

FROM THE CEYLON OBSERVER.
May 8th, 1877.

EDITORIALS.

THE DANDENIYA COOLIES' SENSATION.

A more complete expose of exaggerated and unjustifiable reports has, perhaps, never occurred in the annals of our Legislative Council than was afforded on Saturday in the discussion on the Dandeniya coolies' affair. For several months past the *Examiner* has teemed with letters from Matara correspondents and editorials based thereon, denouncing the Government for their callous indifference to the fact dinned persistently into their ears, that scores and hundreds of coolies engaged on Government irrigation works were neglected left without food, and dying of starvation. So great had the scandal become that our contemporary meditated an appeal to the British public. With what better story could a newspaper, supposed to represent the people of the country, go before the philanthropic soft-hearted British public, than with a report of the deaths from inanition of poor helpless Tamil coolies imported from their own country, no doubt under false pretences, and allowed to drop off in units, scores and perhaps hundreds by a cruel-hearted, bureaucratic Government, and by their officers on the spot—an Assistant Government Agent and Public Works Superintendent, notwithstanding the repeated protests of the independent humane medical officer. There was every element here for a sensational story such as would be certain to catch the ear of the English press and public, and the goodwill of certain members of the House of Commons, ever on the lookout for grievances against their own countrymen on the part of poor downtrodden natives. But behold the whole of the sensation dissolved into thin air by a few minutes' explanation in the Legislative Council. We cannot find it in our hearts to blame Sir Coomara Swamy, Mr. Alwis, Mr. VanLangenberg, or Mr. Mitchell, for the part they took in bolstering up the *Examiner's* correspondents' story and glibly expatiating on the enormity of the official offence, for all this served but to make the Colonial Secretary's revelation the more effective and complete. If ever there was a warning served out to local as well as home grievance-mongers, it is in this Dandeniya coolie affair. We notice one honourable gentleman trying to make capital out of the fact that if coolies had died on the hands of a planter in the same way as at Dandeniya, the public would never hear the end of it from Government. But this member may now reflect that public officers and the Government were made the sufferers in this case, from the same evil of exaggerated reports, by which the planters so often are victimized. At the same time what happened at Dandeniya is only parallel to a frequent experience this season up-country. Mr. Cruse, on his own responsibility, sent advances to the coast for labour, but instead of the 25 labourers he indented for 150 came flocking in, many of them no doubt fever-stricken and emaciated. So it is up-country, planters have been obliged to take on gangs of double the strength they looked for, and consisting of very weakly objectionable coolies simply because it was a case of take all or none at all. In some cases cholera or fever has broken out and the mortality has been great notwithstanding every effort to check the disease and feed the coolies. If our contemporary was furnished with a one-sided story of the case of these plantation coolies as he has been from Matara, we can easily see how great a disturbance he would make over it. But the strangest part of this Dandeniya business is to come: our morning contemporary took care throughout the discussion in the *Examiner* to copy over all the sensational spicy parts from the Matara letters and the editorials thereon. Not only so, but the *Times* had more than one article of its own on the subject denouncing the Government and some of the officers concerned, more particularly Mr. Hall of the Public Works Department, who had to write in his own name and disavow all responsibility. Now however that such complete discredit has been thrown on the stories published in both the *Examiner* and *Times* our last-mentioned contemporary turns round and abuses the unofficial members of Council for occupying time in "mere declamation"! The speeches thus referred to were in our opinion more worthy of consideration than the idle declamation to which both our contemporaries gave currency for weeks together. In the case of these Matara or Dandeniya coolies, the conduct of Government, and of the responsible officers, blamed by correspondents, was deserving of

all praise. Mr. Fisher and Mr. Hall,—though in no way responsible for the condition of immigrants who had come to the districts seeking employment on their own account, neither sought by Government nor induced by any official representations,—did all they could, more especially the former, to provide for their wants. If any one could be made a victim to the clamour raised, it was Mr. Cruse of the Public Works Department, because unauthorized by Government he had adopted the planters' plan of sending coast advances to India for labour. But in this case, where Mr. Cruse indented for 25 there came 150!—accounted for by the fact that coolies have this season been flocking wherever there was any prospect of employment or food. Mr. Cruse is known as one of the most industrious and kindest-hearted of officers, and it is believed he has been largely out of pocket in helping coolies for whose support neither legally nor morally was he—much less the Government—responsible. As it is, however, there has been no starvation and no extra sickness nor mortality. All have been taken care of and provided for, and the sensational Dandeniya Coolies Starvation Reports—
Are melted into air, into thin air.

RATMALANA, March.—Rain fell on 11 days; total rainfall 2.56 inches; greatest fall in one day 28th—29th 0.70 inches.

RATMALANA, April.—Rain fell on 16 days; total rainfall 4.48 inches; greatest fall in one day 31st—1st 0.79 inches.

THE SOUTHERN DISTRICTS:—SALE OF FOREST LAND.—Mr. Churchward of Lillywatte, has to-day bought the 188 acre block in New Kukululu for 15,000 rupees or 80 rupees per acre. This is the block sold at the Government sale for R53 an acre, Messrs Armitage Brothers and William Cameron being the purchasers.

GALLE: ADDRESS TO MR. JUSTICE STEWART.—An address was presented to Mr. Justice Stewart to-day which was read by Mr. Nell, the D. Q. A. of Galle. The address was signed by Mr. Cayley, Q.A., and the other representative of the Ceylon Bar. Mr. Stewart in replying said that he was not quite sure that he would return to the Island again. He would always cherish a grateful remembrance of his 30 years' connection with the Bar of Ceylon.—*Cor.*

SIR WM. GREGORY'S FAREWELL RECEPTIONS.

The Kandy Municipal Council was represented by nearly all the members, Mr. Parsons, Mr. Beven, Captain Byrde, &c.

MR. PARSONS read the address:—

Address presented by the Municipal Council of Kandy. To THE RIGHT HONORABLE SIR WILLIAM H. GREGORY, Governor of the Island of Ceylon, &c. &c. &c.

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY.—The Municipal Council of Kandy beg to express to you, previous to your departure from the island, their sincere regret that your term of Administration is now drawing to a close, and that you are so soon to leave Ceylon.

The interest that Your Excellency has evinced in their Town will be gratefully remembered, and the works that have been so successfully carried out, either under your instruction, or at your suggestion, to improve and beautify the place will be lasting monuments of the aim which Your Excellency has ever had in view to promote the comfort and welfare of the inhabitants.

The interest shewn, during your term of office, in the material and social improvement of the Country, has proved Your Excellency to be a true and faithful representative of our good and noble Queen, and on your departure the Council feel that the citizens of Kandy will lose a kind friend and benefactor.

It is a matter for congratulation to the Council that, after several years of preliminary enquiries, they have been enabled to commence the construction of the Works required to provide the Town with a good and wholesome supply of water—a boon that cannot be too highly valued, and which will greatly improve its sanitary condition. To Your Excellency the Council feel they are indebted for the facilities granted to them in obtaining the necessary loan to carry out this important work, and they are further obliged to you for having laid the foundation stone of the dam of the storage reservoir, that inaugurated an undertaking with which your name will be always connected.

The visit to the island of His Royal Highness of the Prince of Wales, during your Administration, was an important and happy event that no previous Ruler was privileged to witness, and the readiness displayed by the people to give such a welcome to His Royal Highness, as was becoming so exalted a Prince, in token of their loyalty and devotion, must have been gratifying to Your Excellency, and the circumstance will be one to which you will always be able to look back with pleasure.

Should it ever please Your Excellency to revisit Kandy, a hearty welcome will be awaiting you. The Council beg to thank you for the many encouragements given to them from time to time, in the discharge of their duties, and for the interest taken by you in the working of the Municipality and in bidding Your Excellency farewell, they hope that the best blessings may attend you on your return to your native country, and that you may enjoy that relaxation and quiet which are looked upon as the reward of a life spent in the arduous duties of service to our Queen and Country.

- J. PARSONS, Chairman,
- J. F. CHURCHILL,
- JAS. LOOS, M. D.,
- J. B. SIEBEL,
- F. BEVEN,
- L. PIERCE,
- M. C. SADDI LEBBE,
- WM. GOONETILLEKE.

HIS EXCELLENCY in reply said:—Mr. Chairman and gentlemen,—I thank you very much for your address. I think you are fully justified in saying that I have always taken the deepest interest in the town of Kandy. It is a place I have delighted to live in; it is a place I have delighted to embellish; it is a place I have visited with greater pleasure every time I have gone there, as I have certainly found it more lovely and more beautiful than ever. I believe it is one of the most beautiful places in the world. Nature has done much for it, and through the co-operation of the Government and your own Municipal body, Art has done not a little too. You will see from the address which will be read in a few minutes, that I have not failed to give the Kandy Municipal Council prominent acknowledgment

for the enlightened manner in which they have come forward to co-operate with me in beautifying and improving the town. Gentlemen, I congratulate you on the introduction of a pure water supply into your town. When you compliment me on the part I have taken in securing that water supply, you pay me a compliment which is entirely undeserved. The gratitude of the people of Kandy is due to you, yourselves, for the energetic way in which you set to work to secure that great boon. For the acquisition of your water supply, the speedy accomplishment of other public works and improvements; for, in fact everything you have secured for the benefit of Kandy you have to thank, more than any external aid, and more than Government, your own energy; and above all, I am convinced, do you owe your success to the activity of your Secretary Captain Byrde, who seems to me to be endowed with ubiquity; he has one eye here and another there, and seems to be almost at the same time in every spot where the presence of such an able Director of Works is wanted. In what I have done for Kandy gentlemen, I have taken up no new lines, I have adopted no system of architecture of my own; I have been satisfied to follow out and complete, so far as it was possible to do so, and so far they could be ascertained, the designs and plan of the King of Kandy who left these public works unfinished, a ruler who, there can be no doubt, was a man of great taste. And now I think I may say—*opus perfectum*. I think there is little or nothing left to carry out in the town of Kandy. Had anything been left undone, I should have left the town with regret. I believe it is now one of the most perfect gems of Eastern cities, and I am bound to say that had it not been for the cordial co-operation and assistance you have always given me whenever I applied for your aid or countenance, one-half the work would never be done. I thank you very much indeed for the cordial and generous way in which you have always met me in plans for the improvement and benefit of Kandy; and I may add that it shows again how much may be effected when people pull together. I only hope in conclusion, gentlemen, that I may be spared to see your beautiful city again, when the water works have been completely finished.

THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

SAURDAY, MAY 5, 1877.

(Proceedings continued from yesterday's Observer.)

A COOLY DEPOT.

The Hon. Mr. MITCHELL asked whether a site had been fixed upon for a coolie depot on the line of railway, and if it were the intention of Government very shortly to modify the quarantine regulations now imposed on vessels from the coast.

The Hon. the COLONIAL SECRETARY said that a temporary shed had been erected on the line of railway as a trial, preparatory to the erection of permanent buildings. As regards the second part of the question, he could say that the Government had at present no intention of relaxing the quarantine regulations.

THE ALLEGED DISTRESS AMONG COOLIES AT DANDENIYA.

THE HON. SIR COOMARA SWAMY, in pursuance of notice, asked whether it was true that there had been great distress and loss of life amongst the coolies lately employed at the Dandeniya Irrigation Works, owing to satisfactory arrangements not having been made for their maintenance and safety. He also moved for papers. He said that it was not his intention, in asking for full information on the subject under discussion, to institute any charges against any person in the Government employ or otherwise, connected with the great distress and loss of life which, as he had been informed had occurred some short time ago at Dandeniya. He only wanted to know all the facts which could be learned about the case and these he hoped the Government would supply. He was not able to speak on the subject of his motion as one who was quite sure of his facts, but he had received such information from gentlemen, whom he considered trustworthy, as to warrant him in bringing the subject before them. He hoped, however, that the Government would be able to throw such light upon the subject and explain it with the end of proving the statements made by him to be incorrect and demonstrating the innocence of the Government and its agents in the matter. If this could be done, no one would be more delighted than himself. The question of the cause of the death of these coolies—coolies though they were, for upon these the prosperity of the colony largely depended—was one of great interest. Were the poor people sacrificed to the want of due precautions against disease and starvation having been made, and to the want of proper accommodation for their reception having been prepared? The facts of the case, as narrated to him, were that about the end of last year 500 coolies, as he was told, were brought from India for the construction of the Deegama works. As he was informed, the lines erected for their accommodation were quite insufficient; and the sanitary arrangements were so bad, that at last, 50 for each 100 of these 500 fell ill. About the end of December or beginning of January, at the completion of the work at Deegama, Mr. Cruse ordered 150 or 200 of the coolies to be removed to Dandeniya, a place about 14 miles from Matara, to complete there for the Government some irrigation works. The Government however had not given their sanction to the work, and while the contractors there were waiting for its arrival, the coolies were ordered to construct lines for themselves. On the 16th January, Mr. Cruse left the spot and did not return to it until the middle of February. During the whole time the coolies were in a fearful condition. They were starving and had arrears of pay, as he was informed, unpaid to them. Feeling, moreover, that the work on which they were engaged was a Government one, they did not dare to leave the place in search of other employment. (Hear, hear, from Mr. Wilson.) As he was informed,