the destitute poor, and the prospective condition of the talook.

3. It is satisfactory to observe that no deaths from actual starvation took place. The poor of all classes suffered much; but in addition to the works undertaken by Government, viz., the repair of roads, the well-to-do residents in the talook came forward and contributed liberally for their support. There seems to have been an abundance of grain in the country, and an active export of it to the eastern parts of Mysore where the raggy crops had been short.

4. The want of roads in the talook will be in part met by the Great Trunk Road viâ the Burgoor ghaut, which is now in active progress. This road will go right through the talook and prove of great benefit to it.

5. On the subject of small-pox, the Deputy Superintendent of Vaccination has been addressed, and I hope that ere many months have elapsed, he will commence operations in the talook, with a strong body of Vaccinators.

6. The present condition of the talook is satisfactory. The rains have been abundant, and the crop is a good one.

7. Mr. Overbury undertook his duties in Collegal with zeal, and carried them out to my satisfaction. My only regret is that, in their execution, he has contracted fever, which has obliged him to apply for sick leave.

From the Assistant Collector of Coimbatore, to the Acting Collector of Coimbatore, dated 29th November 1866.

In compliance with the instructions conveyed to me by the Collector, desiring me to proceed to Collegal for the purpose of instituting special measures for the relief of the famine, I have the honor to inform you that I left Mettoopolliem on the 12th August, and travelling through portions of the Coimbatore and Suttimungalum Talooks and part of Mysore, I reached Collegal on the 24th August.

My visit extended over the months of September and October.

1. I now beg to lay before you my report on the state of the Collegal Talook, mentioning the special measures taken for the relief of the starving poor.

Paragraphs 2, &c., allude to the state of the Northern Talooks through which I travelled, and of the Collegal Talook during the famine.

2. Leaving Mettoopolliem, the line of road skirts at the foot of the Neilgherry Hills, and follows the course of the Bhowany as far as Suttimungalum. It passes through thinly populated and low jungle country. At this season

there were no signs of cultivation, except in the larger villages of Seroomoogay, Danaikencottah, and Cottamungalum. Here the wet crops were partially sown, but no dry cultivation had commenced.

3. At Suttimungalum, the failure of the rains had caused considerable distress, and some 200 poor were being supported by the wealthy inhabitants. Here also no dry cultivation had been commenced, and the wet cultivation was very limited. Along the route, the tanks were empty, the numerous channels of the Bhowany had dried up, and the country presented a parched and desolate appearance.

4. At these villages, the price of grain was double the ordinary price; but owing to the good communication which existed between the Suttimungalum and Coimbatore Talooks, import of grain prevented its price rising to the unprecedented height to which I found it had risen in the Collegal Talook.

5. Between Suttimungalum and the Hassanoor ghauts, no cultivation had been attempted, and the country for the most part is a thick stunted jungle.

6. The hills on which at this season of the year the rain-fall is usually heavy, were parched and dry. Not even on the summits of the hills was there a drop of water. So that the game, so plentiful in those jungles, had deserted them, and crossed over into the valley of the Ballyrungum hills in Mysore.

7. The high road from Coimbatore to Collegal here branches off, and passes through forty miles of the Mysore country, to the west of the Ballyrungum hills. After crossing the Cauvery, it re-enters the Coimbatore District within three miles of Collegal.

8. Separated from Mysore on two sides by hill ranges, on a third side by the river Cauvery, and on the south by the Hassanoor range of hills, the Collegal Talook is completely isolated.

9. There is no road at present completed connecting this talook with the district. Of the lines of road now in existence, one runs east and west, the other passes through the middle of the talook, and is passable as far as Arobkurry, which is within a short distance of Hassanoor.

10. If this road were completed, along it the traffic from Mysore and Bangalore would inevitably pass, and good communication would be created between this and the neighbouring talooks of the district. The natives frequently complained to me that they had no outlet for their grain, expressing their opinion that if this road were opened, not only would it be a great boon to them, but that grain traffic with the Southern Talooks would be carried on on a large scale.

11. The Collegal Talook seems to be the largest raggy-growing talook in the district; of more than three-fourths of the population this grain is the staple food. It is grown chiefly in the interior, while wet cultivation appears to be nowhere raised in any quantity except in the vicinity of Collegal.

12. Cholum, gram, castor, and buller are also largely sown. Silk is grown in the villages near Collegal; the cotton soil seems to be favorable to the growth of the Mulberry. The fibre of silk so raised is thick and somewhat coarse in appearance. This is woven in the looms of Collegal and in the larger villages, and a considerable export trade in women's cloths is carried on with Salem, Mysore, and Coimbatore.

13. The rains which are usually looked for at the end of June, or the early part of July, had not, when I arrived, begun to fall. Those tanks in Collegal which depended on the hills for their supply of water, were, with one exception, dried up. Those that were fed by channels from the Cauvery were not one-third filled; wet cultivation was in consequence much restricted, and no dry crops had been sown.

14. The price of food and other grains had risen to four times the ordinary price at that time of year. Raggy was selling at 4½ measures the Rupee, the ordinary price being 18 measures. The price of rice was from 2½ to 3 measures the Rupee, the ordinary price being 10 measures the Rupee. Gram was selling at 2 measures the Rupee.

15. Up to the 16th September, there had been no rain. After this, a few showers fell, and the ryots took advantage of these to sow their raggy; but as the rain-fall was insufficient, the crops which here and there had sprouted, were dried up. It was not till the beginning of October

that the north-west monsoon fairly set in, and that the apprehensions entertained by the ryots concerning the failure of their crops were removed.

16. On the 6th September, I commenced a tour of the talook, travelling as far as Martelli, a distance of forty miles in an easterly direction, and as far as Pylur, a distance of thirty miles in the south. The effects of the unusual drought were most visible in the large raggy-growing districts of Amur, Cowdhelli, and Kongharelli, and in the grazing districts of Maptulli and Lokanhalli. In the tanks and wells, there was barely enough water for drinking purpose, and in the two last-named places the water, which was of a most filthy description, was shared alike by the inhabitants and the cattle.

17. In the parts of the talook which I visited, I saw no villages wholly deserted by its inhabitants. Here and there a few houses were temporarily shut up, and the owners were begging their way from door to door, until the rains should enable them to commence ploughing their lands and sowing their crops.

Loss of Cattle.

18. In consequence of the want of pasture and water, the cattle disease made great ravages throughout the talook. As the owners were loath to publish their losses, it is difficult to estimate with accuracy the loss of the cattle during the past season; but I am of opinion that one-third at least of the whole stock perished from want of subsistence and by disease. That the mortality among the cattle was great, was borne witness to by the large number of remains that met the eye in whichever direction I travelled.

19. After the rains had commenced, the disease again broke out among the cattle in the neighbourhood of the Cusbah; but as the precautions were strictly followed, it did not spread. On all occasions, the owners gladly availed themselves of the medicine prescribed by Mr. Thacker, and were ready to purchase it if necessary.

20. The breaking of the monsoon was the signal for the commencement of works of cultivation. The special works, on which the able-bodied poor had been employed, were deserted.

21. The tanks are now full of water, and the prospect of the coming crop is favorable. I have been assured by some intelligent ryots that this year's crop generally will be rather above than below the yield of the past few years.

22. One of the effects of the drought has been a slight reduction in the area of raggy cultivation. In some parts which the rains visited late, the season for sowing raggy had passed, and a gram crop *was substituted*.

Paragraph 23 refers to the condition of the people.

23. The class, the most numerous and influential in this talook, are the Lingites or Weavers. They are divided among themselves into a right and left hand caste, which is a frequent cause of dispute between them. They are a most industrious people, and besides engrossing the weaving trade, the grain trade of the talook is in their hands. The lower castes are the Dhers and the Koravers. These are an extremely ignorant and simple people. They speak a mixture of Canarese and Tamil.

24. All castes suffered greatly from the high prices. The poor of the Lingites and Brahmins were generally supported by the wealthy of their own class, and could not be induced to become recipients of charity publicly at the Relief Houses. The Dhers and Koravers suffered not only from the high prices, but also from being thrown out of employ on works of cultivation.

25. On my arrival, these were pouring into the Cusbah from the adjacent villages in search of work. The wealthy natives had been distributing to the poor cooked grain daily, but relief was insufficiently afforded, and many deserving of support were excluded.

26. In the talook, I saw many cases of emaciation and of great destitution. At Cowdelli, I witnessed some poor coolies unable to purchase grain, who were compelled to boil and eat the root of the wild aloe. This, they informed me, produced the most distressing effects.

27. The health of the population has been good. Up to the sickly season which begins at the end of September, no cases of fever occurred. After that the usual amount of sickness prevailed. Small-pox appeared in ten villages in the neighbourhood of Pylur, but the disease confined

itself to these villages. A Vaccinator, I am given to understand, will shortly be sent to the talook. In the District Gazette, the number of deaths from disease in July of this year is shewn to exceed the number of deaths in the corresponding month of last year by 146. A comparative table of the number of deaths for the following months has not yet been published.

28. No deaths from actual starvation have been reported. Though in many cases deaths have been accelerated by an insufficient and injurious diet, it does not appear that any one form of disease has been especially propagated by the late trying season.

Special Works.

29. The special measures undertaken for the relief of the poor were of two kinds :—

Relief Houses.

(1.) The establishment of Relief Houses.

(2.) The prosecution of useful public works.

30. Relief Houses were opened in Collegal, and in the villages of Kangherry, Anur, and Cowdelli. The poor, after each individual case had been inquired into, were admitted by tickets, and received cooked raggy twice every day. To the high caste poor, doles of flour were given in sufficient quantities.

31. The Relief Houses were opened on the 16th August, and were closed on the 21st October. The total number fed was 12,062. The average cost of each meal was 8 Pie per day.

32. The majority of those admitted for relief were children. Of these, the parents either had been out of employment, and were now engaged on famine works, or owing to the high prices, were barely able to eke out a sufficiency for themselves.

33. A large proportion of applicants were beggars, who had crossed over the Mysore border. In all cases professional beggars were excluded, and travelling paupers generally received a daily meal, and were passed on to a neighbouring village.

34. In order to supplement the sum placed at my disposal from the Famine Relief Committee at Madras, I made a call for local contributions. My call was liberally responded to. The subscriptions defrayed the expense of the several Relief Houses, and shew a balance of Rupees 621-4-9. This sum the donors have presented towards the erection of a Hospital and School at Collegal, or to any other suitable charitable purpose.

Public Works.

35. The special works undertaken for the relief of the able-bodied poor, were the repairs of two roads : the Samaragnugar road leading from Collegal to Mysore, and the Sevasamoodrum road leading from Collegal to Bangalore.

36. In order to prevent the coolies leaving their homes, they were worked in gangs in the vicinity of their own villages. Payment was made at their choice in grain or in money. The rate of wages did not exceed 3 Annas for a man, and 1½ Annas for a woman daily.

37. Each shower of rain made a sensible diminution in the number of coolies employed on the works. In a few days they would again return to the roads. As might be expected, the labor performed by these coolies was very inefficient. They generally endeavoured to evade work altogether, and I was latterly compelled to resort to the system of task work. This answered very well, and a considerable saving was made in wages of superintendence.

Reasons why the distress was more severely felt in the Collegal Talook, than in the other Northern Talooks of this district.

38. Of the causes which combine to create a scarcity of grain, namely, deficiency of production and export, I shall endeavour to shew how far the high prices may be traced to the one cause or the other.

39. For the last three years the raggy crop of this talook has, owing to untoward seasons, been below the average of previous years. The crop of last season was also short. Last year, however, the returns shew an increase in the area of raggy cultivation of 1,500 bullahs of land. From this fact, and from the fact of quantities of raggy being stored up in pits throughout the talook, some of which I have myself seen, and the truth of the existence of which the merchants have assured me, I am led to think that the extraordinary high prices have not been caused by a deficit of production.

40. Within easy communication of Collegal is a large raggy-growing district, the Astagram division of Mysore. Up to this year, between the two places, there has been an extensive traffic in grain, and prices were kept down. Last year the raggy crop in Mysore failed entirely, and no grain was imported into Collegal. On the contrary, an export took place, and it is estimated that one lac of candies was sent thither. This export must considerably have affected prices.

41. Another reason for the excessive prices appears to be the isolated position of the Collegal Talook, to which I have before referred, and to the fact of there being no road through the talook by which supplies of grain might be brought from distant parts of the Coimbatore District. Added to this, the general feeling of insecurity experienced by the merchants, and the fear of loot should they surmount the difficulties of transport, all combined to render the grain-dealer suspicious, and to induce him to husband his stores.

42. The on-coming crop will be reaped about January, and though the present high rates will probably continue until that period, it is likely, from the quantity of grain now in store, that prices, after the crop is reaped, will be lower than they have been known to be for many years in this part of the district.

---

1. The foregoing letter, with its enclosure, will be submitted for the information of Government.

2. The Board are glad to learn that Mr. Overbury has performed the duty entrusted to him in so judicious and zealous a manner, and they join with the Collector in regretting that his health has been so seriously affected.

3. It is gratifying to find that the wealthier residents of the Collegal Talook contributed so generously to the aid of the poor, and that their liberality and the measures of special relief adopted by Mr. Overbury greatly alleviated the distress of the poorer classes, and prevented any loss of life from actual starvation.

4. The Collector is requested to report fully on the subject of the roads referred to in paragraphs 9 and 10 of Mr. Overbury's Report, submitting a rough plan of the talook exhibiting the proposed lines.

No. 154.

Miscellaneous.

ORDER THEREON, 8th March 1867, No. 579.

1. The Collector will convey to Mr. Overbury the thanks of Government for the efficient manner in which he performed the special duty entrusted to him. The Government regret to learn that his health has suffered in its execution.

2. The Board will call on the Collector to submit a scheme for opening up the Collegal Talook gradually by means of District roads. The local cess will provide a considerable sum annually.

(True Extract.)

(Signed) W. HUDLESTON,
Secretary to Government.

To the Collector of Coimbatore.
,, the Board of Revenue.
,, the Department Public Works.

Exd. S. T. Augustin.

No. 579.