

Indian Emigrants

on

Ceylon Estates

Editorials of the

'CEYLON MORNING LEADER'

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Foreword.

These extracts are Editorials from the Ceylon Morning Leader, being the criticisms on a report of a Commission appointed by the Ceylon Government in 1916 to inquire into the conditions of Indian labourers in the Province of Sabaragamuwa. The state of things is not very different from one province to another. Is it not gratifying to note that a Ceylon paper has fought for Indian labourers? There is another paper, the Ceylonese, which has also fought the same battle bravely.

Athikkadu Thekkur, }
Ramnad District. }
1917.

Karumuttu Thiagaraja.



Armond de Souza Esq.,
EDITOR

Continued

A White-Washing Commission.

Few people take the trouble to study the voluminous report by the Commission to inquire into the condition of estate coolies in Sabaragamuwa; but those who do, will scarcely miss the unpleasant sensation of having to do with a Commission which was apparently more anxious to apologise for deficiencies than to discover and report them. The Commission was appointed to inquire into complaints by Mr. Boone, District Judge of Ratnapura, Dr. Lunn, Inspecting Medical Officer, the Government of Bombay, and Mr. Crossman, Police Magistrate of Ratnapura, all of whom made statements suggestive of ill-treatment of coolies in Sabaragamuwa. But if we compare the Commissioners' eagerness to magnify Mr. Crossman's supposed errors with their anxiety to minimise the failures of the planters in the District, the general disposition of the Commissioners becomes unpleasantly suggestive. The report of a Commission to inquire into the condition of estate coolies concerns the evening Press in particular, and we have preferred to observe their criticism before venturing to express our own opinion. This criticism seems now ended. Its general effect may

be described not unfairly as a prolonged attack on the Police Magistrate of Ratnapura. It is now time for our readers to pass their own judgment. Take one instance of the Commissioners' attitude against Mr. Crossman. The Labour Ordinance authorises any Magistrate, "if he is satisfied by affidavit" that a labourer has not worked on any estate for three years or has left his last estate on reasonable cause, to grant a certificate to that effect. This enables the cooly to obtain employment elsewhere. Mr. Crossman, who saw numerous half-starved and ill coolies in Court, issued several such certificates. This, of course, annoyed the planters very much. How do the Commissioners speak of the Magistrate? They complain that he issued such certificates without any inquiry whether the affidavit was true or whether the cause of leaving was in fact reasonable; that it is only reasonable to call the Superintendent of the estate and ask him for his version; that "it was not intended, *we submit*," that such certificates should be so readily issued; that the "indiscriminate" issue of such certificates encourages coolies to abscond; that "in such cases, *we contend*, the late employer should be given the opportunity of refuting the statements of the cooly"; that in one case, the information given to the Magistrate was false. Note the expressions "*we submit*," "*we contend*"—expressions natural in advocates arguing on behalf of

a client and anxious to coax somebody else into their point of view. The general impression of all this is that Mr. Crossman was a bad Magistrate, who unreasonably upset the planter, unreasonably helped the cooly and generally misconducted himself.

What is the truth ? The truth is the Magistrate obeyed the law and had no option to stretch it in favour of planters. The failure to stretch it is nevertheless his grave offence in the eye of the Commission. The law says that any Magistrate, "if he is satisfied by affidavit" that a cooly has not worked on an estate for three years or has left his last estate on reasonable cause "shall" issue the certificate. It gives him no option. He "shall" do it—or the Supreme Court can compel him by *mandamus*. That he obeyed the law is his sin, in the eyes of the Commission. The Commissioners urge that he should have inquired in each case. The law is perfectly clear. There is to be no inquiry : the superintendent of the estate is not to be sent for and consulted ; there is to be no trial. The Magistrate must be "satisfied" ; but the manner in which he is to be satisfied is strictly limited and carefully prescribed ; he is to be "satisfied by affidavit." He is to ask for nothing else, and asking for nothing else, he "shall" issue the certificate. Yet because he did this, this Commission directs an attack on him and argues that he ought to have broken the law. They are not ignorant

men, these Commissioners. They know the law ; “ *we admit* that the law does not specifically require the Magistrate to make inquiries ”—note the expression, “ *we admit,*” indicative of advocacy ; note the term “ *specifically,*” implying that although it does not require this “ *specifically*” it perhaps requires it in some other way, a skilful suggestion, calculated to produce a wrong impression. They know more than this. They admit that where a cooly in his affidavit swears that he has not worked on an estate for three years and thus gets a certificate, “ the remedy of an employer who finds that the applicant is an absconder from another estate is to apply for the prosecution of the labourer on a charge of making a false declaration.” That is the remedy in the second case, too, where the cooly alleges a reasonable cause and has, in fact, no reasonable cause. Yet the Commissioners, while pointing out the right remedy in the first case, suggest by implication that there is none in the second case. Their complaint, if any, was against the law, and they know that, too. They, in fact, suggest an amendment of the Labour Ordinance. Yet knowing that the Magistrate did his duty, had no alternative but to do it, that the fault, if any, is not his, they contrive to use this aspect of their report to confirm the impression, carefully created in the rest of it, that this Magistrate was a reckless and malicious person, who acted

wrongly and took a delight in favouring coolies and distressing planters.

They "admit," they "submit," they "contend"—yet their business was simply to inquire and report. They are advocates, the Government expected them to be judges. The contrast between their concern for the planter and their hostility against the Magistrate is brought out in many paragraphs. One instance will serve for the present. The Magistrate had expressed himself as satisfied that some of the coolies were insufficiently paid. The Commissioners contend that a smart cooly can earn anything between Rs. 15 and Rs. 30 a month. In an actual case tried by the Magistrate, however, they admit that the cooly was paid Re. 1.10 in January and $\frac{1}{2}$ ths of a bushel of rice; Rs. 2 in February and $\frac{1}{2}$ ths of a bushel of rice; and $\frac{6}{8}$ ths of a bushel of rice in March when he bolted before being paid. The Commissioners suggest that $\frac{6}{8}$ ths of a bushel of rice was sufficient for the man, and as to the sufficiency of his wages, they avoid the point by saying that the man did not work and therefore could not expect anything more. But the contrast between the Rs. 30, which colours their visions of what a cooly can earn, and the sum of Re. 1.10 and Rs. 2 which this particular cooly got, does not escape the reader. But mark the Commissioners' conclusion. "It is a matter for *regret* that the Magistrate failed to

investigate the allegations of the coolies more deeply," before delivering the judgment which created this sensation. When a Magistrate fails to probe as deeply as *they* would like into a cooly case, they are filled with "regret." What happens to them when they find that the carelessness of a planter is responsible for a high death-rate on his estate? They are only "surprised." The death-rate on Niwitigala Group was at one time 10·5 per hundred coolies, and in spite of Dr. Langley Hunt's visit and warnings, it rose to 15·6 per hundred coolies. What do the Commissioners say to this? "The number of deaths, though *apparently* large, was not really abnormal." Note the apologetic tone. Not abnormal? The death rate for all estates was 38·4 per thousand in 1913, and 42·3 per thousand in 1914. The death-rate for Colombo in 1914 was 27·4 per thousand. Here was a death-rate of 105 per thousand in 1912 and 156 per thousand in 1913: yet the Commissioners do not think it abnormal! And what is their comment? "We cannot but express our surprise that Mr. Clark" (this is the Superintendent) "*apparently*" failed to appreciate the urgency of the situation. Note the apologetic "*apparently*," suggesting that perhaps really he did not fail at all. They are "surprised" where a planter's conduct results in the death of scores of coolies, but full of "regret" when a Magistrate's judgment is too sharp on a planter to

suit their views. Was this not a white-washing Commission? We shall return to the subject: it is full of interest.

"Ceylon Morning Leader" May 6. 1916.

Was it a Waste of Efforts?

An evening paper said of the Sabaragamuwa Cooly Commission that "the report shows clearly that the Colony has been put to unnecessary expense and that a large amount of the time of busy men, official and unofficial, has been wasted through the excessive readiness of a Magistrate to believe charges against planters and his omission to subject such charges to the simplest and most ordinary tests." The inference is that had it not been for Mr. Crossman's gross prejudice against planters, the Government would not have appointed a Commission, whose report proves that it was quite unnecessary. Was it Mr. Crossman's prejudice that led to an inquiry? Mr. Crossman reported to Government the result of his observations in August 1914; but in January 1914, Mr. A. P. Boone, District Judge of Ratnapura, had written to Government a statement which could

not but compel the authorities to institute an inquiry. He was walking along with Dr. Perera, when some 40 coolies prostrated themselves before him saying, they were starving. The coolies, he says, were obviously starved, many of them were only fit for hospital; the Doctor told him that *from all sides* he was hearing similar reports, and that 75 per cent of his hospital deaths were due to Niwitigala Estate, where the coolies were unable to resist disease, being underfed. Mr. Boone met another cooly in Niwitigala who was obviously dying of starvation. He reported that these coolies could neither bolt nor come to Court to complain, being prevented by watchers from leaving the estate, their only remedy being thus stopped. He reported hearing of four deaths from starvation and declared that from what he had seen, he could well believe it. He suggested action. Here was a report calculated to arouse the most indifferent Government. Yet it is against Mr. Crossman alone that the wrath of those distressed by the Commission is directed. In the same month, Dr. Lunn, Inspecting Medical Officer, reported the occurrence of 290 deaths in a labour force of 2,245 on Niwitigala. He examined the cooly lines and of one set, he writes :—
 “Not a single person in these lines was free from anchylostomiasis and some had malaria in addition.”
 He found two other lines where the coolies suffered to the same extent and reported that the coolies did

not get enough food. He recommended a rigid inquiry. Lastly, there was a strong complaint from the Bombay Government. Can it be said that on Mr. Crossman alone lies the responsibility for the appointment of this Commission, even if it was unnecessary ?

But it was not unnecessary. Mr. Crossman reported habitual neglect and ill-treatment of coolies in Niwitigala. The Commissioners declare that "the evidence on which the Magistrate based his opinion was totally inadequate" and they pile censure on censure on him through a whole page. But facts are hard things, and the Commissioners are beaten by the facts. They visited the estate four months after Mr. Crossman's report. They went in a mood for making excuses. "We saw a number of coolies in various stages of anchylostomiasis but otherwise the labour force appeared to be fairly healthy"—which is like saying : we saw a man dying of consumption, but otherwise he was quite healthy. There were extensive improvements in progress ! But improvements in progress do not disprove previous bad conditions ; on the contrary, they prove the bad conditions which require improvement. The dispensary was inadequate and unsuitable. "We admit that the condition of these three coolies called for an inquiry as to the adequacy of the medical treatment of the labour force, but the state of affairs suggested by the

Magistrate were (*sic*) entirely non-existent at the time of our visit some few months afterwards, and we have no evidence or reason to believe that they (*sic*) did exist," say the Commissioners. What "evidence" did they expect? That is interesting. They are great on the point that the coolies made no complaints. "The coolies had no complaints to make as regards their treatment on the estate"; "the treatment of coolies on this estate has not been the subject of complaint by coolies either in the Police Court or to any public authority"; "the superintendents told us that there were practically no complaints regarding rice." What is the truth? "I understand," writes Mr. Boone, "that it is the practice in the district to get watchers, so that the coolies cannot bolt or even come to Court to lay their complaints. The result is that their only remedy in cases like the above is stopped." Yet these Commissioners complain that these coolies, some of whom were dying of starvation, made no complaint to the Court or to any public authority! On the absence of complaints regarding rice, the facts are interesting. The Commissioners are forced to bear witness that in January 1914, Dr. Lunn found a number of half-starved coolies. There was no inquiry of any kind into their starved condition. Mr. Clark, they say, asserts positively that it was his assistants' duty to supervise the issue of rice to the coolies, but they wonder why

Messrs. Loudon and Ross, the assistants, deny that they required to do anything of the kind. "To what extent this lack of supervision of the distribution of rice was responsible for the condition of the coolies and contributed to the high mortality it is difficult to state." They call it "systematic ill-treatment of some coolies" by a kangany. They have a curious story to tell. "The superintendents have told us that there were practically no complaints regarding rice, whilst Mr. Clark has stated that he noticed the condition of these coolies even before Dr. Lunn drew his attention to it, but that he disbelieved the complaints of the coolies"—so, there *were* complaints, but they were disbelieved!—"and attributed their condition to the fact that they bartered their rice for drink." That is to say, Mr. Clark saw that these men were dying of hunger, but declined to look into their complaints, preferring to believe that they were dying because they had changed their food into drink. The Commissioners at this point wax sadly disappointed. They say Mr. Clark ought to have had the issue of rice properly supervised, that "he showed a strange lack of appreciation of the situation"—mark these careful euphemisms,—and that if he had done his duty, "he would not have exposed himself to the suspicion of neglect." That he should have incurred suspicion is to their mind more

deplorable than that coolies should have died from starvation.

Let us look for a moment at the conditions on Niwitigala. In 1913, Niwitigala was a death-trap. Its death-rate was 23·8 *per cent.* That is to say, while the death-rate in 1913 for all estates in Ceylon was 38·4 per thousand, on Niwitigala it was 238 per thousand ! Did not such a sensational state of things require "rigid inquiry" ? The way the Commissioners deal with this situation is significant of their attitude. They say that "the principal *indirect* cause of this high death-rate was bad recruiting," though why they troubled about indirect causes before tackling the direct ones they do not care to say. Some of the coolies received insufficient food on the estate, ate unripe jungle fruits and fell ill ! The Commissioners cannot acquit Mr. Clark of blame for the bad recruiting. Dr. Lunn visited the estate and ordered certain improvements. They were not adopted and 227 coolies out of 950 died. "We find considerable difficulty in understanding why Mr. Clark.....failed to adopt any of the recommendations" of Dr. Lunn, observe the Commissioners ; "we cannot but express our surprise that Mr. Clark apparently failed to appreciate the urgency of the situation." Mark the tender, reluctant and apologetic tone of these Commissioners who, ready enough to hurl censures on Mr. Crossman, have no more to

say against Mr. Clark than that "we think that nothing should have been left undone which would expose the estate to any suspicion of neglect." Despite all their laboured palliations, their reluctant admissions, their careful excuses, and their sorrowful disappointment with planters, their regret that estates were exposed to any suspicion, contrasted with their eagerness to rebuke Mr. Crossman, does not enough of the truth emerge through their report to show that that the Commission was necessary and that Mr. Crossman's report has probably saved many lives, even if it has since earned for him the wrath of the mighty? Can we say that this Commission was unnecessary?

"Ceylon Morning Leader" May 8, 1916.

Who cares for the Cooly?

Let us examine the point of wages to-day, in the report of the Sabaragamuwa Labour Commission. After all, it is the wages that bring the cooly to Ceylon. What does the cooly expect to get? What does the Commission expect him to get? And what, in fact, does he get? There is some conflict here. To begin with, it is curious that though this was a

Commission to probe the grievances of the coolies, the Commissioners only examined 10 coolies, while they heard no less than 35 Europeans, nearly all planters. The Commissioners often tell us what they find from the evidence of Superintendents; of the cooly, they have little to say, except that there were practically no complaints by them to the Superintendents. Many of the coolies, questioned why they did not complain of this grievance or that trouble to the Superintendent, either show themselves aghast at the suggestion of such audacity, or declare that they were never allowed to go near him, or that the Superintendent did not understand the language and drove them away, or that they never had the chance. There would naturally be no complaints, but that does not imply that there would be none of that suffering which the Commission was appointed and expected to investigate. For instance, in 1913, 227 of the 950 coolies on Niwitigala died. They made no complaint, but just died. The absence of any complaint from them would not prove that they did not suffer death, would it? But there is perhaps another reason why the Commissioners did not care to examine coolies. They would not have believed them, if they had. Mr. R. N. Thaine, Government Agent of Sabaragamuwa, in a Report to Government on the hardships of the coolies, is greatly impressed by "the tendency of people of this class to exaggerate

their grievances, especially when they find they are the subject of inquiry by the authorities"; and so, of course, he would not encourage this most improper tendency, and where he could not help asking questions, would not believe the replies. "My own view," says he, "is that the stories of cruelty are gross exaggerations," and again:—"I do not think that any credence can be attached to this complaint." Which, of course, settles the matter, and so easily, too. Wherefore, those whom the Government appointed to inquire into the grievances of the coolies avoided questioning coolies and preferred, instead, to question those against whom the coolies' complaints were directed. They are quite satisfied with this result.

Now for our three questions: What did the coolies expect to get as wages? And what wages do they actually get? Tukaram Lachiman was getting Rs. 12 to Rs. 13 a month in India as a weaver. He was induced to come to Ceylon on the promise that he would easily earn Rs. 12 a month. He actually gets no more than Rs. 1-50 or Rs. 2 a month. Parvathi, a woman, whose husband was a European's butler in India and earned Rs. 25 a month, was told that she would be a kangani over women and earn about Rs. 13 a month. In point of fact, she says:—"Sometimes I get Re. 1 a month, and sometimes 50 cents." Her husband was in jail on the day she testified. Asana, whose father earned anything

between Rs. 500 to Rs. 1,000 a month and employed 150 men in India, was enticed to Ceylon on promises of Rs. 16 to Rs. 20 a month "with food,—mutton, fowls, &c." So he stole Rs. 300 from his father's hoard and came away with the kangany, who plundered him of his cash. His actual wages are Re. 1 to Re. 1-50 a month. Tuka Ram Baliah earned between Rs. 10 to Rs. 20 a month in India, as a weaver. He was enticed to Ceylon on promises of regular wages of Rs. 25 to Rs. 30 a month with work only till noon. His actual wages are between Re. 1-50 to Re. 1-75 a month. He never once got more than Rs. 2 a month. Laksiman was promised Rs. 30 a month, with work only till noon. He longed to be free from the estate and one day he bolted. He then had no more than Rs. 2 with him, although he was a kangany with 16 men under him. Of course, it must be remembered that every man got some rice in addition, the rice being part of the wages, and counted as such. Lest the reader should receive this testimony with the bias of Mr. Thaine and decline to "attach any credence to it," we may perhaps quote Mr. Thaine himself on the point:—"As regards the complaint that the coolies never had enough money or wages to enable them to purchase sundries, &c., it is a fact that in the majority of cases, coolies only receive as their wages at the end of the month small sums

varying between 75 cents* and Rs. 3. But the amount of wages payable in cash at the end of a month depends upon various circumstances, such as the number of days worked, the quantity of rice issued, and the deductions made on account of advances or debts. From inquiries made, I am satisfied that great care is taken not to deduct too much on account of advances"—not to deduct too much from 75 cents, for instance—"it being the object to give the cooly sufficient cash to enable him to purchase sundries and other necessities. The allegations of starvation are entirely without foundation"—they were amply proved afterwards by Mr. Boone and others, when coolies were found dying or dead of starvation. "If a cooly does not work, he cannot expect to be paid or to receive his required quantity of rice. I do not suppose it will be contended that the conditions existing in India are different."

Perhaps not. But does not the cooly come here from India because he expects something rather better than he can find by staying in India? How does the Englishman approach the situation, in his own case? Does he not expect better pay and better conditions of comfort and social station by coming to Ceylon? Mr. Thaine says the coolies' statements are usually exaggerated, that men of that class are un-

*100 cents make one rupee.

reliable, that he attaches no credence to their words. Well, we have Mr. Thaine's words, too. For example :—Mr. A. P. Boone writes (January, 1914) :—

‘ Forty coolies started prostrating before us, saying they were starving . . . the coolies were obviously being starved. Many of them were fit only for hospital. Dr. Perera told me that from all sides he was hearing similar reports . . . they were unable to resist such diseases (hook-worm) owing to being under-fed. . . . Four deaths occurred from starvation. . . From what I saw, I can believe it.’ The Commissioners say (paragraph 75B):—

“ Dr. Lunn drew attention to a number of half starved coolies. . . . Nor do we find any inquiry was made (by the European Superintendents) into the methods of the kanganies whose coolies were found in this half-starved condition. . . . To what extent this lack of supervision over the distribution of rice was responsible for the condition of the coolies and contributed to the high mortality, it is difficult to state.” Mr. Thaine declares that the allegations of starvation are entirely false. Mr. Boone, Dr. Lunn and the Commission find such allegations entirely true. Mr. Thaine says the cooly is unreliable and unworthy of credence. Comment is needless. However, to return to the question of wages : Mr. Thaine says that the majority of coolies receive as wages in cash between 75 cents and Rs. 3 a month. The

coolies say they get between Rs. 1-50 and Rs. 2. But the Commissioners report thus :—" It is possible for a good working cooly to earn as much as Rs. 15 to Rs. 20, and at some seasons from Rs. 25 to Rs. 30." They add that "these wages can be earned and are actually earned by a very large number of coolies." We have heard the evidence. Which is true? That which Mr. Thaine says, viz: that in the majority of cases, coolies only receive 75 cents to Rs. 3 as wages, or that a very large number earn Rs. 20, Rs. 25 and Rs. 30 a month? And this was the way this Commission tried to help the cooly in Sabaragamuwa.

" Ceylon Morning Leader " May 11. 1916.

The freedom of the Saffragam Cooly.

"Do you want to go back again to India?" the Chairman of the Sabaragamuwa Labour Commission asked Asana, a cooly on Palugampola Estate. "If I am sent, I will go; and if you wish me to die here, I will die" said Asana. "The cooly is absolutely free to go wherever he wishes," say the Commissioners in paragraph 50 of their Report. Note the cheerful optimism of the Commissioners, and contrast it with the dull tone of despair in the cooly. "If you

wish me to die here, I will die." It is the expression of a hopeless, helpless man. Does he know that he is "absolutely free to go wherever he likes"?—Hannanthapa, a kangany told the Commissioners he wanted to go. "The Superintendent says you owe him money," objected the Chairman of the Commission. "I never got even a cent," declared Hannanthapa. The Chairman argued with him, tried to persuade him. "You still want to leave the estate without paying your debt?" he asked. "I do not owe a cent to the estate," stoutly maintained the cooly.—Puthrengan Kangany said he wanted to go. The Commissioners asked him why, wherefore, what his debt was. He struck to the main theme. He wanted to go. "Where are you going?" they asked. "Anywhere," was the reply. "Are you going to pay your debt to the estate?" "I have no money to pay," he said. "Why do you go away then?" "I know nothing about the debt," was the answer. "Did you ask the dorai about the debt?" "No" he said. "Have you given a pro-note for the debt?" "I did not give a note. The Superintendent asked me to touch the pen. I signed." "How much pay do you expect to get?" "I do not care about pay. I want to go home."—Tukaram Lachiman was asked:—"Do you want to go back to India?" "If I am sent, I will go," was the reply, but it appeared that he had walked all the way to the Police Court in his anxiety

to get permission to go. "Why did you not ask your Superintendent?" "I did not know I had to ask him," and he probably didn't. *Apropos* of asking the Superintendent, look at this. Tukaram Baliah was asked:—"Do you want to go back to India?" He said:—"I am 4 years here. I have my parents and other friends and I do not want to stay here and die." The question of debt came up. "Did you ask the Superintendent?" "I never asked the Superintendent: the kangany never allowed me to speak." Asana was asked:—"Did you complain to the Superintendent about the kangany beating you?" "No," he said. "Why did you not inform him?" "Because I was not allowed to go to the Superintendent's bungalow." "Who stopped you?" "A Tamil watcher." Is the cooly free to go wherever he likes? The Commissioners are great on the absence of any complaints by the coolies on this head and on that. Do we understand why no complaints are made? But, the reader will ask, is this true about the kangany? Is he such a tyrant? Let us ascertain from Mr. W. G. Berry, Superintendent of Pinkande Estate. He had one Abdul Khan as a kangany. "Why was Abdul Khan such an objectionable man?" the Commissioners asked. "He did all sorts of terrible things to the coolies," was the reply. "Such as?" "Every cooly of his had to go to work. He frightened the sick coolies to say that there was nothing wrong with

them." "Then, it is a fact that a great many of these coolies were ill, and owing to Abdul Khan, could not absent themselves from work?" asked the Chairman. "The kangany influenced them so much," said Mr. Berry. "When you went round the estate, did none of these coolies complain to you?" "No," was the honest answer. "I also understand," reports Mr. A. P. Boone, District Judge of Ratnapura, "that it is the practice in the District to get watchers, so that coolies cannot bolt or even go to Court to lay their complaints...I was told that 4 deaths had occurred on the estate from starvation...from what I saw I can believe it." Yet the cooly is absolutely free to go wherever he likes, and there are practically no complaints, we learn from this Commission. Are the coolies free, really? And is it true that they have no wish to make complaints?

The "legal position of the Indian cooly," as stated by the Commission, is interesting. He can leave the estate by giving notice or on reasonable cause, they remind us. "Whether the contract is terminated by reasonable cause or by giving a month's notice, the cooly is absolutely free to go wherever he likes." Can he leave the estate at all? Well, there are watchers, admit the Commissioners, but they argue that it is not illegal to employ watchers. How is the cooly free, if there are watchers to prevent him? The Commissioners have a pretty reply to that: "It is, of

course, open to the aggrieved person to prosecute the offender for wrongful restraint and confinement." That is the legal position, and the Commissioners are very anxious to let us know it. But how is this cooly to begin his prosecution against the "offender for wrongful restraint and confinement," if he cannot leave the estate? Mr. Boone reports that the watchers do not permit the coolies to come to Court to lay their complaints. How is this prosecution to be started? The Commissioners are discreetly silent upon that. Does the reader begin to understand the works of this Commission now? Let us return to the legal position, with regard to the notice or reasonable cause. On giving notice or on having reasonable cause, the cooly is free to go: that is the legal position. Some coolies give notice, through proctors. What is the result? The Commissioners turn upon certain proctors and rend them. They are aghast at this "traffic in notice-giving." It is a most "unprofessional" thing for the proctors to do. It is a "scandal." Where a cooly owes a debt to the estate—and he owes debts in strange ways, without ever receiving a cent, sometimes—the Commission think it quite wrong for any proctor to help the cooly to give notice. Coolies owing debts should not leave, then. Yet discussing the "legal position of the Indian cooly" and explaining the advantages he enjoys, they tell us that "he may leave the estate owing a large debt." That is to

say: He may leave but he should not; and if any proctor helps him, that proctor is unprofessional, while if any watcher prevents him, that watcher is not unlawful and can be prosecuted. Now for a plain answer from the candid reader:—*Is the cooly free to go?* Take another aspect. When the cooly gives notice, the proctor through whom he gives it is a bad man. When he leaves on reasonable cause, the Magistrate from whom he obtains his certificate of reasonable cause, is an even worse man, according to the Commission. If the Magistrate is “satisfied by affidavit,” he may issue a certificate to the cooly that he has reasonable cause for leaving. The Commissioners are, however, very angry with Mr. Crossman for carrying out this law. They want him to turn the affidavit into a trial, they call him unreasonable for obeying the law, they virtually charge him with encouraging absconding, and they “contend” a number of other things, though they “admit that the law does not specifically require the Magistrate to make inquiries.” Well, then, the plain English of it is that the cooly is free to go, absolutely free to go, in one of two ways: he may give notice, but if he does, the proctor through whom he gives it, is a very nasty bad man; or he may get a certificate that he leaves on reasonable cause; but if he does, the Magistrate who gives it to him, is a nasty bad man. Again, the cooly may leave the estate. But if he does, a watcher may

prevent him. And the cooly's proper remedy against the watcher who arrests, beats and frustrates his effort to go to Court, is to go to Court and prosecute that watcher. *Is the cooly free in Saffragam?*

“Ceylon Morning Leader” May 13. 1916.

The Happiest Man in Ceylon.

The happiest fellow in Ceylon, according to the Saffragam Labour Commission, is the immigrant cooly. And almost the unhappiest, is his master, the planter, for he is so greatly misunderstood and so much exposed to unkind suspicion. That is the impression one derives from a rapid perusal of the Commissioners' report. It is only on a careful study of it that one begins to doubt. “We consider,” say the Commissioners, “the condition of the Indian cooly far better than it is in India, where he is more or less left to himself”—and yet, we have the Government of Bombay and the Legislative Council of Madras and all sorts of Indian authorities and newspapers holding quite a different opinion, and it takes Commissions and inquiries and investigations for Ceylon to try and disabuse these unkind people of their suspicions about our methods of making the cooly happy. “Certainly,

no other community in Ceylon receives the same amount of individual attention and care from his employer," write the Commissioners. Whose employer? Not the community's, for that would be a singular way of indicating the plural number. It is an excellent sentence for examiners to set to elementary classes. There are others. They are so tempting that we wonder if the reader will pardon a digression for his amusement. It is not irrelevant to the subject, and interesting from an examiner's point of view. Paragraphs 47 and 48 of the Report are of special interest, in this connection. We read:—

"There are certain diseases we desire to draw special attention to, namely anchylostomiasis and malaria. Of the former, it can hardly be overestimated the very serious influence this disease has on estate labourers."

Now in English, we should say:—"As regards the former." What meaning does "of" carry here? And please parse the "it." What is the subject of "can hardly be overestimated"? Is it "the very serious influence" or is it the poor forlorn "it"? Read on a few lines below and you find:—

"But we are of opinion that until the unanimous adoption of some system of conservancy, there can be no hope of other preventive measures."

Here, again, in English, we should say "without the adoption &c" or "until so-and-so is adopted,"

because "until" is a preposition used only before nouns of time. Nor, is it usual in English, to say "no hope of other preventive measures," when you mean "from" other preventive measures. No hope of any preventive measures means that you have no hope that such measures will be enforced or adopted; no hope from them would mean, what the Commissioners wish to say, that even if such measures were adopted, you would not hope for an improvement, until a better system of conservancy is introduced. Take the very next paragraph:—

"Malaria is prevalent on many estates in Ratnapura and not alone gives rise to grave and often fatal results, but in consequence of its prevalency, of its animating and debilitating influences, of its tendency to cause disease of internal organs, undermines the health of hundreds of coolies, predisposing them to other diseases which not alone aggravates, but complicates, impairs their power of resistance and repair, and unfits them for work. This danger has been fully recognised on many estates and is receiving considerable attention, not alone in prophylactic and curative administration of quinine but in the selection of suitable sites for lines on high and dry ground, the keeping of compounds free from vegetation and undergrowth, protecting water pipes and in many instances piping water into the lines."

It is a rich example, to be set to students, with a recommendation to rewrite it in English. We commend the sentence to school-masters. It will furnish

numerous openings for teaching students the correct use of the present participle, both as a noun and as an adjective. But even those who are not school-masters or examiners will rejoice in the curious and repeated use of the affected "not alone" for "not only," and of the word "prevalency" where the simpler "prevalence" would have suited the requirements of the language but not the stilted taste of the writer. Many will also wonder what it is that "aggravates" and "complicates" and how a cooly's "power of resistance" can be aggravated and complicated. We can understand something impairing one's power of resistance, but we can only wonder how it is aggravated and complicated and what it is that, in the sentence quoted, performs this extraordinary feat.

However, we are quite clear as to what anchylostomiasis does, for we read:—"It can hardly be over-estimated the very serious influence this disease has on estate labourers." That, at any rate, means something, even though, like some things in *Punch*, one would have expressed it differently. It brings on a fatal termination of other diseases, and has a very serious influence on cooly mortality. Now turn to another section of the report, where the Commissioners explain how anchylostomiasis struck them, when they visited an estate to see whether the coolies were neglected. "We visited this estate five months after the decision of this case," they say, referring to a decision

of Mr. Crossman, who had reported that the coolies were shamefully neglected. "We saw a number of coolies in various stages of anchylostomiasis, but otherwise the labour force appeared fairly healthy." What is the reader's impression on reading this? That the estate was all right, and that though there were a lot of coolies more or less advanced in anchylostomiasis, that did not matter very much, having little to do with the point whether or not the labour force was properly looked after. Anchylostomiasis, in this connection, then, is a bagatelle, a trifle not worth attention, of no serious importance at all. But anchylostomiasis, in the connection previously considered, is a disease so formidable that the Commissioners' equanimity and grammar are broken in their effort to express their impression of its gravity and terribly serious influence in producing a fatal termination in other diseases. From this view of it, we conclude that anchylostomiasis is a particularly dangerous thing, since its presence favours other diseases and helps a fatal termination thereof. But considered in connection with Mr. Crossman's charge of neglect, it entirely changes its character and admirably lends itself as an instrument of exposing Mr. Crossman's tendency to scares and exaggerations against the unfortunately misunderstood planter. Of course, the planter is not entirely free from blame. In one case, for instance, the Commissioners declare that "nothing should have

been left undone which would expose the estate to any suspicion of neglect," and a little later, they find they cannot really acquit the planter of responsibility and say: "Had this been done, he would not have exposed himself to the suspicion of neglect." Clearly, though appointed to inquire into the hardships of the cooly, it is of the planter that they are thinking all the time. That he should have exposed himself to suspicion makes upon their mind a deeper impression of regret than that the cooly should have suffered. It is a useful indication of their angle of vision, the angle from which the cooly is seen, as the happiest fellow in Ceylon.

"The Ceylon Morning Leader" May 19. 1916.



Indian Emigration on Ceylon Estates

A Report by
KARUNOTTU THIAGARAJA CHEYTHAR.

Foreword.

This Report has already been published in the Indian and the Ceylon Press. To indicate the situation which made it necessary, I beg to quote the following prediction of the Ceylonese, which, unfortunately, has not failed :

“ Of all the fantastic Commissions of which we have ever heard, in this land or elsewhere, the just-ended Labour Commission must surely rank an easy first ”

If any one expects the situation as regards labour recruitment and control to be eased by the findings of Messrs. Marjoribanks and Maricair, we think he is destined to be bitterly disappointed. We are not rashly prejudging the work of the Commissioners. We are guided by the character and scope of the inquiry which they instituted, from the materials of which it is impossible for them to arrive at any estimate of the situation as regards the coolie's side of the case.”

Let us make it true that out of evil good may come.

Athikkadu Thekkur, }
Ramnad District. }
1917.

Karumuttu Thiagaraja.

Indian Emigrants on Ceylon Estates.



VERITABLE SLAVERY.

I beg leave to submit the following Report on the condition of Indian emigrants in Ceylon, to ascertain which I visited many estates in several planting districts.

1. Housing and Sanitary Conditions.—There are many blocks of buildings. In each a long central wall divides two parallel suites of apartments. Each of these, measuring 12 feet long, 10 feet broad, and, approximately, 9 feet high, is provided with one door only (no window) giving on a verandah four feet wide. The walls and floors are of mud, and the roof of corrugated iron sheets, and, sometimes, of tiles. This is the universal type. Each lodging is meant to house four working coolies. The accommodation on many estates is usually less, and five or six coolies, with their little ones, occupy each chamber.

The drainage is very unsatisfactory. Latrines are seldom provided. The new sanitary department is now getting this defect remedied.

The dwellings are often in the midst of clumps of trees. Ventilation is not specially provided, unless

the bad joinings of the doors and the cracks in the walls are considered as sufficient vent for letting air in and out.

2. Health and Medical Aid.—The health of the coolies is not gratifying. On all estates and in all lines visited I met sickly coolies. Malarial fever and anchylostomiasis are very common. Dr. Lunn, Inspecting Medical Officer, Ratnapura, writes of one set of estate cooly lines that he visited:—"Not a single person in these lines was free from anchylostomiasis and some had malaria in addition." Diarrhoea, dysentry, and skin diseases are not rare. The medical care of the coolies is entrusted to dispensers, in whom the coolies have no faith whatever. I myself met a few dispensers and I, therefore, readily believe what the coolies have to say of them. Quinine is said to be their favourite or the only drug. The lines of the coolies are required to be visited by that "Doctor" every other day, but in practice this is done only once a week, and it makes no difference whether he does this every day or only once a week.

"Sick rice," I believe, is given but rarely and in exceptional cases, though the law requires it in every case. The Superintendents say that not only rice but milk, sago conji, tea and all other necessary things are provided on estate account. My impartial and

searching enquiry into this *common and identical* complaint on *all* estates does not support the Superintendents' statement in the least degree. If a cooly falls ill, he must die unless there are near relatives to take care of him (see Appendix B).

A woman after confinement is given half a bushel of rice from the estate and Rs 2 in cash, the latter is placed against her account. Estates neither have trained midwives nor engage them.

Though it is the duty of the Superintendent to send coolies very ill to hospitals, and it is an offence if he does not, yet they are seldom sent. I have met coolies seriously ill on the lines.

The death rate on some estates, in certain years, is remarkable. In 1913, 227 out of 950 coolies on Niwitagala estate died. Last year, I was told, out of 60 infants born on an estate in the Dickoya District 45 died.

3. Food.—Rice is always supplied by the estates. Prices vary from Rs $4\frac{2}{3}$ to $5\frac{1}{4}$ a bushel—(about 18 measures). This is not necessarily due to the difference of the rice in quality but to the fact that the greater the distance of the estate from Colombo the dearer and the worse the rice there is.

A very few estates supply "Coconada Mill" rice which is very good, and some "Rangoon Kallunda" which is also good, but the great majority supply

“Sulai ” and “Pakudi ” rice which are extremely bad and even deleterious. The coolies are forced to take these.

The quantity of rice given per week is:—Men $\frac{1}{4}$ bushel each, women $\frac{1}{4}$ and $\frac{1}{8}$ bushel each, on alternate weeks, and young working boys and girls $\frac{1}{8}$ of a bushel each. It must be remembered that rice is provided in part payment of wages earned ; unless a cooly works the required number of days in a week the allowance of rice is reduced and often stopped. In such cases and when coolies fall ill they are allowed no food (*vide* Appendix (')). It must be repeated here that coolies do seldom get “sick rice ” which the estate is bound to give under ordinance 11 of 1865. section 27.

Coolies often have not enough cash to buy curry stuffs.

Drinking water is obtained from streams but often from wells. A few estates have water taps.

The Ceylon Government has kindly provided almost every estate with an arrack tavern near!

No interval is allowed to take mid-day meals. Many coolies take only two meals, one early in the morning before 6 A.M., and another soon after sunset, while some contrive to find an interval to take a mid-day meal.

On all estates, each dwelling has a piece of ground in front of it, equal to it in size, to grow vegetable upon.

4. Tasks, Hours of Work and Wages.—Cultivation, manuring, weeding, forking and transport are common to all plantations, Tea, Rubber, Cocoa and Coconut. Plucking leaf and pruning on Tea estates, tapping rubber on Rubber estates, picking and breaking pods on Cocoa estates and cultivation on Coconut estates are the chief works. A few of them on Tea and Rubber estates appear to be dangerous. The hills are mostly very steep and almost precipitous and seldom are they flat to any large extent. Standing on such slopes and working is dangerous even in ordinary seasons, but how much more so in rainy seasons? Yet, accidents are happily rare. Plucking tea leaf, picking and breaking cocoa pods and weeding are always done by women and to some extent by young boys and girls. Tapping rubber is also done by women to a certain degree. The rest are done by men. In fact the tasks are not hard in themselves. But the many Supervisors—Sub-Kanganies, Head-Kanganies and Conductors—make them hard. Bribing these immediate superiors prevails, many coolies complain. The Superintendents are responsible for this as they are said to be too prone and anxious to hear complaints against the coolies for their “bad work.”

The hours of work in some districts are from 6 A.M., to 4 P.M., and in others from 6-30 to 4-30 P.M., *ten continuous hours' work a day*. It is complained that the calling horn on many estates is sharp and quick while the horn closing the day's work is lazy and slow. On a Tea estate visited by me the closing horn was heard only at 5-10 P.M., instead of at 4-30 P.M. As was said before, no interval is allowed for mid-day meal. This point I discussed with the Superintendents who while admitting the fact, reason thus:—

- (a) On big estates, coolies working at a great distance from their dwellings would take a long time to go and return for their mid-day meal, and the estates could not afford to allow such a lengthy interval.
- (b) Small estates follow the same custom.
- (c) When the Superintendents after a light refreshment in the morning can afford to wait till twelve or one O'clock for their lunch, the coolies after taking a full meal in the morning can easily afford to wait a few hours more.

Coolies employed in tapping rubber, return home by about one P.M. Coolies employed in all other work cannot be back home before 5 or 5-30 P.M. Even if they are released punctually at the exact

hours, it takes more than an hour to register their names, etc. Factory work is from 6 A.M., to 6 P.M.

The wages of the coolies, though paid monthly, are calculated at so much per day, and no cooly can claim wages for any day on which he has not worked. The great part of the work is done on daily wages while tapping rubber and, on some Tea estates, plucking leaf are contract work.

By far the great majority of the male coolies, from 80 to 90 per cent, working for daily wages, on all plantations, are paid only 33 cents* per day. Pruners get 40, cents per day, but the work goes on only at certain seasons of the year. A considerably low minority of coolies, about 5 per cent, employed in factories, in Superintendents' bungalows and in the work of sweeping lines, is paid at 40 cents per cooly per day.

On all plantations the women, receiving daily wages, are paid 25 cents each per day. For this pay they must turn out a certain amount of work and for more or less than this they are rewarded or fined respectively. Very seldom is their work in excess.

Boys and girls who can show a certain amount of work get each from 16 to 20 cents a day.

The increased wages for Sunday, on which day

* 100 cents make one rupee.

the work is optional, the men getting 40 cents and the women 30 cents each is paid in ready cash on Monday morning.

Coming to work done on contract, on all Rubber estates for tapping rubber and on some Tea estates for plucking leaf wages are calculated on the weight. The rates vary according to the products of the estates. They vary from $\frac{1}{2}$ a cent to $1\frac{1}{2}$ cents on each ounce of rubber, and 1 cent to $1\frac{1}{2}$ cents on each pound of tea leaf.

An industrious cooly can make about 50 cents a day by tapping rubber. Plucking tea leaf by contract, more or less, comes to the same as earning daily wages, viz, 25 cents a day.

Some men, working 26 days in a month without being in bed, can make about $10\frac{1}{2}$ rupees, while many can make only $8\frac{1}{2}$ rupees. Women in the same way can make $6\frac{1}{2}$ rupees and boys and girls between 4 and 5 rupees.

Men, and some women, engaged in the work of tapping rubber can earn from 12 to 15 rupees and from 8 to 10 rupees respectively.

Certainly, the above figures cannot be said to be the average income of the coolies if their consequent illness and the time when women cannot work are taken into consideration.

Most coolies do not get more than 3 rupees in

cash a month. Even those employed in the paying work of tapping rubber get only between 5 and 6 rupees a month in cash. On a Tea estate the accountant showed me the check roll in which I found the wages earned by many coolies, (deducting the price of rice which had been charged at Rs 5 and cents 12 a bushel, and the salary of the dhoby which is 20 cents a month, and in a few cases a certain amount for debts) to be 2 and $2\frac{1}{2}$ rupees only.

In short the earnings of the coolies are scarcely enough to live upon.

Singhalese coolies are employed in some districts to a certain extent and are paid much higher rates than the Indian coolies, though they do not turn out as much work as Indian coolies. Only a small number of the Singhalese coolies live on the estate and others come daily from the villages.

5. Cost of Living.—In Ceylon a cooly needs at least Rs $8\frac{1}{2}$ a month to live upon, while in India Rs 6 is ample. The average price of a bushel of rice in Ceylon is 5 rupees, while it is only Rs $3\frac{1}{2}$ in India. 20 cents for the dhoby for two washes. These two items of expenditure, are paid by the estate, of course, from the wages earned. I give the following table of other necessities:—

Salt	1 Kottu ($\frac{5}{8}$ measure)	18 cents.
Dholl	1 "	18
Coriander	$\frac{1}{2}$ "	9

Chilly	$\frac{1}{2}$ pound	12
Tamarind Fruit	$1\frac{1}{2}$ „	18
Onions		12
Coconuts	2	12
Green species of pulse		9
Salted fish	$\frac{1}{2}$ pound	12
Masi	$\frac{1}{2}$ „	18
Meat		62
Mustard, Saffron, etc.		15
Vegetables		25
Coconut Oil	1 <i>Sindhu</i> (about $\frac{3}{16}$ measure)	18
Gingili Oil	1 „	18
Lamp Oil		24
Match Box	1	3
Betel		12
Arecanut	$\frac{1}{2}$ pound	6
Tobacco		15
Barber	1 shave	6

Total Rs 3.42 cents.

Add the items of rice and dhoby 5.20 „

Total Rs 8.62 cents.

The prices of the things may slightly differ in each district. Many coolies do not earn this amount.

A cooly wants about Rs 125 a year. Here is the detailed account :—

Rice	13 Bushels at the medium rate of Rs. 5 a bushel	Rs. 65.
Dhoby	24 washes	2.40
Dhoties	3 pairs	6.
Upper cloths	3 „	1.
Coats	2 „	3.

Blankets	1	2.
Banians	4	2.
Curry stuffs etc (compare table above)		41.4

Total Rs 122.44 cents.

For women it may cost a little less. Only a small minority of coolies make more than 100 rupees a year. In some cases the earnings of the wife and junior members put together make up the living, while many cannot but get into debts.

6. Advance and Debts.—There is absolutely not a single cooly on any one estate without debts. The only question is about the difference of amount. The debt of each cooly varies from 50 to 200 rupees and more. Seldom does a cooly owe less than Rs 50. The average debt of a cooly is roughly Rs. 100. These debts are said to be accumulated by different ways. First, the amount advanced by the Kangany before recruiting and the travelling expenses. Secondly, value of things bought from the Kangany from time to time. Thirdly, cash lent by Kangany during illness and on other occasions. These debts are first entered in the hand books of the coolies by the Kanakkappullai, and then registered in the check roll. The cooly is defrauded in various ways. More is marked in the book than is really due. Only a few coolies have an idea of their debts. A

graduate of the Madras Presidency, a reliable gentleman, tells me that when he and a few of his friends visited an estate during their pleasure trip in the planting districts, they actually heard and laughed at a Kangany saying 8 and 5 made 15, to which the cooly assented with an *em*. One knowing the ignorance of the coolies would not be surprised at this. The coolies generally buy cloths from the Kanganies who give them on credit. The Kanganies' prices are certainly very exorbitant. Still the coolies prefer buying a thing at double the price on credit, to paying half of the price in ready cash. Apart from the debts to the estates the coolies have private debts of about from 5 to 15 rupees each. Coolies have a tendency to change estates and do change. Before doing so they have to pay their debts. They are always a gang of from 10 to 50. The head of that gang, called Sub-Kangany, obtains a "Tundu," which gives leave to quit the estate after paying the debt marked in it. He takes that *tundu* to another estate and obtains that amount and more if possible to pay off the sundry debts and also to keep cash in hand. Out of this cash the Sub-Kangany is given a good share as bonus for the negotiation. The coolies, sometimes, have no idea of the Sub-Kangany's transaction. Thus, too, coolies' debts are increased year by year. Coolies going from one federated estate to another cannot obtain more than the amount

mentioned in the *tundu*. In such cases, and, if the extra amount demanded is not much, the Head-Kangany often pays out of his own pocket, and gets it back afterwards.

It is not always possible to change from one estate to another. First, when the debts are heavy, the coolies find it difficult to obtain a large amount from other estates; secondly, when the estate is short of labourers, they can hardly obtain the *tundus*.

For the debts, the Head-Kangany is responsible to the estate, and the Sub-Kangany to the Head-Kangany, and, the coolies to the Sub-Kangany.

When the wife, husband or other members die, the debt of the deceased is put to the account of the living. The law does not certainly bind the wife to the husband's debt, yet this illegality freely prevails on Ceylon estates and is practised by the Kangany, the Superintendents countenancing it.

The advances are seldom fully recovered. The Sub-Kanganies chiefly, and Head-Kanganies, and, to a small degree, even estates are said to be losers.

On federated estates a certain amount of the debts of the deceased is written off on estate account. And after a year's service the travelling expenses are cancelled. Only a small number of estates are federated.

It is this cursed advancing system that ruins the coolies. It prevents the estate from increasing the pay, the Superintendents say. It turns Ceylon into an Andaman to coolies, for rarely, very rarely indeed, do the coolies return to India for good. They must return home after paying off debts they are enticed to contract. How can coolies earning 25 and 33 cents repay debts of hundreds of rupees?

A man going there is like one who is transported to the Andamans for life. This happy method of punishing rowdies has been resorted to in Kallal, Rannad District, by Chettiars, who, wishing to get rid of them, have presented large bribes to enable recruiting officers to offer them large advance, and entrap them in Ceylon for life.

7. Freedom of coolies.—This is in some cases seriously interfered with while in others it is not.

• The coolies cannot easily go to Courts (*vide* Appendix C). If the coolies are found going out of the estate for such purposes without the leave of the Superintendents, they are prosecuted as bolters. Naturally, coolies do not ask leave of the Superintendents to go to Courts against them.

Facilities for meeting friends, celebrating festivals, and performing marriages are quite satisfactory. However, outsiders, other than coolies, are not allowed to meet and talk to coolies inside the estate.

8. Punishment.—One is often fined half a day's or a day's wages for bad work. Caning and thrashing also prevail for bad or neglected work or for disobedience. Bolters when caught without warrants are not sent to Courts for justice, but are punished by the Superintendents. When coolies insist on getting *tundus* and the estate cannot afford to spare them, they are punished, caned and kicked (see Appendix A).

9. Treatment of coolies.—That coolies are ill-treated is clear from the foregoing (also from Appendix B). It is supported by the fact that bolting is common. But for the wife, the little ones, and watchmen, many would bolt.

The relations between employers and labourers are bad. This fact is strengthened by the great number of prosecutions before Courts.

Coolies are dismissed from the estate when they become unfit for work, and are left to themselves to shift for the rest of their days.

10. Judicial Administration.—The coolies have many disadvantages. They do not have means to pay for legal advice, to purchase medical certificates to prove they have been assaulted, and have no assistance and do not know how to defend themselves. The only witnesses they can call are their fellow-workers who are unwilling to speak against their masters. Few Magistrates attach any weight at all to the

statement of the coolies. The Labour Law is *too severe*, absurd and inhuman. It sentences to rigorous imprisonment those who fail to work, nay, those who harbour them out of compassion.

11. Recruiting and Recruiters.—The kind of work and wages is always misrepresented, and many great things are promised. That educated men, teachers and clerks, not to speak of carpenters and engine drivers have been captivated by the Recruiters is a clear proof that they are recruited *only* under extremely false pretences.

On Tea and Cocoa estates the Recruiters get Rs. 5 on each cooly recruited, and on Rubber estates Rs. 10.

A Superintendent of an estate, when giving his evidence before a Commission appointed by the Ceylon Government to enquire into the condition of Indian coolies, confessed that he gave Rs. 15 on each cooly recruited and subsequently put that amount to the account of the cooly.

In addition to the fees the Recruiters—Kanganies—are given “pence money.” On every cooly (male and female) working, the Recruiters get 6 cents a day. For instance if 100 coolies work a day, the Kanganies get Rs. 6 that day. On Rubber estates and on some Tea estates, where the wages are paid by weight, the Kanganies get so much for a certain

weight, which would come to more or less the same rate as the above.

Again in addition to recruiting fees and "pence money" the Kanganies are also decently paid. There are Sub-Kanganies under Kanganies who have their own standard arrangements and they are also well off. Kanganies soon become rich and some Kanganies are worth several lakhs each.

12. Morals of Coolies.—I, as an Indian, feel ashamed to deal with this question, which constitutes the gravest blot on the system. The evil is that the number of women is much less than that of men. Troubles among the coolies here are most common. Ah! Superintendents and Kanganies have necessarily to be moved to kindness by the coolies' wife and daughters.

13. Education.—Only a very few estates have provided schools while the great majority has not.

14. Repatriation.—Seldom can a cooly be repatriated for good as said before. When a cooly wants to go home, he or she has to leave wife or husband and children, as security. Without sufficient security, they cannot at all dream of their homes.

Such is a plain statement of the grievances Indian coolies experience in Ceylon, which call for kindly notice and early redress.

Athikkadu Thekkur, }
Ramanad District, }
February 1917. }

Karumuttu Thiagaraja.

APPENDIX A.

Indian Immigrants on Ceylon Estates.

Sir,—While reserving my report for another occasion on the condition of immigrant labourers, to ascertain which I have toured in the planting districts for the last ten days, I hasten to describe to-day an incident that took place on an estate in the Kelani Valley District on the evening of the 1st instant. When I was going up to the bungalow to interview the Superintendent of this estate on the general conditions of estate coolies, I saw some twenty of them coming down crying. On my inquiring what the matter was, they said that for the past three months they had been asking for Tundus, as they had not been well treated there. The tundus were promised from time to time and at last definitely fixed for the 1st instant. So they went to the Superintendent that day. He, they stated, proceeded to cane and kick them, but all except two escaped the thrashing by flight, and were followed by the two beaten ones. One of them had marks of serious injury. He had received a hard kick on his hip which threw him down with force, causing apparently a serious injury to one leg, besides bruises on that leg and arm. He was bleeding profusely.

Medical assistance could be had only six miles away. I waited in vain till 8 p. m. for a car and finally took the coolies in carts to Avisawella Hospital. It was midnight when we reached Avisawella. So nothing was done that night. The next morning the patients were admitted into hospital.

I greatly sympathised with the poor coolies and rendered them all assistance in my power.

Though cases of assault on estates must be expected to be very common, the aggrieved coolies seldom seek redress in courts for want of either means or opportunity.—Yours, etc.,

Karumuttu Thiagaraja.

Colombo, January 3rd.

(We have suppressed the name of the estate. Mr. Thiagaraja's facts are always sound and we strongly advise an inquiry.—Ed. M.L.)

From the Ceylon Morning Leader, January 9 1917.

APPENDIX B.

P. C. RATNAPURA, CASE NO. 28,196.

A Superintendent, Complainant, v. cooly, accused.

ACCUSED AQUITTED.

It was agreed of consent that out of some 60 or 70 odd cases put in against this gang evidence

should be recorded in 8 cases in all : 5 of healthy coolies and 3 of sick coolies, *i. e.*, P. C. C. 28197, 28185, 28125, 28165, 28125, 28174, 28192.

It was agreed that the other cases stand or fall by the result of these cases. I shall write a full judgment in this case and in P. C. 28192, and the reasons given there will apply to all the other cases, they being members of same gang on same estate. I acquit accused in this case and in all the other connected cases.

My judgment must be of some length, and I reserve same for to-morrow.

(Signed.) A. L. CROSSMAN,

Police Magistrate,

October 27, 1914.

Judgment.

In continuation of the above remarks of the cases which were agreed on to be tried and mentioned above I have called for the defence in this case only. In the great majority of these cases it would be impossible to call the accused as they do not know sufficient Tamil, their native language being another South Indian language, of which I have no interpreter. I think the cases can be quite well decided on the prosecution evidence.

The first point which I would emphasize is the scandalous neglect with which the sick coolies—who

form about one-third of the number charged—have been treated.

It is an employer's duty to see that his coolies are properly treated during illness, and sent to hospital if necessary. I consider that complainant in these cases has entirely failed to fulfil this duty. The coolies who are still in health can see the way in which the other members of their gang are neglected in illness and the pitiable state to which they become reduced. I consider this a sufficient cause for quitting service.

I will refer, in particular, to P. C. 28192, in which this complainant has charged one Peria Nagappa.

When this man was brought to court this morning (27th) he was too ill to stand, and was a pitiable sight. I had him examined by the Assistant District Medical Officer, Dr. Nair, who states that he has multiple ulcers in both legs, eczema, anaemia, and general weakness, and that he is unfit to walk. The District Medical Officer considers that he must have been in this condition for a fortnight, and the case is too bad for an estate dispenser to treat, and that the man should have been sent to hospital.

Let us see how he has been treated on the estate. The complainant, Mr. Berry, actually states that he thinks the accused Peria Nagappa is humbugging.

If in so bad a case as that the Superintendent, Mr. Berry, considers that the man is humbugging, *i.e.* feigning illness, it is quite clear that his coolies are being shamefully neglected, and that he does not take the trouble to ascertain whether they are ill or not.

Let us go a little further and look at the evidence of the estate dispenser, Daniel. He states that Peria Nagappa got no sick rice since the 16th instant, and that he has worked since then.

The District Medical Officer states that the man Peria Nagappa must have been in his present state for about a fortnight. It follows then that a cooly in that condition has been left on the estate without sick rice or any proper treatment for the last 10 days. The Superintendent has not thought it necessary to send him to hospital, bad though his condition is.

It is not surprising that the other members of the gang, seeing the serious neglect with which their sick companions are treated on Pinkanda estate, and knowing that it may be the turn of any one of them next, have quitted the estate *en masse*.

I consider they are justified; to remain on the estate under its present superintendent, Mr. Berry, would be a serious risk to their lives.

It is an important duty of a superintendent to send his coolies to hospital for skilled treatment if their illness requires it.

It is clear that in Peria Nagappa's case, and in those of Kistna (P. C. 28125) and Nagappa (P. C. 28174), the dispenser's statement has had no result.

In Kistna's case the District Medical Officer states that he has a large unhealthy ulcer on ankle and that he is unfit to work—also that the ulcer shows no signs of healing, and that the case would be better treated in hospital. He gives practically the same evidence with regard to Nagappa. All those cases should have gone to hospital, yet the superintendent has not sent them.

In fact, in the very worst case, as I mentioned above, Mr. Berry (complainant) believes the man to be merely malingering.

He has left these bad cases to the care of a mere dispenser, who, on his own admission, has done no more than pass the preliminary examination for the Medical Department, and who further admits that he was short of medicine in October (this month), e.g. bandages, indispensable for proper treatment of ulcers.

I regard it as clear that Mr. Berry has failed to fulfil his duty in giving his coolies proper treatment when ill.

Mr. Berry states that no complaints were made to him.

I regret that I am unable to accept Mr. Berry's evidence on this point.

It is improbable in the highest degree that these neglected coolies, who have plenty to state when they come to court, should have allowed themselves to sink into their present bad condition without making any complaints to the superintendent.

If one may judge from his attitude in Peria Nagappa's case, Mr. Berry would be likely to ignore complaints of sickness.

If he regards Peria Nagappa as merely shamming illness, one may well ask what sort of attention and hearing he is likely to give to ordinary complaints.

I consider that the cases of Peria Nagappa, Nagappa, and Kistna show that the complainant habitually neglects sickness among his coolies, and that he fails to send to hospital even bad cases which should be sent there. I invite attention to letter A filed in P. C. 28192, in which Daniel, the dispenser, writes to one John, apparently another dispenser, asking for loan of medicines on October 20.

A reference to the letter will show that the dispenser had not a proper supply of requisite medicine. It is admitted that diarrhoea is very prevalent on this estate, yet the proper drugs for treating it are not available. Mr. Berry has stated in his evidence, in P. C. 28192 that he is not aware of any shortage of medicine in October.

Either Mr. Berry is stating what is not true, or this is an example of his carelessness and lack of supervision. In any case, none but the more trivial cases of sickness should be treated by a common dispenser who has no skilled medical knowledge.

In this connection please see pp. 5, 6 of Dr. Nair's evidence in P. C. 28174, in which he says that Nagappa's ulcers are of long standing and ought to have been cured.

In Kistna's case (P. C. 28, 125) the dispenser Daniel, states that he did not find Kistna to be ill until 24th instant, i.e., 2 days before he appeared in Court with a large ulcer about 3 weeks old—unfit to work and hardly able to walk. During this 3 weeks Kistna has apparently received no sick rice or treatment; no notice was taken of his illness. I refer to the Planters' Legal Manual, P. 53, "it is the master's duty (on estates) to inform himself of all cases of sickness on the estate and to take such steps as he may deem best for the immediate relief of the sick to send to the hospital any labourer requiring treatment."

How far Mr. Berry has neglected these duties is apparent from the evidence in test cases P. C. 28174, 28125, and 28192.

Of the present gang charged, about one-third appear to be sick. This is a very high proportion.

The other members of the gang see the terrible state to which neglect to give proper food and treatment in sickness has reduced many of their number. Each member knows that it may be his turn next, and naturally they are in a state of great alarm.

It is only some 2 or 3 months ago that this same Pinkanda Superintendent (either himself or by his assistant) charged 15 of their coolies with bolting. They were all acquitted, and the condition of some of them was so deplorable that I found it necessary to report the matter to a higher quarter.

Another point I would touch on is this. Since the war the coolies have been paid only half the cash they earn—the other half being set off against their debts—which are ordinarily irrecoverable. So that in effect this is equivalent to putting coolies on half-pay. This involves much hardship to the cooly, who is necessarily driven by shortage of cash to sell his rice to purchase curry stuffs, clothing, and other necessities.

I do not think it necessary to discuss the legal aspects of this matter.

I refer to it only to observe that under such circumstances a superintendent should be careful to see that his coolies are well looked after in other respects.

I hold that the members of this gang had reasonable cause to quit the complainant's employ, and I acquit and discharge them.

(Signed.) A. L. CROSSMAN,
Police Magistrate.

October 28, 1914.

APPENDIX C.

THE DISTRICT JUDGE, RATNAPURA,
to the Government Agent, Sabaragamuwa.

January 10, 1914.

SIR,—I have the honor to report that on the 8th instant I went to Niwitigala estate for a murder inquiry at Watupitiya. After the inquiries Dr. Perera and I started to walk back to the broken bridge, where some 40 coolies started prostrating themselves in front of us and saying that they were starving and had not been given rice, &c. The complaints seemed to be that they worked 6 days, but were only marked for 3 (because they collected insufficient latex or something), or that they worked 6 days but that if they did not work on Sundays as well they were not given rice, or that they were given rice, but their kanganies took half. At any rate, there were complaints of this description. The coolies

were obviously being starved. Many of them were fit in my opinion only for hospital, and I am sure the doctor would support me in this. He, too, told me that from all sides he was hearing similar reports; that 75 per cent of his hospital deaths were coolies from this Niwitigala group; that he had seen Dr. Lunn, and had told him that it was not so much anchylostomiasis etc., that was the matter, but that they were unable to resist such diseases owing to being under-fed.

On my way to Watupitiya I found one cooly lying on his back on the roadside within Niwitigala estate, so weak that he could only walk with difficulty. I do not know what estate he belonged to, but he was obviously dying of starvation.

I also understand that it is the practice in the district to get watchers, so that coolies cannot bolt, or even come to court to lay their complaints. The result is that their only remedy in case like the above is stopped.

I was also told that 4 deaths had occurred on the estate from starvation. The coolies at Niwitigala said so when the doctor and I were going back, and I regret to say that from what I saw I can believe it.

As a temporary measure, I suggest that the doctor be sent to Niwitigala group of estates and asked to send all coolies whom he considers ill to hospital, as

under section 13 of Ordinance No. 17 of 1880 it is the duty of the superintendent to send such coolies to hospital, and it is an offence if he does not, but I do not think that the matter should stop there.

A. P. BOONE,
District Judge and Police Magistrate.

APPENDIX D.

OPINIONS OF THE PRESS.

That the existing conditions of free Indian labour in Ceylon, and in the Federated Malay States are far from satisfactory is a proposition which, in the face of accounts of cruel treatment coming up for public notice, can be hardly disputed. We publish elsewhere an important communication by Mr. K. Thiagaraja, an intelligent and public spirited merchant, on the condition of Indian Labourers in Ceylon giving details which do not certainly afford exhilarating reading. The system should be a vicious one which permits the existence of such conditions as are described by Mr. Thiagaraja. The Committee appointed by Government which recently visited Ceylon and the Malay States should be now drawing up its report, and we would commend to it the description given of Indian free labour by Mr. Thiagaraja. *Hindu* February 28, 17.

We published yesterday from the pen of Mr. Karumuthu Thiagaraja, a Madras merchant who carries on

business at Colombo, an authoritative statement on the plight of Indian Coolies in the Ceylon plantations. Mr. Thiagaraja's statements are serious, and coming, as they do, from a gentleman of his position, they will be read with indignation born of confidence in the writer. We do not know what the Marakayar-Marjoribank's Commission has to say; Mr. Thiagaraja carried on the independent enquiry, actuated by the highest of motives. He closely observed the condition of coolies, with a view towards its amelioration. We commend the public spirit of Mr. Thiagaraja, and hope that the Madras Government will take note of the very serious allegations that he makes and share the indignation that they will rouse in the public mind. It is easy, not merely for the irresponsible, but even for the serious minded, to assert that mere appeals to the Government at such a crisis would do no good, that public men and public organisation must be actuated by the spirit of Mr. Thiagaraja and must bound out the Kanganies from their pray. Much can be done in this direction and, we have no doubt, steps have already been taken to ensure action in this direction. But the Government must act. It must act sternly and without loss of time. Who but "our Government," as Dewan Bahadur Kesava Pillai described the Government of Madras, could feel as strongly as we do over the revelations of human suffering and degradation contained in the independent report of Mr. Thiagaraja? *Indian Patriot* March 3, 17.

**INDIAN EMIGRANT
ON
CEYLON ESTATES**

A WHITE-WASHING COMMISSION

A Criticism

BY

Karumuttu Thilagharaja Chettiar.

FOREWORD.

This criticism, dealing with a report on the condition of Indian Labourers on the Estates in Ceylon by N. E. Marjoribanks Esq., I. C. S., and the Hon'ble Khan Bahadur A. K. G. Ahamad Tambi Marikkayar, Sahib Bahadur, has already appeared in the Indian and the Ceylon Press. The "Madras Mail", the "Times of Ceylon" and the "Ceylon Observer", who resented my independent inquiry, have neither published this criticism nor have they remarked on it. I am afraid that in this case it is not true that 'silence gives consent'.

Athikkadu Thekkur,
Ramnad District. }
August 1917.

Karumuttu Thiagaraja.

A White-Washing Commission. *

1. *Suppression of Facts.*

1. Introductory.—The Commission to enquire into the methods of recruiting and conditions of Indian labour on the estates in Ceylon and Malaya, sent in its report last February. Few perhaps have taken care to study it. In doing so, these can hardly have not felt the painful impression that the Commission has palliated defects rather than pointed them out.

2. Notes of Evidence Absent.—A report, such as this is expected to be, ought to furnish us with notes of evidence taken on the spot, which form the basis of conclusions arrived at by the trusted Commissioners. But such notes of evidence as one finds in carefully drawn up reports, are not forthcoming. A striking contrast is that whereas we have many pages of statistics drawn from a variety of sources, there is no record of evidence drawn from the lips of coolies—no questions put by the Commissioners to the poor labourers, and no answers to them—to bear out the general statements set down in this report.

* This criticism has already appeared in the press.

3. Ceylon Section.—I am dealing only with this portion of the report.

4. Only Six Estates Visited.—We should have expected the deputed enquirers to visit a large number of estates in order to pass a fair and true judgment upon them; it is dangerous to generalise from a few particular cases. But these Commissioners confess (paragraph 1) to having examined but a few estates. There are about 2000, estates in all in Ceylon; but they have visited only 6! To visit 6 estates, perhaps the 17 days spent in Ceylon by one Commissioner and 22 days by the other Commissioner might have sufficed; but they were content to give no more time than this when the hard and important task was committed to them by the Madras Government of scrutinising the condition of things in an island containing about 2,000 estates.

5. Recruiting.—Only one Commissioner, the Hon'ble Khan Bahadur Ahmad Tambi Marakkayar was deputed to consider (para. 1) how the recruiting was done; while the other, Mr. Marjoribanks, remained in Colombo "getting statistical and other information." To do fair justice to the task entrusted to them, we should not have supposed that the Commissioners would have thought of saving time by inadequate work, but would have conjointly instituted enquiries regarding the methods of professional recruiters, and allotted sufficient time to it. It was very necessary

that in such an important question as recruiting, both Commissioners should have made special enquiries. Let us see how Mr. Marakkayar has done his work. Here the report, we should have imagined, would be at its very best. It tells us (para. 18) that the *Kangany* defrauds the labourer recruited, by paying him less than he is entitled to, say Rs. 10 instead of Rs. 30. This is a very great evil indeed. But is it all? Is it likely that the regue who thus defrauds the labourers recruited, does not also recruit them under false pretences? Now, there was a very general complaint in the press that workmen were seduced from India to Ceylon under false pretences. But the Commissioners, who ought to have known what the general complaint and grievance was, should have made a point of investigating the matter. In this respect one looked forward to a more faithful accomplishment of duty. They do not tell us whether the charge brought against the recruitment is true or false.

6. Wages.—We may next take up the question of wages and see how far the Commissioners have acquitted themselves of their charge. Compare their report with my own observation:—

Wages of	According to	
	Commission's Report (para. 36)	My Observation (para. 4)*
1. Pruners	40 to 45 cents†	40 cents
2. Pluckers	25 „ 30 „	25 „
3. Factory labourers	50 „ 60 „	40 „

The difference between the figures is striking. Nor is this all. Pruners have higher wages, it is true, but only at certain seasons of the year when there is work for them, and not all through the year. The rates I have set down are the standard wages given all over Ceylon estates. Apart from the fact that the wages given to pruners and factory labourers are not nearly so high as those stated by the Commission, and that pruners are given higher wages only when there is pruning possible at certain seasons of the year—pruners and factory labourers are the few, and the non-pruners and non-factory labourers are the many, and *these get only 33 cents a day*. This important fact finds no place in the Commission's Report. Can we overlook this serious omission? If we are to consider whether the pay is sufficient, we must consider not the few but the many, not what goes on only a few months of the year, but what is general all through the year.

* The number refers to a paragraph in my report dated February last.

† 100 cents make one rupee.

7. Cost of Living.—Is the cost of living cheaper in Ceylon than in India? If we are to rely upon the Commissioners (v. para. 39) as they have relied upon one Superintendent of “25 years’ experience” it is as cheap to live in Ceylon as in India, given that money bears the same value in both countries. But living is much cheaper in India than in Ceylon. So that if one had the same pay it would be better for him to live in India. Well then, are we to base ourselves upon the statement of one Superintendent who tells us that 6 rupees a month is enough to live in Ceylon? My investigation, made not before one Superintendent (Superintendents are not able to tell of the expenses of a cooly’s kitchen) but before coolies who have to buy provisions week after week from the shopkeeper, leads me to the conclusion (v. my report para. 5) that a man needs not less than Rs. 8 and as. 10 a month to enjoy the bare necessities of life. *Kanganies* themselves, who are better able to speak of this matter than a Superintendent, bear out my statement. Mr. A. L. Crossman, Police Magistrate, Ratnapura, when giving evidence before a Commission appointed in 1916 by the Ceylon Government to inquire into the condition of Indian labourers in the Province of Sabaragamuwa, states that his own investigation shows that a cooly ordinarily requires a little over Rs. 4 in addition to the rice allowance which amounts to about Rs. 5—making the total more than 9 rupees a month.

8. Coolies to Be Fed Like Prisoners!—

A curious remark is made in the report (para. 39) after the statement about Rs. 6 as the amount required for a cooly to live decently in Ceylon. Is it not strange to speak of prisoners in jail being fed on 73 rupees per head per annum *i. e.*, 6.1.4 a month? Are coolies to be fed like prisoners? They may as well go and get fed in jail where they will not be deliberately over-worked as they are on the estate, which we shall show later on.

9. Should the Cooly Emigrate?— It thus appears at least that the wages in India and in Ceylon are nearly the same, but as the cost of living is dearer in Ceylon than in India, it is better for the provident cooly to stay at home. But what makes it still more advantageous for him is that though the wages per day in theory is the same in both fields of labour, the emigrant can practically earn less in Ceylon than in India, as the evidence recorded by the Sabaragamuwa Commission shows. The state of affairs in one province is not very different from that in the others. This is by the way. Mr. R. N. Thaine, Government Agent,* Sabaragamuwa, in a report to the Ceylon Government on the hardships of coolies writes:—

“As regards the complaint that the coolies never had enough money or wages to enable them to purchase sundries, &c., it is a fact that in the majority of cases coolies only receive as their wages at the end of the month small sums varying between 75 cents and Rs. 3.”

*Corresponding to a District Collector.

Moreover, some opinions incidentally expressed in the present report, too, strengthen our case; such as (para. 39):—

“Our impression is that while the average labourer and his family make enough to feed and clothe themselves quite as well, if not better, than in India, they ordinarily do not accumulate appreciable sums as savings.”

Now then, does not the cooly leave his home because he expects something better than he can find by staying in India? If it is not so, why should the cooly emigrate at all?

10. Slavery.—There is another important fact that has to be considered immediately after the point just mentioned. It is impossible for a cooly to start life on Ceylon estates without a debt. The report very honestly admits this evil. It says (para. 14):—

“This sum [money advanced when recruiting] together with the amount of the emigrant’s travelling expenses and food till he reaches the estate in Ceylon forms the debt with which each labourer starts life in Ceylon.”

Not only does “the state of indebtedness” act “as a deterrent to thrift and industry” as the Commission says, but it soon reduces the cooly to a state of veritable slavery. The report indirectly admits this fact. For it tells us in all fairness (para. 27):—

“Many estates early realised that the labourers were at the mercy of the kanganies in the matter of their indebtedness.”

And in another place (para. 34):—

"The labourer thus is free to leave his employer at a month's notice, or at any time for reasonable cause. But under the kangany system described above, whereunder the labourer is a kangany's debtor, and the latter in his turn indebted to the estate, taken in conjunction with the conservatism of the Tamil labourer, it is not surprising that the labourer does not realise his legal position. That the kangany considers that he has some sort of proprietary right in the labourer and that the labourer accepts this position is abundantly clear from the manner in which the labourer is, and allows himself to be, taken from employer to employer by his kangany and accepts the increasing load of debt thrust on him in the process."

The report continues to give truthful testimony (para. 35):—

"Thus a labourer who has not the capacity or opportunity to rise to the position of a kangany or sub-kangany, remains on an estate under a debt which rarely diminishes but often increases."

For the poorly paid cooly, frightfully defrauded by the *Kangany* and finding it difficult to keep soul and body together, to repay the heavy "debt" is certainly out of the question; and to resort to law to seek freedom, he is too ignorant, nor has he got the means and facilities. So some try to escape the heavy burden of debt and slavery by "bolting." The Commission readily admits that "In 1915 the number of 'bolters' from federated estates was 8,894", a fact that certainly does not speak highly of the contentment of coolies. As a result, most, if not all, die like slaves.

And yet Ceylon emigration is 'free', not 'indentured'!

11. Coolies Are Overworked.—The report says nothing of the *10 continuous hours of work a day*, from 6 a. m., to 4 p. m., without break. The Superintendents honestly admit this condition of affairs. The evidence recorded in the Sabaragamuwa Report too bears out this fact. Coolies in India do not work for more than 7 or 8 hours at the utmost a day, and that, not without a break of 2 hours. Important as this matter is, the Commission does not appear to have considered the question.

12. Starvation of Coolies.—The law binds the estate to treat and nurse the coolies during illness. But the estates neglect them. “The first point which I would emphasize is the scandalous neglect with which the sick coolies ... have been treated” are the pathetic words of the judgment in P. C. 28,196 of 1914 of Ratnapura. Mr. A. P. Boon, District Judge, writes (January 1914):—

“40 coolies started prostrating themselves in front of us and saying they were starving ... The coolies were obviously being starved. Many of them ... were fit only for hospital ... He [Dr. Perera], too, told me that from all sides he was hearing similar reports ... that they were unable to resist such diseases [hook-worm] owing to being under-fed ... I was also told that 4 deaths had occurred ... from starvation ... from what I saw I can believe it.”

Dr. Lunn, Inspecting Medical Officer, refers to a number of half-starved coolies, in his report dated January 1914. The Sabaragamuwa Commission finds such allegations wholly true; not to speak of my

appalling experience. I must here reiterate that the conditions are not very different comparing one province with another. Startling as this revelation of the existing state of things is, the Commission ignores the question and passes over the matter in silence.

13. Judicial and Extrajudicial Administration: Acts of Injustice and Atrocity.—We expected the Commission to strongly condemn the so-called law which sentences to rigorous imprisonment those coolies who fail to work or who leave the estate without the permission of the Superintendants; why it even sentences those who harbour the coolies merely out of compassion. But the commission is, unfortunately, silent upon this point.

Nevertheless, the report truly admits (para. 44.):—

“Most estates appear to inflict small fines for petty neglects or bad work. Such fines seem however to be illegal having regard to the provision of section 6 of Ordinance 13 of 1889.”

Acknowledging as the Commission does, on the one hand, that the small fines imposed upon coolies are frequent, and, on the other, that they are illegal, it does not, however, lay much stress upon the point, or suggest any remedies against an evil which may appear small to the master but is very hard on the cooly. If most estates are acknowledged to have committed positive acts of injustice of this kind in small matters, one may not claim that they are not immune from the propensity to commit acts of greater injustice.

The report says (para. 31):—

“Large increase in a labourer’s account in the past were noticeable on account of the relatives who had died or absconded, the amounts of their debts being added to that of the family or sometimes, even of the gang.”

Note the apologetic expression “in the past”! Probably this evil was not noticed at the time the Commission visited the estates. Hence the expression “in the past.” This grave illegality not only existed “in the past,” but exists even at present. A debt of this nature is certainly not recoverable in any Court of Law in Ceylon or in India. Alas! the illiterate cooly does not understand his legal position.

The Commission states in passing (para. 44):—

“Corporal punishment is recognised to be illegal and is certainly not common or usual though of course there are bad masters in the island as well as bad servants.”

The Commissioners, however, do not set in relief the fact that there are atrocities of a serious nature committed on the estates from time to time. There is, at all events, need of emphasizing the point if the object of the Commission is to bring help to the poor cooly from high quarters, seeing that he cannot do anything himself, while his rich and influential master can take the law into his own hands and has the means to escape the punishment of the Court.

I cite three instances from the well-known *Ceylonese*:

(i) “According to Muniyanma, an eye witness, the accused [an estate watchman] came up with a gun to the cooly lines, and asked the deceased, among others, why she

was not at work. The woman replied she would go to work the next day. The accused then shot her dead, and ran off, but was soon secured by some coolies and handed over to the authorities. Karupai, Soccala Naran and Mariamma, all of them eye witness, told much the same story. ... The jury brought in a verdict of not guilty of murder, but guilty of a rash and negligent act. His Lordship pointed out ... that the act could not have been both rash and negligent, and ... the panel submitted ... a verdict of guilty of a rash act. His Lordship ... imposed a penalty of one hundred rupees." (January 30th, 1917.)

(ii) "A planter was convicted of having caused grievous hurt to a cooly in his employ. That was a very serious offence according to our Law. But the Magistrate who convicted the planter shocked the public conscience by fining him ten rupees and detaining him at the Bar till the rising of the Court." (February 6th, 1917.)

(iii) "The accused [a planter] is reported to have said that he told the complainant, the Kangany on his estate ... 'to go on his hands and knees.' And by way of speeding the parting guest the accused called him a 'nalla madu.' ... The accused ordered the complainant to kneel down. If he had refused ... accused is reported to have stated that 'he would have killed him' ... The Magistrate considered the accused 'technically guilty' of wrongful restraint, and fined him ten rupees. (April 25th, 1917.)

May cases of such revolting natures be passed over in silence?

The report tells us (para. 41):—

"An employer has no power of arrest in respect to a servant who absconds or rather offends."

But the estates employ watchmen and supply them with arms to prevent coolies from leaving the estate. Nay more, the estates advertise offering rewards for the arrest of "bolted" coolies, and males and females

are arrested without Court warrants by private individuals.

Instances like these are not to be quietly ignored by an impartial Commission, but rather to be commented upon.

The Commission remarks with reference to the year 1915 (para. 43.):—

“The total number of cases against labourers (44,09) and against employers (26) is very small in comparison with the size of the labour force (about 400,000 workers) and the number of employers (over 2,000).”

If the Commission had considered the question whether coolies enjoy sufficient facility for proceeding to Court to lodge complaints, it would not have come to such a satisfactory conclusion.

14. Hardships at Mandapam.—The report says nothing of the complaint in the Quarantine Camp at Mandapam—whether the coolies are well-fed, properly housed or not. The Commissioners instead of investigating and reporting on the complaints, give us (para. 20) a bare description of the official version.

15. Some Contrast.—A remarkable contrast with the grave omissions is the space given (para. 4 to 12) to the strength and distribution of the labour force and its sufficiency to meet the demand; as if the poor slaves could take advantage of the competition for labour. Three pages are devoted to it out of 22

pages, not counting the statistics. Again one page is allotted (para. 55) to the description of hook-worm disease besides an extract of 3 pages (pp. 76 to 78) in the appendix. Had Lord Pentland's Government wanted information of this nature it would have easily got it from one of the Doctors in Madras. It surely has not sent out Commissioners to get information available in Madras.

It is to be concluded, from a consideration of the foregoing remarks, that the Commissioners have taken a hasty view of things in Ceylon and that a more mature judgment would have altered greatly not a small number of their statements; or is this report to be taken in the light of an apology for the planting interest as opposed to labour interest?

So much for *suppressio veri*. Tomorrow we shall consider some statements made in the official account.

Athikadu Thekkur,
Ramnad District,
August 22nd 1917. }

KARUMUTTU THIAGARAJA.

A White-Washing Commission.

II. Mistaken in Portraying Facts.

Today I undertake to show that even such facts as are recorded in Messrs. Marakkayar and Marjoribanks' Report are not quite correct.

16. Federation.—The report says (para.28):— “Only some 75 per cent of the estates in Ceylon joined this Federation ”; whereas up to April 1915 only 858 estates had joined it—it must be, I reckon, about 42 per cent. Since 1915, the number must be on the decrease. For it worked so badly that it has of late been abolished.

The report states (para. 31):— “The debts of deceased labourers are now written off by all federated estates.” This is by no means a matter of course. Compare the rule of the Federation, which I quote:—

“Rule 28. On the certified death of any registered cooly (not Kangany) his or her individual debt not exceeding Rs. 50 - shall be written off against the Estate and the remainder of the debt shall be debited to the Kangany or written off at the discretion of the Agents or Proprietors on the recommendation of the Superintendent.”

Needless to say that seldom is a recommendation of this nature made or accepted. It is rarely that a cooly owes the estate anything less than Rs. 75, and the balance which the *Kangany* has to meet is without exception recovered from the cooly's family.

Do not the above statements of the Commission disclose some lack of seriousness in the writing?

17. Island Free from Foul Diseases.—

The report says (para 62):—

“Cases of plague, cholera and small-pox are rare amongst the estate population. In fact, these diseases are not prevalent in the island.”

But if it is true that “these diseases are not prevalent in the island” how could the Chairman at the meeting of the Colombo Municipal Council on the 25th May last, announce 169 cases of plague in the year as compared to 69 in 1916 and to 33 in 1915?

18. Housing and Sanitary Conditions.—

The report says (para. 45) that housing and sanitary conditions are quite satisfactory. My experience is that it is not so. Ventilation has not been specially cared for. More than four persons occupy a room of 12 feet by 10 feet. Dr. Lunn, Inspecting Medical Officer in the Civil Department, refers in his report to the insanitary state of certain lines he visited. The Sabaragamuwa Commission says that it visited a large number of estates in the Ratnapura District and “many did not come up to the standard of sanitation.” Dr. T. S. Nair, Assistant District Medical Officer,

when giving evidence before the same Commission says the coolies "are kept too over crowded." "Look at this picture and on that!"

19. Gifts after Chidbirth.—The law requires the estate to bear all expenses during the month after confinement. The report, therefore, says (para. 57) :—"The general practice is to give the mother Rs. 2, and half a bushel of rice." In my investigation, however, I found that this Rs. 2 is debited to her account; and the Sabaragamuwa Report corroborates this fact. It says:—

"The practice of debiting the woman or her husband with the cash advance given to her after confinement, appears to us to be contrary to the Law."

20. Gifts to Children.—The law also urges on the estate to see that children under the age of one year receive proper care and nourishment. So, the report says (para. 57) :—

"Some estates give all non-working (i.e. non-earning) children one meal a day free at four in the afternoon. On other estates children not yet of an age to do any work are mustered once a month and each mother is given 1/8 bushel of rice. On some estates, a mother is given a bonus (Rs. 5 or more) if her child lives to be one year old."

When speaking of "some estates", "other estates" and again "some estates" in the above quotation, it is not very clear whether the Commissioners mean to give an account of all the estates or a few. I do not think even a few estates do what the Commission says. I did not hear of any of these facts

during my investigation. Nor is there any record of any of them in the Sabaragamuwa Report. Is this the practice? Or is it a regulation that remains a dead letter?

21. Statistics Misleading.—The Commission says (para. 6):—

“A large proportion (about 40 per cent) of the labourers going to Ceylon through the Labour Commission, during the last few years is composed of persons who have been in the island before.”

Now what would be the reader's impression after his perusal of this statement? He would be tempted to smile at those speaking of the ill-treatment of the coolies. For how could the coolies think of returning if they were ill-treated? What is the fact? Do they return willingly? This is what we should consider. Circumstances force them to return. They place a substantial security before leaving, without which they cannot go from the estate. Mr. A. L. Crossman, when giving evidence before the Sabaragamuwa Commission says:—

“In the case of Tamils, when one is allowed to go someone else of the family is detained. I remember one case, 28,705 in which Mr. Berry, of Delwella, stated with regard to a small gang, consisting of a husband, wife, and two children, that he would not allow all the gang to go to India together.”

When a man goes back to India, leaving a wife and children behind, is it surprising that he returns? Can we conclude that he is drawn back to Ceylon by

love of the estate and the *Kangany*? From the statement quoted above, made by the Commission Report, it will appear that the Commissioners have been misled into the insinuation that the labourer returns to Ceylon because he loves to do so. And the reader is apt to conclude the same, whereas the labourer returns because he is morally compelled.

22. Repatriation.—

"Some labourers, no doubt, return to India permanently after ... finding the condition unsuitable."

So says the Commission (para. 6). But can those who are said to find the conditions unsuitable return to India permanently? Compare that remark with what the report says by the way (para. 65) and see whether it is easy for the cooly to return to India:—

"The debt which practically every labourer owes his kangany or his estate prevents him leaving except for short visits to India with the leave of his employer or except by 'bolting'."

Now, not some, as the Commission says, but the vast majority of the coolies find the condition unsuitable, as the unscrupulous *Kangany* recruits them only under false pretences. Can they all or even some of them return to settle down in India? It is impossible, except in very rare cases, as they cannot repay their debts to the estate. Quite recently, as late as February 28th last, "Devadass" bore testimony, not without proofs, in the columns of the popular "Hindu", how a mechanic was enticed away

to Ceylon and forced to do cooly work; how and with what difficulty he managed to get home after his relatives in India had paid Rs. 50—12—0 to the Labour Commission at Trichinopoly for his passage. Again, *all* the coolies examined by the Sabaragamuwa Commission complained that the conditions are absolutely different from what they expected them to be and begged the Commission to send them home. The writers of the report are not cognisant of this.

The Commission reports (para. 65):—

“Labourers who break down in health and become unfit for work on the estate are usually sent back to India at the expense of the estate, but there is no law on the subject and no special organization to control the matter.”

Note the benevolent tone “are usually sent back”. When the planters do not do what they should do according to law, (see paras. 12, 13 and 20 of the present article) is it at all likely that they practise philanthropy when there is no law or special organization to control the matter?

Mr. Fritz Kunz, Principal of Ananda College, Colombo, in the course of a heartrending description of “A victim to our labour system” tells us (see *Ceylonese*, February 4, 1917):

“On account of his frequent illness he was asked by the Kangany to leave the estate. It should be noted that he was not regarded as a chattel because he owed the estate nothing. He left the estate a sick man and the possessor of 25 cents in Ceylon money ... What state is Ceylon in when sick men can be cast out like dogs when

their usefulness is at an end, and turned away from the natural asylum of the sick ? ”

23. Sex Ratio.—The percentage of men and women among the arrivals for 61 years is 73·45, and 16·75 respectively (and children 9·80)—a fact which the Commission tries to explain away. It argues (para. 6):—

“Comparing this with the proportion of males and females among the Tamil labour force in 1911 (234,594 males and 205,708 females) it is evident that a low proportion of women among each year’s immigrants does not necessarily mean a low proportion of women in the resident immigrant population.”

If the proportion was somewhat fair in 1911 does it necessarily mean that it will be so in the following years as well, especially, too, when the percentage of women in the subsequent years is very poor.

The Commission observes (para. 6):—

“The men return after a time and go back again with their women folk in many cases thus getting counted twice over.”

But compare this with what the same Commission says (para. 65.):—

“Leave from the employer [to go to India] can be readily obtained by those who have settled down to family life on the state, but probably not easily by others.” How then can the unmarried men return to India and get back to Ceylon with their women-folk “thus getting counted twice over”? Again do men alone return and go back “getting counted twice over”?

If we compare the *percentage* of women who arrive in Ceylon to that of women who depart from the island, we find the latter to be greater than the former. Comparatively a greater percentage of women depart than arrive. So, whereas 30,000 men and 5,000 women arrived in 1900 in Ceylon, 10,000 men and 2,500 women departed in 1901. So, if a certain number of men is counted twice over, a comparatively larger number of women is also counted twice over. Why overlook the latter fact which is obviously more conspicuous, and observe only the former which is comparatively less remarkable?

"The women more often settle in their new homes and their daughters grow up, marry and settle there too. Thus in course of time the inequality in numbers between the sexes tends to disappear,"

plead the Commission (para. 6). That the inequality has not disappeared in the course of 61 years has also not struck them nor the fact that the percentage of women arriving every year continues to be very low. The Commission do not discuss the present proportion of the sexes in the manner of the critical historian.

"...The sexes are fairly evenly matched in the Tamil labour population"

declare the Commissioners (para. 68). According to the census of 1911, the Commission says, "there were 239,111 males and 209,038 females." Even if we accept this to be quite correct for our special purpose, every seventh or eighth man has no wife. Can we then

say that "the sexes are fairly evenly matched"? In face of the fact that the proportion of women in the world is greater than that of men it is very significant and regrettable that on the Ceylon estates the proportion of men to women is roughly 7 to 6 — a very large and unsatisfactory proportion, indeed—the significance of which the Commissioners rather underrate.

"Excepting new arrivals, the labourers live in families on the estate and there are no undesirable features due to a lack of women,"

the Commission reports (para. 68). But what about the "new arrivals"? Are these "new arrivals" above ordinary human weakness? Had the commissioners used more discretion, they would not have committed themselves to such discordant and dangerously broad statements.

24. To Sum up the Work of the Commission.—The notes of evidence required to clinch statements are conspicuous by their absence. General conclusions may be arrived at only by the examination of a fairly good proportion of particulars; but the Commission has visited only a few estates. Important as the system itself of recruiting is, it does not tell us whether it is an evil or not, in its method of working. It sets down rates of wages which on verification prove to be incorrect. Easy as it is to find out the cost of living, the Commissioners, however, have underestimated it. Does the cooly gain by going to Ceylon from India? This question is

unanswered. Again we are not told whether the emigrant retains his liberty or becomes a slave. One might think after reading the report that he is not overworked, whereas facts point quite the other way. The Commissioners speak of the law that the cooly must be fed during his illness, and are silent regarding its frequent infringement with immunity. The law in Ceylon is extremely hard on the cooly and benevolent towards the master, and yet the Commission maintains silence on the subject. Many are the hardships of the quarantine camp, they are not dwelt upon, nor referred to. Relevant points are skipped over, and irrelevant points such as the supply of coolies meeting the demand are dilated upon. The debts of deceased labourers are not entirely written off by Federated estates. The Federation has unfortunately, been abolished since. Rare though plague is supposed to be in the report under review, there were according to the Municipal Chairman's statement 169 victims to it in 1917. Its notion of sanitation must narrow, if a house 12 feet by 10 feet for four coolies with their children, is considered a satisfactory condition. Whatever it may say of gifts to women after childbirth and to children, there is no evidence that they are given to children and that the practice as regards women is contrary to law. The statistics are presented to us in such a manner that one is apt to conclude that the cooly returns to Ceylon after his visit to India because he likes to return, which impression the Commission itself creates;

whereas a close study of the figures leads us to quite a different inference. Again it magnifies the situation of the suitability of the conditions to the cooly, and minimises the difficulty of his being repatriated. The fact is few, if any, return, it being next to impossible for the cooly to get back to India when once he has bound himself to the *Kangany* and the estate. It does not blush to say that the proportion of the sexes which is a very important question—is “fairly evenly matched”, when a scrutiny of the figures reveals to us the alarming truth that there are only 39 women to every 61 men! Can I not, therefore, be excused for calling it “A White-Washing Commission”?

Now to turn to the good side, little though it be, of the report, the Commission is very liberal in exposing the ‘unscrupulous’ *Kangany* and his worse methods. Another praiseworthy feature is that it refers to the “suicidal policy of issuing *tundu*” (a kind of leaving certificate mentioning the debt on payment of which he will be relived from that jail—estate)—which is the cause of the chronic debt of the forsaken cooly.

25. Conclusion.—I have dealt with a number of the flaws in the report, though not with all nor in complete detail. Even those I have indicated show, I am afraid, that Mr. Marjoribanks, who may be supposed to have written the report, has, however unintentionally, used the white-washing brush freely, and the Honourable Khan Bahadur has, with energy,

seconded his innocent efforts. The report, indeed, is meagre and not very creditable.

The public, we may conclude, was right when it anticipated from the men chosen to be Commissioners that the burden of work committed to them was above their strength. Nor has it been disappointed. Who is to blame? The Commissioners are to blame if they accepted a task to which they felt themselves unequal. The selection of gentlemen was not a happy one. Had the Government chosen more qualified men we should now be in possession of more historical facts; the sufferings of the coolies would have been made public, and called for redress from the British Government which is chivalrously striving to right wrongs.

The *Madras Mail*, the *Ceylon Times*, and especially the *Ceylon Observer* have censured me for the offence I had committed in privately investigating and reporting on the condition of the poor coolies on Ceylon estates. I consider that their remarks spring not from self-interest but from a Commission report, hastily drawn up, and rather uncritical. The Ceylon Government also seems to have suspected my motives, and instituted enquiries regarding my person and character. I have naturally incurred the displeasure of the Planting interests of Ceylon. But I regret this less than the attitude of the Government and the Editors who are expected to judge impartially and to give both sides a hearing, and especially me who am

quite disinterested in the matter and but wish wrongs to be righted. I, therefore, indulge the hope that the present review may throw light on the subject and draw the impartial Government and the Editors of these papers to the side of human suffering, and play the Samaritan to the forlorn cooly.

Athikadu Thekkur,
Rammal Pickett,
August 23rd 1917. }

KARUMUTTU THIAGARAJA.

APPENDIX.

Opinions of the Press on the Commission.

A Perfunctory Report.

The Report on the Indian Labour Emigrating to Ceylon and Malaya prepared by Mr. N. E. Marjoribanks and the Hon'ble Khan Bahadur A.K.G. Ahmad Thambi Marakkayar, Sahib Bahadur
is a perfunctory performance of hardly any value for the purpose for which the Committee was appointed. For all that we know, the greater portion of the compilation which has been dignified into a report, might have been written by the Committee without leaving the City of Madras.

We do not propose now to re-state the statistical information given in the report of the Committee, but even such facts as are mentioned go to strengthen the case for a detailed inquiry into the system of free labour as it is being worked in Ceylon and Malaya. The frightful state of indebtedness described the other day in these columns by Mr. Thiagaraja is incidentally supported by the Committee which says that in spite of various measures taken, the average debt of a cooly is Rs. 70.

What value, then, can be attached to an investigation which gives the public bare historical and

statistical information and refrains from telling the Government which appointed it what further measures are necessary to improve the conditions of Indian labourers and what precautions should be taken in respect of recruitment? The Committee appears almost to think that there is not much to complain about in regard to either of these matters. We think that this conclusion is wrong; there is a clear evidence that matters are very grave and even in the report there are certain facts mentioned which lend support to this view. *But the public cannot rely on this document for an impartial, accurate and detailed account of the condition of Indian labour in Ceylon and Malaya*, and we have to look forward to the unofficial deputation for a fair and full description and for recommendations for improving the system. In the meanwhile, we must ask the Madras Government and the Government of India not to rely very much on the compilation which has now been published. (*Hindu*, March 7, 1917.)

One-Sided Opinion.

It will be seen that this report is absolutely devoid of suggestions, [or] of any comments on the evidence of ill-usage laid before the Courts, and of other serious complaints made by responsible men. Our readers will do well to compare it with that of Mr. Karumuttu Thiagaraja, published in our columns on Feb. 28th last. It might as well have been written

in their studies from the printed returns available.
(*New India*, March 7, 1917.)

... ..
We wish very much that some private persons would visit Malaya, and bring us back information of a fuller character than is presented to us in these formal reports, which do not help us to estimate the real condition of the coolies employed. *That the deputation has seen that which the planters wished them to see, and no more, is obvious.* Taking the two reports together, Malaya, seems better than Ceylon. But we wonder what we should learn if we had a Mr. Karumuttu Thiagaraja to report to us about the conditions of emigration to Malaya. (*New India*, March 8, 1917.)

Begging the Question.

... ..
As we have said, as a document recording the rules and regulations in force, and the conditions of labourers as seen at first glance, the report is valuable; but those who would examine it with a view to find out the truth or otherwise of the serious allegations of oppression and mischief such as come from independent source like that of Mr. Karumuttu Thiagaraja, nothing but disappointment awaits. The Commissioners have approached the question not with the spirit of enquirers, but of learners. They have found excellent rules in the books, but they have also

found that the ignorance of the cooly enslaves him to the Kangany. *Is it or is it not a fact that the Tamil cooly in the Ceylon plantations is harshly treated?* Is it or is it not a fact that very serious instances of ill-treatment of coolies have come from the Malaya Peninsula, in fact to such an extent that the Government once notified publicly that there was no Protector of Emigrants in Malaya? We find no answer to this important question in the report of the Commissioners. It was for this answer that Indian public opinion demanded a Commission of Enquiry. If, as a result of the report, the Government would prohibit the emigration of illiterate and ignorant men who could be led like cattle by Kanganies, a real step would have been taken to satisfy the public. As it is, the Commission, whose report is placed before the public, need not have been appointed at all. (*Indian Patriot*, March 7, 1917.)

No Opinions.

Mr. Marjoribanks, I. C. S., and the Hon'ble Khan Bahadur Tambi Marakkayar
have now submitted their report which has been
placed on the Editor's table
we must say that, at a first glance, we find it disappointing. It contains a number of statements of facts, but few, if any, expressions of opinion as to whether the actual working conditions are good or bad. For example, the account of the quarantine

camp at Mandapam is a bare description of the official procedure, as follows:—

“The great majority of the labourers going to Ceylon at present are quarantined at the Ceylon Government camp at Mandapam. The quarantine is for six days. All who do not bear marks of recent vaccination are vaccinated, and all cases of contagious or infectious diseases are not allowed to proceed. The clothes and effects of all labourers are also disinfected. The camp etc., etc.”

It was surely not necessary to send two Commissioners to find out such facts as these. They could have been obtained in a letter from the Ceylon Government. We have heard tales of shocking discomforts in the camp, and should have expected some sort of opinion as to whether a careful personal inspection of the camp, with inquiries amongst the labourers, afforded any ground for supposing that the conditions are not as they should be, but there is no expression of opinion at all.

We have heard much, again, about punishments inflicted upon coolies for different offences, as for example about imprisonment for leaving service without due notice, and we should have expected some expression of opinion as to the general effect of the various penalties. But we find nothing but a bald statement of the penal provisions. Such information as is given might have been got from the Ceylon statute-books without going to Ceylon.

In another place we have a dissertation on the hook-worm:—"The hook-worm is a worm about half-an-inch long which attaches itself to the inner wall of the human intestine, where it sucks the blood of its host. It lives etc. etc." For this and for all that follows we could surely have gone to a medical treatise.

It is true that ninety-nine pages contain a good deal of matter that is of much interest; but very little of it is of the special sort that we should have expected from specially-appointed Commissioners. *We expected "propositions", and we find nothing but "definitions." We expected conclusions, but we have been given no more than statements of facts. We feel that we are still left in the dark as to the actuality of the "conditions of Indian labour" on estates. (Madras Times, March 8, 1917.)*

Contradiction and Confirmation.

We are only able to-day to deal with the Ceylon Section of the report of Messers. Marjoribanks and the Hon'ble A. K. G. Ahmed Thambi Marikayar on the conditions of free emigration to Ceylon and Malaya, chiefly because we have another independent report on the same subject by Mr. Karunattu Thiagaraja, which also calls for notice at the same time. *Both reports are interesting and, to a certain extent, they confirm each other in one particular, namely as to the conditions under which this labour is recruited, the evils of the advance system, the state of chronic debt in*

which the labourers exist, and the consequent unrest and movement of labour caused by the tundu system

... ..
This last is a system suicidal to the interests of the planter

A point that critics like Mr. K. Thiagaraja and others overlook is that efforts have been made by the planters and the Ceylon Government to minimise these defects in the system of recruiting, but they have been obstructed, partly by lack of unity among the planters themselves, even among those who formed a federation to restrict advances and to limit as much as possible the burden of debt which the coolies arrive on the estates, but chiefly by the *Kanganies* and professional recruiters in South India, who benefit chiefly by this system of advances... ..

When, however, we come to the question of the condition and treatment of coolies on the estates, etc., we cannot help thinking that the independent enquirer, Mr. Thiagaraja, has been finding out things that he was predisposed to find, irrespective of whether they existed or not. As regards the housing and other accommodation of the labourers his criticism is wholly destructive. Against this we would put the deliberate opinion of the two special Government Commissioners: —“As far as we saw, the accommodation appeared sufficient and there was no overcrowding.

“Similarly with regard to the health of the people.

It is not much use providing medical treatment and midwives if the preference of the people are all in favour of quackery and crude obstetrics. The law in Ceylon however imposes on planters a certain responsibility in these matters, and it is only reasonable to suppose that they, in their own interests, will see to it that this law is carried out....

In this direction and in others it is as well to remember that the special Commissioners have had at their disposal all official facts figures and reports, and the conclusions at which they arrive are much more likely to be correct than that of the independent enquirer, who, despite the best intentions in the world, gives evidence in more than one place in his report that he has been only too willing to lend a willing ear to what he has merely been told. Here, for instance, in a case in point. Dealing with the morals of the coolies Mr. Thiagaraja says:—
“The evil is that the number of women is much less than that of men.”

Naturally this question was one on which the special Commissioners were deputed to enquire. Let us see what they have to say on the subject: “It will be seen from the figures quoted (proving that they have gone into the statistics carefully) that the sexes are fairly evenly matched in the Tamil labour population. Excepting new arrivals, the labourers live in families on the estate, and there are no undesirable features due to a lack of women.” Again Mr.

Thiagaraja says, on the subject of the treatment of coolies, that the relations between employers and labourers is bad, a fact that is strengthened by the great number of prosecutions before the Courts.

... ..
 Apparently Messrs Marjoribanks and Marakkayar were under the same impression; because this is what they say on this subject

"We were surprised to learn the right figures, as perusal of the daily papers had given us the impression that prosecutions were far more numerous." In another place we were told that the kind of work and wages available in Ceylon are always misrepresented and that quite educated men, have been taken in.

... ..
 The fact that educated men, or any man for that matter, finds himself in Ceylon in the alleged unenviable conditions referred to is, therefore, entirely his own fault. He can get all the advice he needs in south India, and even at the last moment he is allowed to change his mind and go home again.

... ..
 We could easily go on thus selecting from Mr. Thiagaraja's report statements of this kind that have no evidence of any kind to support them, beyond an imagination too ready to see evil where none is. There are evils enough in the system of indentured emigration without necessary calls on our indignation being made by those who also oppose ordinary emigration. (*Madras Mail*, March 8, 1917.)

Criticism Awaited

... ..

The report practically resolves itself into a close description of the labour system in operation in this island, including the methods of recruiting the labourers from Southern India, and contains little or nothing by way of criticism, though it is quite evident that the Commissioners carefully investigated all the defects or alleged defects which it contains

The Commissioners content themselves with stating facts which are practically common ground with reference to all these subjects and practically abstain from criticism, though they point out the heavy indebtedness of coolies and other objectionable features of the advance system.

As already stated the report is purely informative. Criticism will probably follow later. (Times of Ceylon, March 22, 1917.)