

# THE OVERLAND

# Ceylon Observer.

AND

WEEKLY SUMMARY OF INTELLIGENCE.

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COLOMBO:—MARCH 1, 1877.

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## THE OVERLAND OBSERVER

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Per P. and O. SS. HYDASPES for Southampton—Messrs. Bosanquet, Bell, Popplewell, Duncan, Sergeant Calvert, wife and 3 children.

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Per SS. NAVARRO, Miss Townshend.

Per SS. DUKE OF ARGYLE—Mr and Mrs Geo. Shaw and family.

By an early steamer—Messrs C. H. Cameron, junr., and Norman MacLeod.

## HEADS OF INTELLIGENCE.

FEBRUARY 22ND TO MARCH 1st.

The Government have not yet taken any decided step to provide for the employment of the surplus immigrant labour at present in the country. They are resting on their oars apparently, watching the current of events, and it remains to be seen whether, notwithstanding the Lieut.-Governor's calm assurances to the Deputations who waited on him in Colombo, the Director of Public Works will be quite prepared to afford immediate employment on new roads to any gangs of necessitous coolies clamouring for rice. At present a policy of "masterly inactivity" would certainly appear to be in the ascendant so far as Relief Works are concerned, but the Lieut.-Governor is partly justified by the fact that no unemployed or starving gangs have placed themselves in the way of Government officers save those journeying from the coast to certain of the coffee districts where they say they have engagements. As His Excellency stated the other day, official enquiry has failed to discover as yet any number of coolies without employment, food or resources, and accordingly while certain roads are held in readiness there is no ostentatious display of opening relief works. Possibly the official mind may be influenced to some extent by the tradition of a former clamour, about surplus labour and the need of Government providing special employment, having been exploded by a report from Major Sumner that although his officers had made the most strenuous efforts they could not find a single gang of so-called unemployed coolies to add to their force of labour on the roads. In the meantime the Lieut.-Governor has departed on his tour by way of Badulla to Batticaloa, in which district he is now inspecting tanks, previous to taking his departure by the *Serendib* for Jaffna and the Pearl Fishery. He has left the quarantine regulations in full force at the ports on the Western Coast, so far checking the stream of immigration which would go to feed the supply of local unemployed labour. Government Agents and Medical Officers at all the different stations have orders to relieve actual want, and, as we have already stated, sections of half-a-dozen new roads or road extensions in different parts of the country are being held in readiness for the employment of needy coolies when they actually come to the front.

Such, we believe, is a fair summing-up of the position and action of Government towards the "Unemployed Labour Question" which has been the chief topic of discussion during the fortnight. On the other side, among different sections of the public a rather different feeling prevails. Our contemporary of the *Examiner* has been trying to show that distress prevails to a considerable extent among the rural agricultural Sinhalese, but in this we think he has failed so far as reliable provincial reports go. The chief and almost only serious complaint against Government or its officers has reference to a party of immigrant coolies connected with irrigation or road works in the Matara districts whose wants would seem to have been culpably neglected, owing perhaps to the absence of the officer in charge who, however, has some excuse in that he was unfortunate enough to lose a member of his own family from cholera about the same time and had to remove his wife from the station. A good deal has also been made of the large number of coolies landing on the coast of the North-Western province at Kalpitiya and Chilaw and finding their way hence to Puttalam. It is stated that 1000 men, women and children pass along this road every other day, but as already mentioned the Government have given explicit instructions for the treatment of the diseased and distressed among immigrants on this route. It is up-country and in the coffee districts however that the danger of official arrangements proving inadequate more immediately threatens. Planters throughout Matara support their Chairman's statement of large bodies of unemployed coolies living on their savings or on their friends, or as best they may in that district. A Nilambe