

INDIA (EMIGRATION).

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RETURN

To an Address of the HOUSE OF LORDS, dated 1st March 1889,

FOR

GOVERNMENT of INDIA DESPATCH No. 1, of 22nd January 1889; Revenue
and Agricultural Department (Emigration).

India Office,
5 March 1889. }

J. A. GODLEY,
Under Secretary of State for India.

(The Lord Stanley of Alderley.)

Ordered to be printed 5th March 1889.

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GOVERNMENT of INDIA DESPATCH No. 1, of 22nd January 1889; Revenue
and Agricultural Department (Emigration).

To the Right Honourable Viscount *Cross*, G.C.B., Her Majesty's
Secretary of State for India.

My Lord,

Calcutta, 22 January 1889.

IN replying to our Emigration Despatch No. 18, dated 17th July 1886, on the subject of the Inland Emigration Act, your Lordship, in a Despatch No. 102 (Emigration) of 4th November 1886, expressed agreement in our view that the most judicious course for the present would be to leave the Act as it is, taking steps to correct, as far as possible, by executive action, those parts of it which require amendment, and to avoid the agitation and unsettlement which might be caused by re-opening discussion on the principle of the measure. Your Lordship at the same time desired that the working of Act I. of 1882 should be narrowly watched, and that a further special report should be submitted after the lapse of another three years, *i.e.*, at the end of 1889, or at an earlier date if it should appear that circumstances had so altered as to make it possible or desirable to repeal the Act.

2. Your Lordship's orders have been carefully carried out. The Governments of the two Provinces affected by the Act, Bengal and Assam, were specially desired to make and maintain all such inquiries as might be necessary for a thorough examination of the existing system at the end of the prescribed period. The investigations which have been made in accordance with these instructions point to the necessity of a further special and comprehensive inquiry during 1889, before a complete revision of the existing law can be attempted with any security that all the defects in the working of the present system will be satisfactorily removed or remedied. During the progress of the investigation that was being conducted in pursuance of your Lordship's orders, a letter was received from the Indian Association in which various charges were brought against the system of emigration in force under Act I. of 1882. The system of recruiting was especially singled out for attack; it was stated that the labourers were ignorant and helpless, and easily induced by false hopes and delusive promises to enter into contracts; and that the manner in which the contract was explained to the coolies was a mere form. The conditions of life in the gardens were described to be most unsatisfactory, and the high death-rate and low birth-rate were especially noticed. Cases of hard treatment of coolies by the planters were said to be common, and it was alleged that some of the provisions of the law for the protection of the tea labourers were systematically violated.

The letter was forwarded to the authorities in Assam and Bengal in order that any issues raised by it, not already covered by the official inquiries, might be included among the subjects upon which the Assam and Bengal authorities were required to report.

3. The main questions with which we shall have to deal, and which have been the subject of examination since the receipt of your Lordship's Despatch of 1886, may be grouped under four heads. Two of them specially concern the labour-importing province of Assam and two of them the labour-exporting province

province of Bengal. The first two, those which concern Assam, are the relations between coolies and planters, and the health of coolies on plantations. The other two, which specially affect Bengal, are the prevention of abuses connected with recruitment, and the provision of sanitary arrangement for coolies *en route* to Assam. We will deal first with the subjects with which the Province of Assam is mainly concerned.

The position in Assam will be more clearly understood if we are permitted to remind your Lordship very briefly of some of the leading facts and circumstances which have been communicated from time to time in the Annual Reports, and which relate to the bearing of the Act on the condition of emigrant labourers in Assam. In 1883, the year following the introduction of the Act, the relations between the managers of tea gardens and the labourers were reported to have been as good as they ever had been. In Sylhet, where new land had been cleared, it was necessary to warn the agents of certain gardens that, unless better arrangements were made for protecting the coolies from hardship, the plantations would be closed. This warning, which was rendered possible by the operation of Act I. of 1882, had a speedy and salutary effect. The death-rate, however, was high, having risen from 37·8 to 41·3 per mille. In 1884 the relations between employers and labourers continued to be satisfactory. Isolated cases of insubordination were reported, but the details furnished in connection with them proved that the coolies were able to make their grievances known in an effective and forcible manner. The health of the coolies was, however, again shown to be unsatisfactory, the death-rate having risen to 43·2 per mille. But measures were taken to close unhealthy gardens and to ensure more frequent inspection by officials. In 1885 the relations between employers and labourers were reported to be good, and no case of a manager using undue oppression to a coolie came to light. The death-rate fell to 36·8 per mille, a rate little, if at all, in excess of the normal death-rate of an Indian population. A daily steamer service for the transport of immigrants to the Surma Valley was on the point of being started, and the report generally showed that the measures which were allowed by Act I. of 1882 had done much to improve the condition of the coolies, and that without the assistance of the Act such interference on behalf of the immigrant population, however necessary, would have been impossible. It was at this period, *i.e.*, between the receipt of the Assam report for 1885 and that for 1886 that your Lordship's instructions, adverted to in the first paragraph of this Despatch, were received.

The report for 1886 showed that the relations between managers and operatives appeared to be satisfactory and creditable. The death-rate, however, rose from 36·8 to 39·8 per mille, and it was noticed with regret that the number of unhealthy gardens had increased from 42 to 64. Inspection had been lax, and seventy gardens employing statutory labourers had been left unexamined, indicating the necessity of more stringent provisions for ensuring an effectual system of supervision. The report for the year 1887, however, the last one which we have received, shows that after careful inquiries the Chief Commissioner of Assam was of opinion that the relations between the employers and labourers seemed to be fairly good. The death-rate fell as low as 36·2 per mille, and the number of unhealthy gardens was reduced from 64 to 49.

4. It will thus be seen that, so far as the working of the Act within Assam was concerned, we have had no grave reason for anticipating the time determined by your Lordship for the submission of a special report on the working of the Act and that there is now cause to believe that in the two most important points, the relations between employers and labourers, and the health of the garden coolies, conditions are, on the whole, satisfactory and improving. Although isolated cases of hardship have occurred, and the birth-rate among the coolie population has shown a downward tendency, yet the careful reports which have been submitted by the Chief Commissioner of Assam justify the conclusion that, in spite of certain defects, the working of Act I. of 1882 in Assam is beneficial to immigrants after their arrival in that Province. We are, however, not prepared, until we have received the report which is expected from the Chief Commissioner of the Province, or until the consultation which has been alluded to in the final paragraphs of this Despatch has taken place, to decide in what respects new legislation is likely to be required for the

improvement of the law so far as it affects Assam. The Chief Commissioner, who only joined the Province a year ago, has found it necessary to make a personal tour through the plantations before submitting his Report, and it is necessary that we should be guided by his opinion before placing any definite suggestions before your Lordship. One of the principal questions, of which the decision depends on the Chief Commissioner's Report and advice, is, as we have already intimated, the character of any final investigation which may be necessary in Assam before the revision of the existing enactment is undertaken.

5. Turning now to Bengal we are constrained to admit that the Act has worked less satisfactory. Abuses exist in the system of recruiting, and sanitary arrangements *en route* are defective. Early in 1888, and before the receipt of the letter from the Indian Association, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal had specially deputed a police officer to inquire into serious charges which had been made of recruitment by force or fraud for service in the labour-districts, and had also been considering the necessity of adopting legislative measures in the interests of sanitation in connection with an outbreak of cholera among coolies on their way to Assam. Sir Stuart Bayley was of opinion that some change in the law was demanded, inasmuch as the object of Act I. of 1882 had to a large extent been frustrated under the system of free emigration which is permitted by Section 7 of that Act. The Lieutenant Governor suspected that malpractices in the shape of abduction by force or fraud were not infrequent, pointed out that no thoroughly efficacious provision could be made for the sanitary protection of the free emigrants under the present enactment, and expressed an opinion that so far as its operation in Bengal was concerned, the law required amendment. Before, however, making any proposal for definite action, or for remedies which might cause inconvenience and expense to the planters of Assam, Sir Stuart Bayley thought it advisable to communicate with the Chief Commissioner of Assam, and with our consent deputed his Revenue Secretary, Mr. Nolan, to confer with Mr. Fitzpatrick in November last.

6. The result of this Conference has been that the Bengal Government has made proposals for important changes in the system of recruitment, and has strongly recommended that measures be taken to prevent the sanitary evils which have caused outbreaks of cholera among emigrants to Assam. We are disposed to agree that a case has been made out for introducing reform in the system of recruitment, and for establishing more effectual sanitary control over free emigrants on their way to Assam. Owing, however, to the fact that the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal has taken executive measures to prevent and abuses in recruiting, it may not be found necessary that any part of the present Act I. of 1882 should be undertaken in anticipation of its expiration at the end of the three-year period. On this point, as well as on the question of what further investigation may be needed before finally revising the present enactment, we shall shortly have the opportunity of conferring with the Chief Commissioner of Assam, whose arrival in Calcutta within a few days is expected.

7. The present position may be thus briefly summarized. Ever since the Act of 1882 has been carefully watched, with the view of introducing necessary reforms at the end of 1889, or earlier in case of urgency. The Governments of Bengal and Assam were required to institute an inquiry throughout the three years. Early in the second of the three years, and antecedent to the complaints made by the Indian Association, inquiries were made by the Government of Bengal into abuses connected with recruitment, and later on in the same year, that Government deputed a high official to confer with the Chief Commissioner of Assam. The views of the Bengal Government have been communicated to the Government of India, and demand a consideration of the question whether urgent legislation may not, in anticipation of the end of the three-years period, be necessary for the prevention of abuses connected with recruitment or for better sanitary control, in the Province of Bengal. In the meantime executive measures of a remedial character have been taken by the Government of Bengal. Information from Assam

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Assam itself is not yet complete, But the Chief Commissioner, who has been engaged in visiting the plantations, is shortly expected in Calcutta, and we shall then, in consultation with the Bengal Government, decide how far further inquiry may be requisite before the Act of 1882 is thoroughly examined, and what is the earliest date at which the question of new legislation can be finally and fully considered.

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We have, &c.

(signed)

Lansdowne.

F. S. Roberts.

A. R. Scoble.

C. A. Elliott.

P. P. Hutchins.

D. M. Barbour.

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