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TEA-GARDEN COOLIES IN ASSAM.

A LETTER

BY

THE HON'BLE J. BUCKINGHAM, C. I. E.,
(ADDITIONAL MEMBER OF COUNCIL)

REPLYING TO A COMMUNICATION ON THE SUBJECT,
WHICH APPEARED IN THE "INDIAN CHURCHMAN."

THE WHOLE REPRINTED

WITH INTRODUCTION AND AN ANSWER

BY

THE REV. CHARLES DOWDING.



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ERRATA.

Page xii, Introduction, 4th line from bottom :—

for food-production-on-tea-gardens, read food-production on tea gardens.

Page 15, line 20 : *for attandaunce, read attendence ; line 25 : for feeliny, read feeling.*

Page 28, lines 2 and 3 : *for were acustomed to, read were never accustomed to ; and
for are never very commonly, read, are very commonly.*

Page 30, footnote : *for bought, read brought.*

Page 42, line 42, *for "Only here and there such a man," read "Only here and there, is there such, &c."*

Page 47, line 1 : *for fasalao'd, read fusalao'd.*

Page 58, line 21 : *for truth, read ruth ; last line : after agreement should be ?*

Page 70 : at end of letter (line 20) *read signature, C. D.*

Page 72, line 18 : *for kit's, read Kit's ; after last paragraph, read signature, C. D.*

Page 76, line 4 : *for find for herself, read fend for herself.*

CORRECTION OF POSTSCRIPT.

Section 142 C. may be, and has been applied for the re-patriation of incapacitated time-expired labourers. C. D.

INTRODUCTION.



"THE expansion of the tea-garden industry demands, yearly, more coolies than the natural flow of emigration from even the most congested districts, *inhabited by people whom Assam will suit, can afford.*"

This was the opening sentence of a communication to the *Indian Churchman*, which, though carped at, and cavilled at on all hands, remains, so I think, uncontroverted, as to its main facts and deductions. I knew that this article was little likely to be palatable reading to many; but I never supposed any attempt would be made to contest the incontestable. I believed the paper might be of use, in drawing attention to a condition of things hardly realisable by anyone living outside the province of Assam. I still hold this belief, although I regret that, in dilating on the personal characteristics of a certain class of employer, I should have given pain to some, and given to others, a handle for declaring that the article was an attack on planters, rather than an indictment of the system, which it is their fate to have to work under. I reprint it, however, with the ensuing correspondence, which, although once republished in a pamphlet form, is now out of print. I entirely concur in the desire displayed by that republication that the subject should have wider consideration than it could obtain whilst confined to the columns of the *Indian Churchman*.

My paper, avowedly, took a view of the subject, very different from a previous communication to the *Indian Churchman*, from the pen of the Rev. S. Endle of Tezpur. It was, in its turn, assailed by three typical champions of the present condition of things. The first was "Ex Luce Lucellum," a Calcutta gentleman who vouched for himself as having, "a practical and wide experience" of the matter under discussion. He may be taken to represent the agent class. The second was "Medicus," a garden-doctor long in Assam. The third was the Hon'ble J. Buckingham, C.I.E. Others, less known, also wrote, contesting my facts or conclusions. Against my unsupported opinion, therefore, were ranged, a clergyman, who had spent thirty years in Assam: a Calcutta merchant: a medical man of experience: and a representative planter, of sufficient distinction, as amongst planters, to be called to a seat in the Viceroy's Council.

"Dare to do right!" says the poet. "Dare to risk being proved wrong" is the corollary. This daring is mine. But I insist on the proof. This proof, I hold, is so far wholly wanting. I believe that my presentment of facts is as much nearer the reality as it differs from theirs.

I replied to "Ex Luce Lucellum" in a tone of somewhat exaggerated deference. The letter of my friend "Medicus," though it contained some valuable information as to contractors' mal-practices, and as to the ease with which figures could be manipulated in making out returns, I regarded as chiefly interesting as a *coute qui coute* eulogium of every other detail of the system. I answered it, however, point by point, and he wrote no more.

Owing to Mr. Buckingham's standing, I considered his letter of greatest moment. Fortified too, as it seemed to be, with quotations from official figures and utterances, it was most damaging as it stood, to my case. It was referred to, in the columns of a public print, as a crushing answer, which had finally disposed of me and my assertions. I wrote a reply, but unfortunately for me the greater portion of my letter was suppressed as "illegible." The Editor of the *Indian Churchman*, in fact, applied the *closure*, and in an editorial, summed up *against me*. On two points only, though very important ones, could I congratulate myself as having impressed him. He said:—"While, however, we are unable to go all the way with Mr. Dowding, nor to believe that the instances of hardship he quotes are anything more than unavoidable exceptions to the efficiency of a well-intentioned system, there are two points on which we are inclined to agree with him. He has spoken of the sufferings of those coolies, who from sickness, or any other cause, have to be sent back to their homes No doubt, when it is once determined that they cannot be of use, their manager is apt to lose interest in them, and will not put himself to any excessive trouble, to see that they reach their destination in health, safety and comfort. We are not sufficiently acquainted with the details of the question to be able to say whether the law is at fault, or its working, but certainly here is just a point where the most stringent regulation is required, because it is the point where self-interest fails, and natural kindness can only operate at considerable expense to itself. Secondly, there is probably, a real grievance, in the case of new gardens, for in these, as a correspondent has pointed out, 'there is more sickness and mortality than in old ones, due, in large measure, to the turning-up of virgin soil, and the rotting of newly-cut vegetation; but to some extent also, to the fact, that the proportion of new emigrants is very much larger than in old-established gardens, amongst whom (the new emigrants) the percentage of mortality is much greater.' *We think it probable that if the nature of their work were clearly explained to new coolies, before they came away, few of them would come.* (The italics are mine.) It looks as though a law were wanted, to the effect that the opening-up of new gardens should only be entrusted to coolies who have been long enough in the country to be acclimatised, who know to what they are going, and who should only serve in temporary batches, with special pay, for the specially dangerous service."

I thought that my good friend, the then Editor of the *Indian Churchman*, had dealt somewhat hardly with me in thus closing the discussion; but I had reason

afterwards to be well content. He kindly returned me my letter. In February, I got sight of the Immigration Report, and found it a mine of information confirming the conclusions my un-assisted intelligence had arrived at. I re-cast my reply to Mr. Buckingham, and it grew into something like a review of the condition of the coolie throughout the Province, though still retaining the form of a letter to the papers.

In this introduction, I would ask my readers' attention to a significant note sounded by all three writers whom I have specially mentioned, namely, a note of alarm at the subject being written about at all. "Ex Luce Lucellum" opines that my first communication was an attack "meant for the possible delectation of two audiences, one an English, and the other an Indian one." "Medicus" complains that I am "giving a handle to evilly-disposed persons to use against a system, that is in itself, right and just." Mr. Buckingham brands as an "agitator lost to all sense of honour and truth," anyone who shall dare to hint that the system is a "thinly-disguised slavery."

Why this terror of publicity? Why this resentment of an appeal unto Cæsar?

Periodically the papers have rung with the grievances of the Uncovenanted Civil Servants, and the Commons grew faint at the recital of them. But no one declaimed against this as an agitation.

The Behar Survey touches the interests of wealthy land-owners, and European Indigo Planters; at once meetings are held, and resolutions passed protesting against the designs of Government; Home goes their record of wrongs, and at times almost weeping, threatening at times, Peers of Parliament and men of renown wax eloquent over the woes of oppressed Maharajahs and opulent Zemindars. But such as these we name not agitators.

Note again the stir caused by the sudden death of a European in Cachar, at the hands of dakáits, and compare it with the indifference shown, as to the slow death of thousands of coolies. I speak no ill of the dead, when I allude to a forcible, though not too forcible, letter which was quoted at the meeting of the Indian Tea Association of April 28th, 1893, from the manager of the Endogram Tea Company, in Cachar, *re* this murder of a planter at Balladhun. We turn to the Immigration Report of 1893, and find that the death-rate among Act-coolies on the Endogram Estate was 301·3 per thousand: and that this is recorded as "the result of importing totally unfit coolies." We wonder whether this poor gentleman wrote an equally forcible letter to those who were responsible for sending up these coolies to their death. Mr. George Dickson, speaking at this meeting, said that it was futile to apply to the Assam Executive. "We must appeal unto Cæsar, and the sooner it is done the better.....I think an appeal should be made to the Imperial Government. I may have spoken strongly, perhaps some people may think too strongly, and if so I regret it, but when one thinks of the number

of Europeans in Cachar who consider, and rightly consider, their lives and the lives of their families to be in jeopardy, it is too much to expect a man to mince his words."

Does an appeal unto Cæsar only lie when Europeans,—or if natives, at least wealthy ones—are concerned? I also say, I may have spoken strongly, perhaps some people may think too strongly, and if so I regret it, but when one thinks of the number of coolies in Assam, and how their lives, or the lives of many of them, are in jeopardy, it is too much to expect a man to mince his words.

I landed in India in October, 1882, and soon found myself in the midst of the intensest ferment that had stirred the country for many a long day. Did Europeans impose on themselves any limits as to their speech and action? I remember warning a gentleman, who took part in the movement, that we were giving an object lesson which might be grasped much sooner than we should wish. He laughed at me, but I have lived to see the truth of my remark.

This year, again, we have beheld the commotion caused by the so-called "Cotton Duties' Scandal." In deference to a body of selfish voters (selfish as yourselves, gentlemen, but more powerful) the Indian Government has been forbidden to take measures, which would have tended, somewhat, to produce an equilibrium in Indian finances. What indignation it wrought in you, what fear; what strong language at unanimous meetings, it called forth!

But you were not agitators, were you? His Excellency the Viceroy, speaking in his Council, though his official view might be supposed to be adverse to the movement, declared that it had "created a body of opinion." Well then, be fair! Call me not an agitator, but acknowledge that I am but desirous of creating a body of opinion, on the condition of coolies in Assam!

I consider such a body of opinion ought to be created. But it is no easy matter. I am, myself, a small shareholder in a very large Tea Concern. This greatly quickens—as I think it should—my interest in the subject. Owners of tea shares cannot salve their consciences by the reflection that it is the business of Superintendents and Directors to look after these things. Directors and Superintendents, all the world over, consider much more carefully the interests of their shareholders than those of their employés. It was only on the first of January of this year of grace, 1894, that there came into force, at home, more stringent legislative provisions, for lessening the risk to work-people in match factories, of that most horrible disease, Necrosis of the jaw-bone, or "Phossy-jaw."

I have no reason to suppose, that in the concern alluded to, there is any deliberate neglect of the coolies' welfare, but I know that one large garden, at least, is persistently unhealthy, and I find but very slight reference to the fact in the Yearly Report sent to the shareholders. This report only tells me that the labour force is such and such. It does not tell me the death-rate on them. It tells me what the acreage is of mature tea, and what extensions there have been during the year; but

it does not tell me how far the opening-up of new land has necessitated the importation of new coolies, or how these new coolies are standing the process of acclimatization. But it does tell me what the out-turn of tea has been, what price it has fetched, and what dividend has been declared. I claim to know much more than that. The Directors' Report to the shareholders should contain precise information as to the condition of the labour force, with copies of all remarks of Inspecting Officials, and the findings of Committees. If this statement were an honest one, we should be in a position to discover whether there were cause, or not cause, for us to be haunted with the thought, that though our profits might be less, yet, if we spent more on the care of our coolies, or paid them higher wages, their death-rate also would be less.

The Bishop of Durham in his Lenten Pastoral of this year, says: "The thoughtlessness of investors may help to maintain unrighteous tyrannies. The using of money is as perilous as the gaining of it. In both alike we are bound to consider not only the material result of what we do, but also the moral result. Do we then limit our demands on others by that which we ourselves in their place, with full knowledge, should be ready to give?" These words we shareholders may well lay to heart.

Again, Canon Scott-Holland, preaching at St. Paul's, on the text: "Cursed is he that removeth his neighbour's land-mark," pointed out how often the wicked phrase seemed to be verified, "A Company has no conscience," and went on to show how we might also sin through becoming the tools of a system. Again, class interests and professions committed gross sins from which any individual member of them would instinctively shrink:—"So it comes about, that a great and honorable profession, such as that of the lawyer, and that of the clergy, has again and again, arrived at a point where it stood convicted, by the outraged conscience of its fellows of the most inhuman injustice, harshness, cruelty, greed, ambition; so, a propertied class has before now come to build up its stability in the most monstrous oppression. It has tolerated criminal miseries at its very door without seeming to see that they existed; it has acquiesced in a condition which its own supremacy has made to seem familiar, and yet which every human-hearted member in the class would condemn with indignation if it were his own benefit which was bought at such a price."

Have we in Assam not learnt to acquiesce quite too easily in the suffering we may see? Must we not feel that if "The Disagreeable Man," in the little tale called "Ships that pass in the Night," had addressed to ourselves the following remarks, we should, unheeding the taunt implied, have regarded them as really very sensible advice. "These things occur," he said, "it is not that they are worse here than anywhere else; it is simply that they are together in an accumulated mass, and as such, strike us with tremendous force. I myself am accustomed to these accumulations of selfishness and neglect.....Don't even trouble to criticise them; it is only a nuisance to yourself....., fill up your time with some hobby,

cheese mites or influenza bacillus, and then you will be quite content to let people be neglected, lonely, and to die. You will look upon it as an ordinary and natural process." But in truth I doubt if we can be said to see what is going on around us. A man may know that his garden is technically an "unhealthy" one; that he has lost a lot of coolies, but does he realise what it is, except as "depreciation on block?" Take a garden with a population of some 700 or so. This would make a fair-sized village at home. With a death-rate a shade over 7% this would mean a funeral a week, for every week in the year; or two funerals a week, for six months in the year; or, if it were an epidemic, a funeral, every other day, for nearly four months in the year.

In 1892, 57,000 people, or more than one-eighth of the whole garden population of Assam, were dying at the rate of nearly 10% per annum. It remains to be seen whether the next Immigration Report will record any improvement in the mortality returns of the province.

Of course there are plenty of planters who are sincerely concerned, for the coolies' own sake, when there is a heavy death-rate. I remember one especially tender-hearted man, now dead, so distressed at seeing his poor friends dying around him from cholera, that he wrote in to me asking the prayers of the Church for them. But this was an exceptional case.

And the tenderest hearted employer,—himself, though he know it not, "the tool of a system"—will say: "It is sad, very sad, there should be such mortality, but we must have coolies!" This 'must' is an economic must, based on the supposed necessities of the tea industry, not a moral must. The moral must reads with a negative. You must not have coolies, unless you can ensure that they shall be distinctly better off than in their own homes. And when I say "they," I do not mean the fittest, who shall survive a severe process of acclimatization, but the whole body, men, women and children, whom you import. If otherwise, you perpetrate a wicked fraud on those who come up in the full belief they are going to improve their condition by emigrating to Assam. If you commit this injustice, because the law permits it, you must not blame the coolie, if, without the permission of the law, he tries to right matters by desertion. Hence in 1892 (*vide* Report, p. 26), from the mean force of, say, 457,700 souls, 354,700 of whom were on healthy gardens, and 103,000 recorded as living on unhealthy gardens,* there were 17,263 desertions; 12,568 from healthy gardens, 4,695 from unhealthy ones, producing a desertion-rate of 35.3 *per mille* from healthy gardens, and 45.4 *per mille*, from unhealthy ones, a mean rate, over the whole force, of 37.6 *per mille*. As however, the force contained some 173,900 children, and children would scarcely be counted among the deserters,

* This figure, 103,000, must be the entire population living on unhealthy gardens: technically unhealthy, that is, owing to the death-rate on some or all classes of labour on them being over 7%. The figure 57,000, given by me, is the actual number of people, of such classes, on such gardens, among whom the death-rate was over 7%.

we should deduct them; and calculating the desertion-rate on the 283,800 adults, we find it 60·8 *per mille*.

It was stated by the Hon'ble Sir Philip Hutchins, in his opening speech in Council, last year, that the result of investigation had been "to bear out the opinion expressed again and again by successive Chief Commissioners and other impartial observers, that the condition of labourers on Tea Gardens is far superior to that of the masses in the districts from which they emigrate." This is no doubt true as regards the majority of coolies on the majority of gardens; but these death and desertion rates go to shew, that there is a very large minority, as to whom this opinion is not correct. This fact has to be faced, although a genial optimism dislikes having its attention drawn to disturbing considerations.

Truth recently quoted from an article by Mr. W. G. Kirby, in the *United Service Magazine*, some facts touching the difference between the chances of death in the profession of arms and civil career, respectively. It was shewn that the risks of war and climate incurred by the British Army and Navy involve an annual addition to the normal intensity of mortality amounting only to about 7·5 *per mille*: of which one-half represents the addition in respect of climate risks, and the other the addition in respect of war risk. It is perfectly certain that it would be much safer for a very large number of coolies to take the Queen's shilling, and go through a severe campaign, than to emigrate to Assam.

When we come to witnesses, who would not claim to be otherwise than interested, and therefore partial ones, we need no warning that we must discount their evidence, owing to the well-known fact that such are invariably possessed with a bland assurance that those they employ, on whatever wage, are extremely well off, if they did but know it. Mill-owners and mine-owners, and ship-owners and smack-owners, always hold this opinion. Apprentices on Grimsby smacks have to thank Mr. Labouchere for drawing attention to their preventible hardships. I may be allowed to express my humble appreciation of what this gentleman has done for many who could do nothing for themselves. He has rather a 'down' on parsons. Perhaps he has never realised that parsons are always born into the world laymen, and may seldom wholly get over the original taint. Again, seeing how often he is right in what he says, he could well afford, when it is proved that he has found a mare's-nest, and perhaps done injustice to some one, to acknowledge it less ungraciously, and with more gentlemanly frankness than is his wont. None the less, it is refreshing, in these days, when you are considered out of the running, unless you have pace-makers, to find a man who will boldly state an opinion because it is his own, heeding not at all whether it be the opinion of any mob, Tory or Radical, although, with a not unpleasing inconsistency, he is ready to call every other man accursed who does not bow to the mob that may happen to agree with the Editor of *Truth*. Now, these Grimsby fishing-apprentices, just like coolies, did constantly desert, or refuse to obey orders, and as constantly, by an impartial Bench

of magistrates (borough magistrates), did get sent to jail. It struck no one but Mr. Labouchere that this was other than an ordinary and natural process. He, however, commented on it, and an article appeared in a Grimsby paper, purporting to reply to the strictures passed by him upon the treatment of the fishing apprentices in that port. It was asserted that nowhere were boys "better fed, more comfortably clothed, and humanely treated all round" than the fishing apprentices. Just what is asserted of coolies, though more than one-eighth of the body had a death-rate in 1892 of nearly ten per cent. per annum. "That sort of talk," said Mr. Labouchere, "may satisfy the Grimsby smack-owners and magistrates; but in view of the facts which I published, and of what takes place in the police-court every week, it will not satisfy the public. I can assure both the Bench and the smack-owners that they will yet hear a good deal more than they wish about this question. Meanwhile, it is satisfactory to note that Bumble is shewing less readiness to supply the Grimsby fishing-industry with boy-labour. At the meeting of the Liverpool Select Vestry last week, attention was called to the committals of apprentices to prison at Grimsby, and it was resolved to try and find other sources of employment for the work-house boys." * *Mutatis mutandis*, I would gladly echo these words.

At a farewell dinner at the Royal Exchange in Calcutta, Lord Lansdowne made what was described as a great speech. In the course of it, he protested most strongly against the practice of pouring "inordinately strong doses of Western nostrums" down Indian throats.—"There is a tendency," he said, "to apply British standards to such questions as the employment of labour in mines, in factories, and tea gardens." When we read these words we were filled with amazement, that an audience composed largely of prosaic sons of the quill and the ledger, should wield such a magnetic influence, should possess such powers of hypnotic suggestion, as to compel those who address them to do so in accents that fall sweetly upon their ears. Thus, and no otherwise, spoke Mr. Mackay in his last passing speech and profession. † But then he was one of themselves. How did it come about that a retiring Viceroy could be willed to hold such language? By 'Western nostrums' he did not mean alone maxims and procedures of government which, because found applicable to our political circumstances at home, are by hag-ridden theorists declared to be no less suitable to the absolutely dissimilar conditions prevailing out here. He might well have pointed out that those who maintain that because both England and India date their letters, 1894, they are equally *fin du siècle*, and therefore contemporaries, are guilty of an anachronism for which Macaulay's school-boy would be whipped. He might have said that there is no inherent right in any man to share in the government of his country, his doing so might be injurious to the well-being of the many. The only right he has is to be well governed. If it be

* Truth of March 22, 1894.

† Vide letter in Appendix, p. 68.

decided that this result is best attained by giving him a share in the government, it is granted, yet not as of personal right, but because it is best for the community at large, composed of individuals like himself. We are not yet within measurable distance of this being the case in India. But such were not the utterances of Lord Lansdowne. He demurred to the "applying of British standards to such questions as the employment of labour in mines, in factories, and tea-gardens." Here we are on different grounds altogether. It is not a question, abstract or actual, of government, which is always empiric. It is a matter of humanity and mere justice. It may be perfectly true that we, in England, have only recently practically realised that the labourer is worthy of his hire: that if his trade be a dangerous one, like mining, he is entitled to every possible safeguard: that children should not be stunted, nor women have their natural functions interfered with, by employment underground: but the discovery once made, is, like the discovery of chloroform, equally valuable, and equally applicable, to every clime and every age. Yet carried away by the desire to please, or under the influence of his audience, Lord Lansdowne missed his grand opportunity of setting forth this fundamental truth. And his audience was pleased: so pleased that a few merchants of the city—admirers of his—formed themselves into a committee, and canvassed for subscriptions for a monument. Two hundred and twenty-two subscribers were found, some of them in England. Of these, 187 promised Rs. 87,571, a handsome response from so small a number, though it would not have bought much statuary. So it was fortunate that 35 of the subscribers were rajahs and nobles of India, who gave, with oriental lavishness, no less than Rs. 54,750, or nearly Rs. 1,600 per head. The total is Rs. 92,321; and this is all, I believe, to be spent on a brazen image of this pleasant-spoken gentleman. I would it had been applied as an educational endowment. I could have undertaken to forward a sufficient number of beneficiaries, the children of European fathers and native mothers, (whose needs would therefore appeal to both sections of subscribers), who are at present to be found uncared for, objects of contempt, in any village, living disgraces to the English name, one day, perhaps, to become actual dangers to British rule.

Revenons à nos moulons. A great deal can be got out of coolies, if care be taken to put plenty in. Of coolies' wages I shall have something to say in the body of my paper. Explanation should certainly be forthcoming why the "Wage-unit," whereby I mean the aggregate average monthly wages of two men, and two women, and a child, tabulated together, for certain reasons, in the Immigration Report, should, in one portion of Sylhet, be as low as Rs. 13-9-7. Yet, speaking generally, the welfare of the coolie population of Assam is perhaps less a question of "Supply," than of supplies. The Tea Industry takes credit to itself—and I do not say unduly—for having opened out Assam. But how has it opened it out? By clearing jungle, and planting, say, some 250,000 acres of tea. To tend this tea, it has, say, 500,000 men,

women, and children. But you cannot eat tea, and nothing else has been planted. It is as if a man should emigrate with his family, to some un-peopled waste, and whilst raising cattle, or growing corn for export, neglect to plant so much as a patch of potatoes, wherewith to feed himself and his household. The law insists, indeed, that the employer shall provide rice for his labourers, at three rupees a maund (80 lbs.); but in spite of this there are portions of the Province, where an actual scarcity prevails, where Inspecting Officers, and high Medical authorities know that coolies are sickening and dying, because fish and vegetables, and milk and meat, are simply not to be had for money. The Administration supplies cheap liquor, but this is the reverse of an advantage. As an illustration, I will notice two contiguous districts, with which I am acquainted. The Wage-unit of Lakhimpur is Rs. 23-13-8; of Sibságar, only Rs. 20-11-3. Yet the death-rate of Lakhimpur among adults, was 50·0 *per mille*, against Sibságar's 45·9. The three rupees a month more wages received by the Lakhimpur people was an insufficient set off to the greater scarcity of provisions in the one district than the other. The difference between the two districts, as to food supplies, is to be traced to their earlier political circumstances.* Even in former times the district of Sibságar was the most prosperous part of Assam; and in 1792, when we first entered the country, at the invitation of the rajah, whose people were in rebellion against him, owing to the oppressions of his rule, and remained there for two years, ensuring the *Pax Britannica*, Assam was described as very wealthy and prosperous, carrying on a large trade with neighbouring countries, and the people happy and contented as long as their rajah behaved tolerably. Although we retired in 1794, and the country immediately fell into anarchy and confusion, yet the troubles of the earlier part of this century did not fall so heavily on the district of Sibságar, as on Lakhimpur. Sibságar district was the seat of the Native Government, and for the mere support of it alone, cultivation was necessary, and some protection was given to the ráyats. Oppressive as this rule might be, the Burman's little finger was thicker than the rajah's loins. When we re-occupied the country in 1825, we gave effectual protection to Sibságar; the thousands of slaves carried off in that year to Burmah and the Singpho country were taken from Lakhimpur. It was some time in the eighties of the last century that Singphos arrived from the Hukong Valley, and aided the Khamtis to establish themselves at Sadiya, our now North-easternmost station in Assam, and it was only after they had oppressed this district terribly, for ten years, ravaging it, and carrying the inhabitants into slavery, that the rajah was able to drive them out. In 1810, the Khamtis and Singphos again took Sadiya and behaved towards the unlucky inhabitants as usual. By 1818 the Singphos had transferred their allegiance, and 6,000 more of them came with a Burmese invasion, which displaced the Khamti ruler at Sadiya, and appointed a governor of their own, who instead of ruling Sadiya as an

* *Fide* St John F. Michell's, "North-East Frontier of India."

independent Khamti possession, held it in trust under the Burmese. For some years, this district was the recruiting ground of Burmese and Singphos. The latter race especially, who thought it beneath them to do a stroke of work for themselves, made ample use of their opportunity of obtaining cheap labour. To this day, Singphos whom I have myself visited just on our border, holding cultivable land, do no servile work, as they regard it, but obtain the services of Nagas, who receive half the produce as their reward. Even, when, in 1826, the Burmese retired, on peace being signed between the English and Burmah, the Singphos remained, doing as they listed, though in 1825 we had inflicted a defeat on them and delivered no less than 3,000 Assamese slaves. To this day, however, there are said to be numbers of slaves in their hands, in the Hukong Valley, the descendants of those formerly carried thither. As late as 1843, when the Singphos made a successful attack on Bisa, then held by us, nine Sepoys were captured, and sold as slaves, some to the Hukong Valley, some to the Bor Khamtis. These warlike races were always ready to replenish their stock of helots. I am told that the Abors, against whom we lately bungled an expedition, (bungled that is, because the Indian Government refused to sanction a sufficient, and homogeneous force) have not only to show, as their spoils, several stand of arms, and also officers' kits, but some Kassia baggage coolies whom they took from us, and retain as slaves.

The general result of all these disturbances was that Lakhimpur was practically denuded of population. Such cultivation as there had been reverted to jungle. What population remained became the listless, indolent, opium-eating people we now see: and though it was of the Sub-division of North Lakhimpur, that Robinson wrote in 1840, his words would have applied to a large portion of the district:—"It now presents little more than a miserable picture of depopulated villages and orchards, and plantations run to waste, or covered with dense jungle."

It is plain that those who started the cultivation of tea in Lakhimpur district, did so under great disadvantages. Not only did they, sooner than others, find that the supply of local labour was insufficient, but also that the sparse population, then as now, grew nothing more than they required for their own use, so that there were no supplies available wherewith to feed imported labour. The obviously wise course would have been, from the very first, to set about growing their own supplies. Even if the early planters made up their minds, that it was cheaper to import rice, than to go in for its cultivation on a large scale, yet for every twenty acres of jungle cleared and planted with tea, one acre might have been devoted to the raising of vegetables, and the growing of wholesome fruit, oranges, limes, plantains, and the like. It would have paid them, probably, to have established cattle runs, and imported a few decent beasts to improve the wretched native breed. But, speaking generally, tea planters, and tea companies, in this district, cared for none of these things. They and the coolies are suffering now for their short-sightedness. The subject does not yet engage their attention

as it ought. It is true that on concerns where the "Hotel System" prevails, *i.e.*, public messes, where sickly coolies, or those who have not learnt to feed themselves properly, take their meals, small *máli-bágáns*, vegetable gardens, are kept up, to supply the hotel : but nothing is done to meet the needs of the whole force. Nor, on many gardens, are coolies encouraged to grow vegetables for themselves. And the words of the dying laird to his son, "Plant trees, for they will be growing when you are sleeping" have been no more heeded than they had been by him, as he acknowledged, though his father before him had given him the same advice. The Administration might well have made it a stipulation, when giving grants of land, that a certain proportion of every grant should be opened out for cultivation other than tea. It can scarcely be too late for it to bring some pressure to bear, in this matter, even now. The total area under tea, in the Assam Province, is less than 250,000 acres, whilst the extent of land granted by Government to the Tea Industry amounts to a million of acres. It will be replied that, indirectly, the Tea Industry has done something to promote cultivation, in that some 40,000 acres are held from Government by time-expired immigrants, and Mr. Buckingham quotes figures (I know not from what source), to the effect that 97,000 coolies have settled down to pursuits other than tea, some of these holding land from planters; so that some small portion of these 750,000 waste acres is being made productive. But it is certainly a very small portion; and in Lakhimpur district, where cultivation is especially desirable, it is probably smallest of all; whilst of Government land only 6,585 acres are held in this District by old coolies. This is, in part, due to the very strong pressure which planters were able to exert, and did exert, to make coolies re-engage, instead of going away and becoming cultivators on their own account. Time-expired coolies are shy of holding land from planters, because, as they quite reasonably observe: "If we take the Sahib's land he has a *dakhal* over us, a hold upon us, which we cannot tell how he may use: if we take land from Government, we pay our yearly rent, and *bas!* no one has any further claim on us." If the Tea Industry therefore is to turn any considerable portion of its still un-tilled grants to account, for food supply, it must not wait for time-expired coolies to do the work; but take it in hand as a recognised department, or feature of its own operations. It must be observed that, assuming 97,000 people have settled down to cultivation, and hold 40,000 acres from Government, and were it as much as 5,000 acres from planters, 45,000 acres in all, this gives over two souls per acre. I leave experts to say whether they are likely to do much more than support themselves, or have anything to spare for the *bouches inutiles*—*quá* food-production-on-tea-gardens.

It must be remembered that there is another factor which has militated enormously against that opening out of the country by cultivation *other than tea*, which Government has always had in view, as the end which justified the protection of the Tea Industry by penal legislation. If a coolie, owing to illness, or other causes, has been in receipt of low wages during his contract time, he

has nothing saved at its expiry, wherewith to start farming. He may be in the same condition although his wages have been good. The Excise Department has a most reprehensible habit of placing liquor-shops on garden land, if it can get permission. Failing this it plants the temptation to drink on other land, as near the coolie lines as it can. The results are notorious. Supposing the coolie be otherwise able to resist the blandishments of his employer to re-engage, he may find himself not only with nothing in hand, but with a big bill against him at the grog-shop: and he renews his agreement in order to obtain the bonus, and wipe off some of his debt, and so gets bound for another term of years. It is a subject of grim jest among planters that the only set-off to Government's practice as to liquor-shops, against which they have protested fruitlessly, again and again, is that it strengthens their hold on a number of coolies, who without this State incentive to drunkenness, might save money and at the end of their term leave the garden to become independent *râyals*.

There is no doubt but that Government has been greatly disappointed in the expectations it formed that the Tea Industry would be an admirable helpmate in its work of opening out Assam to immigration and settlement. The tie between these two parties is not based on mutual affection, but avowedly on mutual convenience. It may be snapped at any moment. There is no sentiment about the matter: nor can the weaker party complain, if she receive, perhaps very soon, a writing of divorcement from the stronger. Indeed, except on the supposition of incipient insanity, it would be difficult to explain her conduct but as intended to bring about this result. Her fidelity to her master has never been above question: she has all along been a most disobedient mate: ruling the house by no means well, and acting the very step-mother to many of her husband's children. In proof of this we need but consider the action of the chiefs of the Industry on the subject of the importation of unsuitable labour. I would preface this portion of my review, by saying that it is not directed against planters. I have other fish to fry. A "Cachar Planter" in a letter to be seen in the appendix, replying to my first communication, said:—"The writer of the sweeping indictment himself would have more power to effect improvements than any planter in tea." I know not how this may be: but I will accept the challenge, in so far that I will speak with a plainness that would cost the average planter his appointment, if he signed his name to his observations.

Nothing is, at first sight, more astounding to an outsider like myself, than the apathy of planters as regards questions vitally affecting the very continuance of the craft whereby they have their wealth. Serious speech and thought touching the circumstances, as apart from the business details of their profession, would seem to be unknown amongst them. The cause is this—they have no say in the matter. "We are powerless," more than one planter has said to me: "Everything is settled by the Calcutta Agents." Very many planters hold their appointments

at the pleasure of the Calcutta Agents. A man I knew, was believed, both by himself and others, to have forfeited his position because, in spite of warnings, he persisted in protesting against the inferior class of coolies sent up to his garden. Another, who wrote to his Agents, complaining, on the same score, got back from them the prompt reply: "The coolies you complain of were inspected and passed by ourselves." Reading between the lines, the monition was plain: "If you have anything more to say, you had better not say it!" These potent personages therefore, the Calcutta Agents, demand the close scrutiny of anyone who would master the conditions of the Tea Industry in Assam. Excluding natives, some forty odd Calcutta firms are Agents, Managing Agents, or Secretaries, for the tea gardens of the whole Province of Assam. Of these, some twenty-six, representing 182,000 acres, out of a total under 250,000, are members of the Calcutta Tea Association. Seek we therefore knowledge by examining, amongst other data, what this body has to say for itself, in its published proceedings. We must first grasp the fact already alluded to that a very large number of planters hold their appointments from their Calcutta Agents. Except such planters as are Managing Proprietors, or part Proprietors, and those who by their position as long-trying and trusted Superintendents are able to hold their own, and those who take their orders direct from Home Boards, the average man is at the beck and bidding of his Calcutta Agents. In many cases these are avowedly "Managing Agents:" others have often obtained, by the foreclosing of mortgages, a proprietary share in a garden: and where this has not yet occurred, the garden is, not seldom, so deeply in their debt for advances, that their word on any subject is final. It has not been unknown for dissatisfied shareholders to attend an Annual Meeting in Calcutta, to enquire, for instance, into the enormous prices paid for inferior coolies supplied to the garden by the Agents, and to find these gentlemen, what with their own votes, and the proxies, with which they had been primed by trustful home shareholders, practically unassailable. Remember that the fact that the Agents hold shares in a garden, does not necessarily identify their interests with those of other shareholders: or guarantee that the concern will be run for the equal benefit of all. This all-powerfulness of the Calcutta Agents is recognised by Government. Sir Philip Hutchins, speaking last year in Council, said: "We can only reach the Agents through the gardens. The Bill on the table will give very stringent control over the gardens, and has been framed on the principle that they are responsible." Now this is necessary, but hard on the planters. It places them between the devil and the deep sea; *e. g.*, a planter may receive orders from the Calcutta Agents to extend his garden, at the rate of fifty acres a year, till an appointed maximum of 1,000 acres is reached. This obliges him to increase his Act-labour force by, say, 25 % per annum. The Calcutta Agents, who have given him his orders, draw 2½ % on all stores passing through their hands, to the garden: 5 % on all purchased by themselves: and Rs. 2 per head on every coolie,

good, bad or indifferent, that they send up: this is also approximately $2\frac{1}{2}\%$ on their cost. Now, in these days, when the supply of labour suitable for Assam, is avowedly not equal to the demand, the addition of 25% to his Act-labour force means the importation of a considerable proportion of weakly unsuitable coolies, of whom many will die. But what is the planter to do? He has received his orders from his masters. So that many planters are actually working with a halter round their neck. On the one side are their Agents egging them on: on the other the Administration saying: "You shall not turn your garden into a bloodless shambles." Wherever there is a large importation of coolies there is an increased death-rate. In 1892, the percentage of increase of Act-labour by importation in the seven districts of the Province of Assam was as follows: Cachar, 44.8% ; Sylhet, 13.1% ; Kámrúp, 40% ; Darrang, 22.2% ; Nowgong, 30.5% ; Sibságar, 20.0% ; Lakhimpur, 32.0% . Over the whole Province the importation was 25.5% .

Now this is a portentous fact, with results most lamentable. Remedy I know none, save a partial one, the absolute prohibition of extensions. Suitable labour is simply not to be had, at any price. The recruiting districts are exhausted. Even an oyster-bed cannot be raked every year, for an indefinite period: there must be close-years. It has to be recognised that the same holds good of recruiting districts. My old friend, Mr. C. W. Gray, Superintendent of the Bengal Coal Co., presiding at the Second Annual Meeting of the Indian Mining Association, said: "The labour question, always a serious one, threatens to assume alarming proportions, now that new fields are being opened out. It is one of the most important questions before the Committee. For my own part, I should like to see Raniganj and neighbourhood closed to the exploits of the coolie-catcher." The feelings of the members of the Indian Tea Association, on reading these words, may be better imagined than described, seeing it is *their* coolie-catchers (contractors they are more politely called, for there are Europeans professionally engaged in this dirty business) who *exploit* Raniganj, and neighbourhood, the very centre of their operations, for the supply of coolies to Assam. If the Coal Industry carrying on its business in the coolie's own home-country, finds labour scarce, what must it be to the Tea Industry which has to send down hundreds of miles, and search for a good coolie with lanterns, as the philosopher sought for an honest man? The condition of things is of course, just what is stated in my opening sentence: and the result is set forth in these words of a "Garden Manager," as plainly as he dared speak, when criticising his superiors. "The difficulty in the Assam Valley is to *get* the coolies, and it looks as if Agents sooner than send up no coolies at all, have sometimes sent people who turn out utterly unsuitable to the climate." They do this not only, 'sometimes,' but very frequently. Mr. Fitzpatrick, the then Chief Commissioner of Assam, in the Immigration Report for 1888, after speaking of the danger to coolies' health from change of climate, and perhaps,

change of diet, proceeds: "It need hardly be said that the risk to health, thus arising, is enormously increased, if the coolie is already in a sickly or weak state when he arrives in Assam, and yet month after month one hears of the 'bad batches' sent up by contractors, or Calcutta agency houses, and of the immense mortality among them." Since these words were written, whatever change there has been, has, owing to the increasing difficulty of obtaining labour, been a change for the worse, as is seen in the last Report. "Medicus" indeed states that, "it is as much to the Agent's interest to send up good coolies as it is to the Managers' to keep them well and healthy." If this be so, we can only say that they often neglect their own interests. I have already quoted Sir Phillip Hutchins' *dictum*, that the Agents can only be reached through the gardens: and, in his speech, he gave a typical, though extreme instance of the indifference of some of them as to whether the coolies they send up are good or bad, that is, likely to live or not. "Sixty-two coolies were sent up after registration in Calcutta, and after executing contracts under the Act, to the Rowta garden. They were described in their contracts as Ghasi by caste, and as coming from the Sonthal Purganas, a district from which good recruits are ordinarily obtained. Seven months later only 16 were left on the garden; 26 had deserted, 16 had died, the contracts of 6 were cancelled for permanent physical incapacity; the remainder were a sickly and feeble set. It was found when they reached the garden that they were not Sonthals at all, but coolies from the North-West Provinces, of a low and sickly type. Their castes and addresses had been mis-stated. Altogether the case was a most distressing one,...and the conclusion I came to was that the coolies had been personated at the time of registration, or that they had been changed before despatch to the labour districts.....The fault lay entirely with the Calcutta Agents, who had been invited by the contractors to inspect the men, but had neglected to do so.....The owner of the Rowta garden should I think change his Agents, and no other planters should employ a firm which has been guilty of such gross and culpable negligence."

Now this sounds very well, but as a matter of fact planters, speaking generally, don't employ firms, but the firms employ the planters: and if a planter wrote down to his Agents telling them, that their gross and culpable negligence having caused a heavy death-rate on his garden, he wished to change his Agents, he would get a letter back, by return of post, directing him to hand over charge, and go seek another appointment; and he would probably have lengthy leisure to reflect on the truth of the adage that it is dangerous for an earthen pipkin to jostle an iron pot. The fact must be recognised that the interests of Calcutta Agents, and of the gardens are not invariably identical. The Chairman of the Assam Branch of the Indian Tea Association, in a memorial addressed to the Chief Commissioner, dated November 5th, 1892, amongst other figures, the accurateness of which I am not able to test, stated that there were, (presumably, in some portion only of the

Province) 35 Companies, of which 28 paid a profit averaging 7.44 %, whilst 7 paid *Nil*. But though 7 paid their shareholders nothing, and others, no doubt, very little, yet it is certain that what they paid their Agents was not to be sneezed at. We are reminded of an American anecdote. A father on his death-bed, called his young son to him, and said: "My boy, I am leaving you the whole of my property, but as you are so young I have placed it in the hands of a Managing Agent." The youth replied: "Father, it would be more to my benefit if you left him the property, and made me the Managing Agent." The gratified father, convinced that his son was young only in years, left him uncontrolled possession, and died happy.

Thus it is everywhere. In the *Pioneer* of April 8th, 1894, we read of the Sassoon Spinning and Weaving Company's Mill, Bombay, as follows:—"The working during 12 months had resulted in a loss of Rs. 48,000, but the Agents got their Rs. 50,000, or Rs. 60,000, and to improve matters tried to reduce the hands' wages by 10 %. Mr. Naorojee Waddia championed the mill-hands, and demurred to the system, under which the Agents pocketed half-a-lakh, by way of commission, and sought to improve the position of the shareholders by taking 10 % of their hard-earned pay out of the pockets of the labourers. It need hardly be said that Mr. Waddia's rôle was not a popular one. As a matter of fact he was cheered with contagious irony, and one shareholder had the courage to accuse him of the desire to kill the goose that laid the golden eggs. A protest against the further reduction of the wages of these already insufficiently-paid mill-workers was a step in the direction of killing the mill-industry."

I do not wish to make a charge more sweeping, or less so, than it ought to be. Let the galled jade wince. But when we consider the awful death-rate which has prevailed on many gardens, in every part of the Province, and know that it is largely due to the importation of totally unsuitable coolies: when we remember that in 1892, over 28,000 labourers, recruited under the Act, were imported into Assam: of whom 15,000 were Contractors', or Dépôt coolies—that is, coolies recruited by the professional Bengal Black-birders, whilst 13,000 odd were obtained by sirdars sent down from the gardens, nominally to get labour from among their own friends and relations, in their own homes, (albeit it was stated in the course of the debate, and not traversed, that this fiction can no longer be maintained): when we are told by Sir Phillip Hutchins, that "the largest number of labourers recruited under the Act are now registered in Calcutta," and can, therefore, be examined by the Agents, residents of Calcutta, and the unsuitable ones, that is those who are almost certain to break down and die in Assam, be rejected: and that, if they fail, from motives of self-interest, to do this, they are guilty of gross and culpable negligence: then we, like the Government of India, wish we could reach, get at, the Calcutta Agents.

The Indian Tea Association is a sort of Corporation of Calcutta Agents, with its head-quarters in Calcutta.

Ostensibly, indeed, by Rule III., it is composed of Proprietors and Managers of, as well as Agents for, Tea Estates (including Limited Companies, which are represented by their Agents or Secretaries), but actually there are none but Agents at head-quarters. By Rule VI. it is laid down that "the Association may be represented in the Tea Districts by existing Local Associations, working in conformity with the Association's Rules:" but it is directed how these local bodies shall be composed: and, though they may frame their own rules, these are subject to the approval and confirmation of the General Committee, that is, of the Agents. We see, therefore, one all-powerful Upper House, sitting in Calcutta, composed of Agents, and a number of small Lower Houses, consisting of planters, in different parts of Assam, who cannot communicate with one another, except by post, and can, therefore, take no effective common action, however little they may agree with the policy of their superiors of the Upper House. It is to be noted that a very large number of the members of the lower assemblies hold the appointments, which qualify them for their seats on these petty vestries, at the pleasure of individual members of the Upper House. It was, I believe, the conviction that the Agents carried things with a higher hand than they were entitled to, and that planting interests, not always identical with Agents' interests, received less than their due share of attention from them, which galvanized, a few years ago, the Assam Branch of the Tea Association into some sort of vitality. This has now a paid Secretary, and the presence at its deliberations of my good friend Mr. Buckingham, the Provincial M. P., gives these some degree of weight. It is not unworthy of notice, that when Government desired to appoint a planter representative on the Viceroy's Council, it was not the planters, but the General Committee, that is the Agents, who were requested, in an informal manner, to suggest the names of some gentlemen from whom the Chief Commissioner could select a nominee acquainted with the wants and requirements of the planting interest. It might, indeed, have been difficult to focus planter opinion: and under the existing circumstances, the Calcutta Agents must be regarded, *faute de mieux*, as the brain of the Tea Industry. All the more incumbent, therefore, is it on them, to fulfil their functions. Have they done so? I say, they have not. Far too prevalent is the idea, that every European, and every Industry carried on by Europeans, may do what is right in its own eyes, because it is in India. Has this "brainy" body, the Calcutta Association, done aught to combat this notion? As the eyes and ears of Tea: as the recognised channel of communication, between Government and the Industry: has it striven to instruct the Assam lambs, committed to its care, to impress them with the sweet reasonableness of Government enactments: in short, has it done what Mr. Buckingham is declared by Mr. J. N. Stuart, the Chairman of the Tea Association, to have done, namely, "taught them much of which before they were ignorant?" It may be doubted. It was in constant communication with Mr. Buckingham, who assisted at the deliberations of the Viceroy's Council, last year, on the amending of Act I.: it printed a full account of the debates, in its report of 1898: and it

knew that it had been laid down that an Act might be interpreted by the declarations of Official Members of Council when it was passed. It was, I think, in September, or October, 1893, that, at a meeting of the Calcutta Association, the Annual Immigration Report of the Chief Commissioner of Assam was laid on the table. Now, this Report, besides the usual statistics, which find few students, did give utterance, most unmistakably, to the intentions of Government, as to holding gardens responsible for the importation of unsuitable, and therefore, sure soon to become moribund coolies. Yet no one, in the Meeting, so much as peeped and muttered, still less commented or enlarged upon the contents of this Report. It has been left to an outsider, like myself, to try and popularise the pronouncements of a Chief Commissioner. The Report was just laid on the table. In the House of Commons, when a representation is made to it, of which it intends to take no notice, it is moved that the memorial "do lie upon the table." So was it here. The Immigration Report lay upon the table, undisturbed, and gathered dust. For at their Meeting on April 13th, 1894, they "considered letter of 26th February, from Messrs. J. MacKilligan and Co., handing copy of a circular letter and its enclosure, addressed to one of their Managers, under instructions from the Chief Commissioner of Assam, and asking whether the Association had any information on the subject, or proposed to move in the matter. The circular intimated that unhealthy gardens would be dealt with in a more stringent manner than formerly, and also, that the importation of bad batches of coolies would no longer be accepted as a valid excuse for high mortality, and that the Managers of gardens, would, in future, be held responsible for importing such batches." Now, this is, word for word, to be found in the Chief Commissioner's Report of 1893: it was also stated, as the resolve of Government, by Sir Philip Hutchins, in the debate in Council, last year. It must, therefore, have been perfectly well-known to the Calcutta Tea Association. Yet, what answer did they give? "After consideration of this letter, it was decided to reply to Messrs. J. MacKilligan and Co., that the Committee had not had their attention drawn to these orders from any other source, and as they appeared to be nearly a year old, they proposed waiting to see if any other complaints were made. Copy of the letter and enclosure was to be sent to the Assam Branch, and enquiry made concerning the circular in question."—"Kuchh nahin dekha: Kuchh nahin sunna ham log," quoth they! But do we shareholders, for this pay our servants, the Agents so handsomely, that they may go about in wilful oblivion, neither seeing aught, nor hearing? Do they not yet know that the city is taken at one end? Or is it that, regardless of our interests, let alone humanity, intent only on earning their two rupees a head for every coolie, good or bad, to live or die, whom they send up, they are determined to make hay while the sun shines to crack on all sail till something carries away? It is difficult to avoid any other conclusion. It may be, though it ought not to be, that an individual firm, so little realises its functions, as to think they are those of mere despatching Agents, and so fails to acquaint itself

with the intentions of Government: but this cannot be the case with the Central Committee of the Tea Association. Their duty was clear. They should have replied to Messrs. J. MacKilligan and Co., thus:—"The circular merely embodies the fixed policy, and resolve, declared over and over again, of the Assam Administration, and the Government of India. It behoves you, and all of us, to set our house in order." If it was not an unworthy subterfuge to shelve the matter, it was mere trifling, to refer it to the Assam Branch. It was sheer impertinence towards the Administration, to suggest that a garden had a ground of "complaint" in receiving from a Deputy Commissioner such a warning, doubtless deserved. They knew full well that no Branch Association composed of planters, would feel itself at liberty to reply fittingly to a communication from the General Committee composed of Agents. If they did, their answer would run as follows: "Planters do not wish to import bad coolies: you Agents despatch them to us, with other goods: we place our orders with you, but expect you to use common honesty in fulfilling them. You are in Calcutta; nearly all Act-coolies are taken there for registration. You can inspect them, and examine them, and refuse to pass any who are not suitable. Do you use your powers, or do you with a light heart, pass them all, knowing that if they die, or if their agreements are cancelled for permanent incapacity, it only means a fresh order from us, and two rupees a head more to be earned by you?"

The Association makes suggestions to Government about *arkattis*, but these are simply to hinder crimping of coolies, from one garden's contractor, by the contractor of another, not for the coolie's well-being. It is pitiful about over-travelled coolies, who having failed to change their train at a junction, are carried on, and put to some inconvenience at their un-chosen terminus; but it is not for the coolie's sake, but because of the garden that is waiting for their services. It is quite indignant that an official should have summoned a coolie to his Court, for some reason, without going through all the formalities that the coolie's employer thinks ought to have been observed towards himself. Again it is not the coolie it commiserates. It thus tithes mint and cummin, but it neglects the weightier matters of the law, truth and justice towards the coolies. It may sometimes put forth some severe remarks about contractors' mal-practices and the inferior coolies they supply, but it makes them with its tongue in its cheek, and winking the other eye, as who should say:—"Dear contractors, you mustn't mind our talk. We are 'in' with you. We know that when we insist on having coolies, although the recruiting districts are exhausted, we are putting a premium on mal-practices, and are compelling you to supply bad coolies. We have no more right to complain, than a man who insisted on buying pearls by the bushel, though the season was bad, would have to demur to the quality of them. Of course, we must have coolies, if not good ones, then bad ones. Our talk is only talk, it doesn't hurt you, you know, and it throws dust in the eyes of a public, which might, otherwise, make troublesome and searching enquiries. In this thing pardon your servants. For

we are your servants, as you have shewn those amongst us who have foolishly tried to make the selection of suitable coolies a reality, and have been told with forcible frankness: 'Look here, if you don't take the lot, good and bad together, at a fixed price, you shan't have the good, except at a prohibitive one.' "

When we think of these things we realise, once more, how true was the instinct of the old-fashioned English gentleman, which forbade him to allow his son to go into trade, except as a last resource. Better earn his living by daily toil in Manitoba, or drive a cab in Melbourne, than sit driving a quill, in a merchant's office, acquiring those maxims of cold-blooded and calculating selfishness, which might seem the first principles of the successful man of business.

If, however, Agents would prove they are ingenuous in their lamentations over the importation of unsuitable coolies, let them make representations as follow, to the Government of India and the Administration of Assam. Every Act-coolie's contract-form has printed on it, the name of the contractor who supplied him or her. Let orders be given to all Government Officers, and Inspectors of labour, when cancelling contracts for permanent incapacity, or for other causes, such as fraudulent enlistment: or again, whenever they find on a garden a number of coolies who ought obviously never to have been imported, to record the names of the contractors with the number of coolies concerned. Be they also directed to record the names of the Agents of the gardens. Let the Chief Commissioner of Assam be requested to publish in his Annual Immigration Report the names of these Agents and Contractors. As this might not be effective, seeing that this Report is one which planters, and it would seem, Agents also, refrain, with remarkable unanimity, from reading: let him send to all Managers in the Province, with duplicates to be forwarded to the Agents, circulars containing this information, together with the warning that if they do not avail themselves of it, gardens concerned will be visited with double severity.

But if they refuse this test of their sincerity, and go on in their old courses, it must be remembered that it is we, holders of tea-shares, and our Boards of Directors at home, who are ultimately responsible. It is for us, that Agents and Contractors do the things of which we disapprove. It may be answered, that a considerable proportion of gardens are managed directly by Home Boards, and their so-called Agents are purely Secretaries, and forwarding houses. In that case, let these Home Boards send out periodical Deputations of Managing Directors, with full powers to over-haul, and enquire into the doings of their subordinates. Till they do this, and acquaint themselves with every detail, they are careless of the interests of the coolies, they are neglectful of ours. It shows no undue distrust of human nature to say this. Read the narrative, lately appearing in the *Indian Planters' Gazette*, of what went on in the early "Sixties." Speculative planters were well to the fore: some Agency Houses aided and abetted them, whilst others themselves were bit. Gardens were formed, that is tracts of half-cleared jungle had a few tea-plants dibbled into them, not that they should become productive

estates, but, avowedly that they might give their names to Companies, and be sold as valuable properties and going Concerns. It is not on record, that in those days, as now, there was any heavy loss of human life. It is probable that local labour fully sufficed for gardens which had not even a prospective, but only a *Prospectus* existence; for which no one but the purchasers hoped a future life, but which were known to be, but :—

“Day-flies, May-flies, to perish in the using,
“Lures for foolish fish to bite at to their losing.”

—*Old Song.*

Circumstances have changed since then, but is there any indication that commercial morality moves now on a higher plane? Is not the line between what is of questionable honesty, and what is unquestionably dishonest, as ill-defined as ever? Do we not still declare that we follow honesty because it is the best policy, and so imply, that we reserve to ourselves full liberty to do other, when it is absolutely convenient?

One word touching this Introduction, and my paper generally. It may be said, that its style is vernacular to a degree. I wrote to be understood of the people. Again, it has been complained that I affect a sarcastic tone. For this I make no apology. Sarcasm and irony are recognised as legitimate resources of rhetoric, and controversial letters are but speeches in a written debate. Experience too, proves that when addressing a man, especially on a subject touching which he is not sure that he wants to be addressed, if you tender your observations, all nicely wrapped up in soft language, he is very likely to go to sleep over them. But if you pelt him with a hail of words, he may, perhaps, though only for peace sake, give you a hearing. I ask a hearing.

CHARLES DOWDING.

“ASSAM COOLIE RECRUITING.”

The Editor of the “Indian Churchman.”

SIR,

A letter appeared in your paper of the 9th instant on “Assam Coolie Recruiting,” and although it has been most ably answered by “Ex Luce Lucellum,” plainly proving the whole letter to be a gross misrepresentation of facts, still I feel sure you will be glad to receive further proofs, which may help to cast a brighter aspect on (as you yourself say) such a depressing picture as that represented by your correspondent.

From the first paragraph of the letter referred to, one would infer that there is a certain natural flow of immigration into the Assam Valley, but this is not the case. Owing to distance and tardy means of communication, there is not, as yet, that spontaneous immigration which we should all like so much to see spring up.

It would be a long story were I to trace, from the commencement of the Tea industry, the various methods of importing coolies into Assam; from the long and tedious journey by country boats, occupying more than three months, to the present comparatively rapid journey of six days by “Despatch Steamer;” how during the last 15 years various schemes have been laid before the Government of India, whereby coolies might be imported at the expense of Government and distributed over the Province, but in every instance the project has been abandoned as impracticable.

In the Resolution of the Government of India, dated 19th October, 1888, the following significant remark was made:—“The Assam *waste* lands are already being opened up under the influence of European capital, and improved communications; and it would seem unwise to interfere with, or hasten the development.”

As to the system of recruiting, every possible precaution is taken by the Governments of India and Bengal to prevent abuses. Coolies are given every opportunity of making complaints, not only in the district of recruitment, but at the embarkation depôts, and also at the periodical inspections of gardens, and it is satisfactory to find that in 1891 there were only three *true* cases of fraudulent recruitment recorded in Assam, and *none* in Cachar, and this out of an annual importation of from 30,000 to 35,000 coolies. Where, therefore, is this “vile trade of European coolie contractors?”

Your correspondent goes on to state that “coolies die by thousands in Assam.” This appears rather a random statement, and surely it would have been only fair to have given you some statistics as to the percentage of deaths among the coolie population; but as this has not been given, I must do so. I will first take deaths *en route*:—

To the Silehar depôt in 1884, the deaths *en route* were 8·13 *per mille*, in 1891 it was reduced to 1·32, owing in a great measure to better sanitary arrangements, and more careful supervision on the way.

Again, of 11,776 immigrants shipped from Goalundo for the Assam Valley in 1891, 37 died only, and of these 22 deaths were from cholera.

The death-rate in the Province of Assam, among all classes of labourers, *including children*, for 1890, was 34.3 *per mille*, in 1891, 36.8 *per mille*.

I fortunately have before me the statistics of the mortality in various parts of India for 1891.

In Bengal the death-rate was	...	...	...	26.94 <i>per mille</i> .
„ Madras	„	„	...	26.2 „ „
„ Bombay	„	„	...	27.26 „ „
„ N.-W. Provinces	„	„	...	31.14 „ „
„ Punjab	„	„	...	46.87 „ „
„ Cent. Provinces	„	„	...	35.54 „ „

In the town of Maldah the death-rate was 93.82, in the district of Nuddea 45.14. Chatra returned a death-rate of 61.94.

Assam, *including the whole of the coolie population*, showed a death-rate of 29.91.

The article goes on to state that “not until the death-rate is 7 per cent. is a garden placed on the Government ‘black list,’ and subjected to more frequent and minuter inspections.” This is not correct. There is an important provision in the Act whereby a garden is liable to have a commission held on it, when on *any portion*, or on *any particular class* of labourers, the mortality exceeds 7 per cent.

Again your correspondent says “The coolies do not die of diseases they bring with them, the diseases are generated by the local conditions of the garden.”

The Sanitary Commissioner of Assam ascribes the “apparent importation” of cholera to the “contact” the coolies had at Dhubri, and elsewhere, with pilgrims going to Calcutta and Murshidabad to bathe in the Ganges; also the Chief Commissioner writes, “Dr. Gilo’s investigation and my own enquiries lead me to have little doubt of the *importation* of this disease (anchylostomiasis) into Assam from the *recruiting districts*. One garden showed 36 per cent. of the new coolies were suffering from anchylostomiasis, and this disease will be found among many of the new batches in most gardens.”

Then, as to “wages not being high,” “over work,” “insufficient food”—I will take the average wage earned by coolies from two districts, which I think ought to be sufficient.

The average monthly pay earned by men in the non-manufacturing season (about 4 months) was, in the Sibsagar district, Rs. 4-9-4; for women Rs. 3-8-11; the highest pay a man earned was Rs. 13 a month, and the highest a woman earned was Rs. 10. In the manufacturing season the average for men was, in Sibsagar; Rs. 5-5-7 for women, Rs. 4-5-4; the highest wage earned by a man being Rs. 15-5-6, and a woman Rs. 10-8-0.

In Lakhimpur, the average in the non-manufacturing season was, men Rs. 4-8-8, highest Rs. 9-15-0; women Rs. 3-9-3, highest Rs. 10-9-0; in the manufacturing season, men Rs. 5-9-5, highest Rs. 15-14-5; women Rs. 4-8-9, highest Rs. 17-2-8.

The average cost of a coolie’s living in Assam is about Rs. 3 a month.

It should be borne in mind that the above does not represent the only means of living, or I ought rather to say of saving money, the coolie possesses. For instance, the planter is compelled to supply rice to the coolie at Rs. 3 per maund, and many gardens incur a loss of thousands of rupees *per mensem* on this head alone.

If a coolie is ill, he receives sustenance allowance, or is entirely fed from the hospital at the factory expense; he is allowed a house, land to cultivate rice on, or garden land, free of rent, also leave for one day in every seven, for which he gets full pay; he also gets

free medical attendance, medicines and hospital comforts. I have known as much as 6 per cent. of the total expense of an estate debited to this account alone.

The Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, in his Special Report, says that Rs. 20 represents seven months' wages for an able-bodied man in Chota Nagpur, and that from a period antecedent to the commencement of labour legislation, the labouring classes have looked to immigration into Assam as a means of improving their condition.

It would take too much space, were I to quote the many assurances from those in authority that the coolie is not overworked and that he gets sufficient food.

The analogy drawn by your correspondent as to getting the last pound of work out of a coolie is revolting.

The "whip" at any rate takes good care that his horse is well fed; whereas your correspondent does not even give the planter credit for this piece of humanity.

Coolies with hidden treasure, amounting to hundreds of rupees, will come up to their managers begging for a rupee, saying they have nothing to live on; it is a common thing for them to starve themselves for the sake of hoarding their gains.

A Deputy Commissioner writes :—"The truth is, that the bulk of the N.-W.P. coolies who come up here are low caste men, Chamars, Bhars, and so on. Half-starved in their own country, they have little or no stamina, and like all North-Westerners, they are bent on saving money and seldom feed themselves well."

It is customary, at nearly all gardens, to have what is now styled the "Hotel" system; sickly coolies, or those who will not take care of themselves, are regularly dieted.

The Deputy Commissioner of Sylhet writes :—"It is now becoming the custom amongst gardens importing labourers from the N.-W. Provinces, to keep a kitchen from which food is dispensed regularly every day to new coolies. This system works well, and no doubt saves the lives of many coolies."

In a report from the Collector of Ganjam the following will be found which I think is rather to the point; he says: "Enquiries made show that emigrants proceed to Assam cheerfully, having learned from returned emigrants the nature of tea work and the prospects of profit."

It certainly has been said that the garden labour system is "a thinly disguised slavery," but fortunately corroborative testimony entirely disproves this statement, and it is hardly possible to imagine that any one but an agitator lost to all sense of honour and truth, would dare even to hint at such a degraded state of affairs.

Roughly speaking, only from 5 to 10 per cent. of the coolies imported leave Assam at the expiration of their agreement, and a *large proportion of these actually return again to Assam on a fresh agreement for 5 and 6 rupees per mensem.*

I must give at length an extract from a letter written by the Rev. W. Hoberlot, a Baptist Missionary, who personally brought up a party of Christian coolies from Orissa to Sylhet, in 1889. The Reverend gentleman wrote the following to the *Englishman*, and the Chief Commissioner also made a point of quoting it:—

"I found that the condition of the coolies was better than that of the great majority of ordinary labourers in Orissa, and far to be preferred to that of thousands in this Province, who live on the merest pittance, and are often in great straits, while their prospects are much brighter than these can ever hope for. The coolies earn more, wear better clothes, and have better food than tens-of-thousands in these parts. House accommodation is provided for them, they have medical aid in case of illness, and while sick and unable to work are entitled to receive half pay. In these respects having privileges not enjoyed by the labouring classes in Orissa, they can all save money and buy cows (great numbers of

them do so), two things quite beyond the reach of the many with whose condition I am contrasting theirs. The tasks exacted from the coolies are such as ordinary able-bodied men and women can accomplish without distress, and hard-working individuals can do more, up to the extent of more than doubling their wages. Riding out one day between 1 and 2 o'clock to visit my men where they were at work, I met a coolie returning to the lines who had finished his task and was free to do as he liked for the rest of the day. Arrived at the place where my men were, I saw two others, father and son, at work next to my people, and their task was within a little of being finished. It was then not 2 P.M. My men agreed that the work was not hard, though harder to their unaccustomed hands than to the experienced ones. The wives of these men, who were picking tea leaf, also asserted that their work was not laborious, though it would require practice before they could make up the required quantity.

"I mention these things as matters of personal knowledge, and as a ground for the opinion I have arrived at, that the lot of coolies on tea gardens is far preferable to that of thousands of labouring classes in Orissa with whose circumstances I am familiar. I would, therefore, as one desirous of promoting the welfare of the poor, advocate the emigration to tea gardens of all the needy ones among the labouring classes in this Province and in other parts of India."

The Rev. Isaac Row, who made two prolonged tours through the tea districts in 1886-87, and 1887-88, and whose experience with all classes of coolies is exceptional, writes the following:—

"The misrepresentations so persistently made with reference to this subject are a great wrong not only to the planters but to the coolies themselves, of whom there are tens-of-thousands half-starved in over-crowded districts in Bengal and elsewhere, who should be encouraged and helped to emigrate to Assam, where they might readily find lucrative and easy employment."

Does this look like "disguised slavery?" The article in your paper goes on to say, "Read the *Planters' Gazette*—'Coolies any quantity: warranted junglies.'" "For sale," it is not added, but it is implied. Would your correspondent hesitate to pay a Commission Agent in Calcutta Rs. 10 for sending him up a cook or a khansamah? Where is the difference? I guarantee no coolie contractor has ever existed who could get such a handsome commission on each coolie passing through his hands.

As to the remarks regarding the ownership or proprietorship of a coolie, I would ask your correspondent again if he would take the trouble to try and recover a fugitive servant, whom he had imported, say at a cost of Rs. 50, or would he consider that the honor and glory of importing a servant for his next-door neighbour was a *quid pro quo* for the money expended, and forego all claims to the man?

Your correspondent might study law a little more before he talks about Civil Procedure and penal enactments: he is evidently in a mist here. I may refer him to the Indian Penal Code.

The article under reply accuses Government of most inhuman action with regard to coolies, who through their inability to stand the climate of Assam are released from their agreements. It says, "These poor coolies are handed Rs. 17 each (why Rs. 17, I am sure I do not know), and they are free, no one is responsible for them, they might stagger to the station hospital and die there, or crawl out and linger on wherever they could; if enough of their Rs. 17 was left to take them to their home, 600 miles away, they could go," &c.

This is absolutely false. It is true that by the old Act, only three months' pay could be demanded from the planter, but the balance required was paid out of the Labour

Transport Fund. All such coolies re-patriated were, and now are, sent back to their country under the strictest surveillance, and it is most iniquitous to assert that coolies are allowed to lie about and die.

As for there being no Poor Laws, your correspondent is right, we have no need for them for there are no poor, and the Charitable Dispensaries are kept up by voluntary contributions from planters, with a Government grant-in-aid.

And now, as to the pressure put on the coolie to give an agreement after his original agreement has expired, I presume your correspondent alludes to one single case of wrongful execution of contract, and on account of which the whole system has been severely criticised. I cannot help thinking that the mere fact of this case coming to light proves the efficacy of Government supervision to detect such breaches of law, and the Chief Commissioner himself says that the condition of tea gardens, and the system of supervision and control, are such, that it is *practically impossible for a manager to retain coolies on a garden who are unwilling to remain.*

It is not very easy to follow your correspondent's line of argument, when, at the commencement of a paragraph he complains of the actual pressure put on the coolie to 'engage' and finishes it with "contracts of re-engagement must be signed in the presence of the magistrate, who will satisfy himself that the agreement is given willingly." Does he wish to imply that the magistrate is a party to the compulsion?

Then, as to "cajoling" a woman to give an agreement, and the husband being told he will be hurried off the garden if he does not give one too,—the same argument will, I think, hold good in this case.

A statement is made about *hât-chits* being necessary before a coolie can travel safely through the country, without which he would be harrassed on all sides, and even captured outright by *arkaties* and hurried off to some distant place.

I maintain that all this is mere fabrication. Coolies can travel anywhere without the slightest interruption. Your correspondent has probably been muddling with the above, the custom of giving *hât-chits* to coolies who have leave to visit their friends in another garden; this is very often done so as to satisfy employers that the visitors have got *bond fide* leave.

Can your correspondent be aware that out of nearly half-a-million coolies imported into the Province ninety-seven thousand have settled down in the Province to other pursuits besides tea, on their own account? If these people were harrassed in the way the article complains, how long should we be without hearing of a complaint? I challenge your correspondent to produce a single instance.

I would now ask, why is it that, notwithstanding all the alleged persecution the coolie gets from his master, Government officials in all grades have to pay coolies double what planters do, and they consider themselves fortunate if they can get them at this rate.

What becomes of all coolies who are said to go begging from door to door for work, and are ruthlessly turned off because of the terms of an Association? Surely if such was the case, there would be hundreds of coolies available at all the civil stations.

Any unprejudiced person must own that a certain healthy combination between planters is most necessary, and it is the only real check there is to the demoralization of the Labour system.

There is one more statement you must allow me to question; and it is this: your correspondent says:—"There is no doubt that the exercise of power over a large number of men has a tendency to brutalize, against which a man must be on his guard." Included in this category of being thus "brutalized," we have "Planters," "Sea Captains," and "Army Officers."

May I ask why the Church should be excluded, for I am sure, from what I have seen both in India and England, its power in many instances is unbounded ?

In conclusion, I may say that the consensus of opinion of all civil officers, from the Chief Commissioner downward, is, that the relation between planters and their coolies is all that can be desired, and the very few sensational cases arising are not sufficient to assume that there has been any retrograde tendency. Any exceptional instances have met with the entire disapproval of the whole planting community.

The friendly relation between planters and their coolies does not even cease on their connection being broken up. Testimony shows that Bengali villagers constantly come to their old managers for advice, asking them to be their mouth-piece in communicating their wants to the District Officers.

From the foregoing remarks I hope it will be seen that I have no intention of holding up planters as paragons of virtue and forbearance ; but what I have endeavoured to do, and I hope successfully, is to prove the groundlessness of the misrepresentation and attacks upon the Labour system, and the injustice of such disparaging remarks being aimed at the planting community generally.

The Tea industry has not only been the means of saving and civilizing thousands of the natives of India, but has also kept them from perishing miserably from starvation and disease ; and at the same time it is gradually developing the resources of one of the richest provinces in the Empire. The quantity of land held direct from Government by ex-tea-garden coolies being in 1888, 25,000 acres ; in 1889, 28,000 ; in 1890, 32,000 ; and in 1891, 36,000 acres. The figures do not include the area taken up by coolies on private lands. Can such figures as these be without a significant meaning ?

Trusting you will favour me by inserting the above facts in your paper,

I beg to remain,

Yours faithfully

J. BUCKINGHAM.

P. S.—I have signed *in propria persona*, and I trust your correspondent will do the same, if there is any further correspondence on the subject : we shall then, I think, be able to meet on more equal terms.

REPLY.

Dibrugarh,

May, 1894.

To

The Editor of the "Indian Churchman."

Sir,

Let this be my reply to the letter of the Hon'ble J. Buckingham, which appeared in your issue of November 4th, last.

By the "natural flow of immigration" into the Assam Valley, I meant the immigration brought about by a fair statement to labourers down country, of such advantages as may be obtained by coming to Assam. I may mention one instance of perfectly natural flow. At Dibrugarh Steamer Ghât, there is a body of 200 or 300 particularly sturdy North-Westerners, in the employ of the Railway, who coal steamers, and handle heavy goods. These write to their friends when more men are required, and more come up. The pay and conditions of labour are such as to approve themselves to them.

The Cacharis, too, though theirs is a migration from one part of the valley to another, rather than an immigration, come in large gangs to Upper Assam, and are welcomed on most gardens, working, however, only for a certain number of months. Here, again, the pay and conditions of labour approve themselves to them, and they come willingly.

In like manner, sooner or later, gardens will have to make their pay and conditions of labour acceptable to the ordinary run of coolie, for contractors and Act I. will have gone away down the wind together.

Mr. Buckingham says—"As to the system of recruiting, every possible precaution is taken by the Governments of India and Bengal to prevent abuses. Coolies are given every opportunity of making complaints, not only in the district of recruitment, but at the embarkation depôts, and also at the periodic inspection of gardens," and he points with satisfaction to the fact that in 1891 only three true cases of fraudulent recruitment were recorded in Assam, and none in Cachar, out of an annual importation of from 30,000 to 35,000 coolies.

Says the writer of the leader in the *Indian Planters' Gazette* of October 21st: "If the contractors do not evade the law, as they always have done, and will continue to do, when it profits them to do so, the leopard will change his spots."

"Medicus" also, in his letter of October 21st, describes at length the contractors' malpractices, though with reference rather to recruitment of the wrong kind of coolie.

I am sure Mr. Buckingham does not suppose that 3 in 30,000, or 3 times 30 in 30,000 would represent the cases really true occurring in any one year.

His figures prove one of two things, or both: either the Government machinery for following up such cases is still insufficient, or there are unexplained obstacles to coolies availing themselves of their opportunities of making complaints. In this relation, it is worth noting that in the Immigration Report for 1892, pages 10 and 11, no less than seven cases, involving more than that number of individuals, fell through, or were in abeyance either because the people took the law into their own hands and absconded from the garden, or because they could not be traced, or because husbands down country took no legal steps to get their wives back, or because it seemed doubtful if a criminal case would lie, or, finally, because months elapsed without the authorities in the recruiting districts making answer to enquiries of officers in Assam.

Mr. Buckingham will remember the case of a contractor last year, who was fined none too heavily for his forcible procedure towards some Santhalis. He was in treaty with them for recruitment, and gave them some money and a pig that they might have a farewell feast with their friends. Unmanned, apparently, by these farewells, they decided not to emigrate, but having eaten the pig and spent the money, they returned no more to their expectant friend. Armed with a gun, he went in search of them. They took refuge on a hill: he sent them word he could hit a bird flying, and could easily shoot them there. But he promised not to shoot, so they came down. He passed them triumphantly through the local authorities, and they were got safely past troublesome enquiries all the way up to the garden. Here one of them wrote a letter, and the whole story came out.

For one case of fraudulent enlistment, proved and punished, there are doubtless scores, if not hundreds of cases of enlistment by fraudulent representations, which are either not discovered, or which, formerly, perhaps the law could not touch, though contracts are now voidable for this cause under section 11A of Act I. amended.

Now, as to vital statistics, and my statement that coolies die by thousands in Assam; Mr. Buckingham calls this a random statement, and says it would have been only fair to give you some statistics as to the percentage of deaths amongst the coolie population.

In my default he himself gives some, as follows :—“ The death-rate in the Province of Assam, among all classes of labourers, *including children*, for 1890, was 34·3 *per mille*; in 1891, 36·8 *per mille*: though the death-rate for the whole of Assam, *including the whole of the coolie population*, was only 29·91, in 1891.” This last figure shows a higher death-rate than that of Bengal, Madras or Bombay, though lower than that of the Punjab, N.-W. Provinces, and Central Provinces; but it seems to have escaped Mr. Buckingham’s notice that the figures he himself tenders go to prove how much higher the death-rate among imported labour is than among the indigenous population, in spite of the care supposed to be taken of the labour force, as compared with the *laissez aller* which prevails as to the sons of the soil.

Mr. Buckingham challenges me to produce figures in support of my assertion that the death-rate is unduly heavy.

I will do so. Mr. Buckingham, writing in October, 1893, does not quote from the Immigration Report published in July of that year, but from the one of the year before. My figures will be, by a twelve-month, more recent than his, for they will be taken from the report of 1893. There shall be abundance of figures, and to aid you, Sir, in understanding them, I will place before you huge cantles from the comments and detailed observations of officials, contained in this report. I could scarce have supposed, Sir, when you summed up against me on December 2nd, and quoted from this report, that you had yourself seen it, but rather that you were making use of carefully selected extracts from it, which had been furnished you by others.

Put briefly, the figures I shall give will shew :—

that the death-rate amongst adult Non-Act coolies in 1892, was ...	37·7	<i>per mille</i> .
amongst all classes of labourers, including children ...	41·9	do.
amongst Act and Non-Act adults, taken together ...	48·7	do.
amongst Act labourers alone ...	64·3	do.
amongst some, or all classes, on 143 unhealthy gardens ...	96·1	do.

The highest death-rate, out of Assam, quoted by Mr. Buckingham, was at Maldah, 93·8 *per mille*. “ Medicus,” in his letter to you, declared that “ coolies die only at a fair yearly percentage;” and that, “ however well cared for, the coolie himself is responsible for any excessive death-rate in most instances.” This statement is not borne out by the figures and facts which I shall submit.

This Table gives the Non-Act labour force and their death-rate.—

DISTRICT.	MEAN STRENGTH OF NON-ACT COOLIES EMPLOYED IN 1892.		DEATHS.			Annual death-rate <i>per mille</i> .
	1st half-year.	2nd half-year.	1st half-year.	2nd half-year.	Total.	
Cachar ...	51,474	52,211	1,122	851	2,003	38·5
Sylhet ...	49,531	51,915	378	1,118	1,996	39·2
Kámrúp ...	1,553	1,450	53	46	99	65·8
Darrang ...	11,586	11,893	250	203	453	38·5
Nowgong ...	7,014	6,737	213	130	343	49·7
Sibságar ...	21,934	22,953	380	278	658	29·4
Lakhimpur ...	21,814	22,523	358	406	764	34·4
Total in 1892 ...	164,957	169,684	3,254	3,062	6,316	37·7
Do. in 1891 ...	154,249	159,614	2,525	2,841	5,366	34·1

It must be explained that “ Act ” coolies are those who have given an agreement to labour for four years, under Act I. of 1882, which includes a penal clause, by which a coolie

deserting or refusing to work, may be punished with imprisonment. An employer can arrest a runaway coolie without a warrant, if 5 miles from a Police Station, under Section 172. He is required to take him, however, without delay, to the Police Station, nearest to the place of arrest, under a penalty of Rs. 200. This provision has been largely ignored: though essential in the coolie's interest. Desertion may be the only practicable means a coolie has of drawing attention to his grievances. In the year we are considering, 28,455 coolies were brought up under Act I. Of these 13,513 were recruited by garden sirdars, men sent down from the garden to recruit their own friends, if possible; the best way of increasing the labour force; whilst 14,942 were Contractors' coolies, gathered, often by force or fraud, wherever the professional "Black-birder," or "Coolie-catcher," can get them. They have no idea where they are going, can exercise no choice of place or master, but having been bought from the Contractor for a particular estate, they must stay wherever he consigns them. Act coolies, at the expiry of their four years, may, if they like, re-engage under the same Act, for a similar or shorter period. They generally prefer to give an agreement under Act XIII., by which they are only liable to civil action for breach of contract. Often they only give a verbal agreement. "Non-Act" means, therefore, *not under Act I.* Having survived their 4 years (5 it was till recently), they are acclimatised. They claim, and are "worth" more than before, like "salted" cattle in South Africa.

I give the official comment on the following Schedule :—

DISTRICT.	DEATHS AMONG ALL CLASSES OF LABOURERS INCLUDING CHILDREN			DEATH-RATE PER MILLE.		
	1st half-year.	2nd half-year.	Total	1st half-year.	2nd half-year.	Annual.
Cachar	2,045	1,907	4,042	19.7	19.0	38.7
Sylhet	1,578	1,953	3,531	16.6	19.9	36.5
Kamrup	125	137	262	33.2	37.4	70.6
Darrang	1,397	1,354	2,751	28.1	26.2	54.3
Nowgong	495	418	913	29.4	24.8	54.2
Sibsagar	1,941	2,041	3,982	19.5	20.0	39.5
Lakhimpur	1,619	2,150	3,769	19.3	24.6	43.9
Total, 1892	9,200	10,050	19,250	20.3	21.6	41.9
Do. 1891	7,205	8,627	15,832	17.1	19.7	36.8

"It will thus be seen that the annual death-rate for the year under report was higher than that for the previous year..... This result was doubtless largely due to the increased number of new and unacclimatised coolies in consequence of the larger importation of the last two years, and also to the fact that, in many cases, the coolies imported were of poor physique. The occurrence of outbreaks of cholera and influenza is given by some officers as a further reason for the increase of mortality. It is true that the year under report was a peculiarly unhealthy one amongst the general population of the country; but the Chief Commissioner fears that the main cause which operated to produce the increased rate of mortality amongst the garden population is to be found in the recruitment, during recent years, of coolies of poor physique, *who were unable to stand the change of climate to which they were subjected, or to perform the work expected from them.*" The italics are mine.

The following Table shows the mortality amongst both Act and Non-Act adults.—

DISTRICT.	Annual strength, of Adult force.	NUMBER OF DEATHS AMONGST ADULTS.			DEATH-RATE PER MILLE.		
		Act.	Non-Act.	Total.	Act.	Non-Act.	Total.
Cachar	59,153	798	2,003	2,801	108·7	38·5	47·4
Sylhet	57,942	397	1,906	2,393	55·3	39·2	41·1
Kámrúp	2,454	110	99	209	115·0	65·8	85·1
Darrang	35,496	1,680	453	2,133	70·6	38·5	60·0
Nowgong	10,860	285	343	628	71·6	49·7	57·8
Sibfagar	61,322	2,162	658	2,820	55·5	29·4	45·9
Lakhimpur	56,589	2,077	764	2,841	60·1	34·4	50·0
Total, 1892	283,819	7,809	6,316	13,825	64·3	37·7	48·7
Do. 1891	265,315	5,416	5,366	10,782	49·8	34·1	40·5

“These figures disclose a lamentable increase in the mortality amongst both Act and Non-Act adults during the year under report, which was common to all districts of the Province. The following explanations of this result are given by Deputy Commissioners:—

The Deputy Commissioner of Cachar (Mr. Herald) writes:—

“From the above figures it appears that the total increase in the death-rate was shared by both Act and Non-Act adults, the rate among Act adults having advanced by 25·5, and that among Non-Act adults by 2·8 per mille. The increase in the case of the former is due to the large importation during the year of a bad type of coolies from the North-Western Provinces, and Oudh and Behar, among whom deaths and desertions are very common almost everywhere. It is a known fact that the contractors, failing to procure supplies of a better class, palm off decrepit specimens of humanity, and it is no wonder that there should be such losses by deaths and desertions.”

The Deputy Commissioner of Sylhet (Mr. O'Brien) reports:—

“The high death-rate observable on some gardens is due to the practice of importing cheap and bad coolies, e.g., a North-Western costs about Rs. 15, and is likely to die in his first year; whereas a good jungli coolie, who thrives in this climate, cannot be imported usually under Rs. 100. Now, out of every 9 North-Westerns, costing Rs. 135, 3 may possibly die in the first year. The other 6 will by that time be acclimatised, and will have cost the same as 3 junglies, say Rs. 300, (that is assuming they have done little work, and have been receiving subsistence allowance.) This gives a balance of 3 men to the credit of the garden.”

The same officer commenting on the increased importation of Act coolies into his district, says:—“It would appear that *new gardens and extensions have to be worked by Act labour* (the italics are mine), as the Non-Act coolie is aware of the unhealthiness of such gardens, and will not go to them. It is significant that the demand for labour on such clearings is met by an increase in the supply of Act coolies, there being concurrently a falling off in the number of free immigrants.”

The Deputy Commissioner of Darrang (Mr. Anderson) writes:—

“The death-rate increased on almost every garden in the district. This was partly due to an outbreak of cholera last spring (and this chiefly affected gardens, which have not imported much labour this year), but chiefly to the extremely poor type of coolie imported in large numbers this year.”

Mr. Anderson adds:—

“The enormous mortality among Act coolies is bad enough as it stands; but it has been

chiefly among the new coolies. If the history of particular gangs be looked up, it will be seen that the percentage among them is simply too shocking for words to describe."

The same officer commenting on the recorded causes of deaths, writes :—

"The table tells its own tale. It is quite clear that though cholera accounted for many deaths, the huge death-roll of the year was chiefly due to anæmia and sickly new immigrants. This will more clearly appear when individual unhealthy gardens are considered."

As regards children, let it suffice, that amongst them (from birth to the age of sixteen) the death-rate in 1892 is put down as 31·1 *per mille*, over, say, 1,73,000 children; as against 30·7, over 1,63,000 in 1891.

"But it must be remembered" (says the Report) "that no great reliance can be placed on the figures, which are less trustworthy than in the case of adults."

This is no doubt true; and affects therefore the death-rate of 41·9 given for all classes of labour, including children. This would stand higher were correct figures obtainable.

Considering that out of every 1,000 births, 260 infants die before they are a year old, it is obvious that any district returning a death-rate among children lower than that among adults generally has been furnished by gardens with incorrect figures. Kámrúp and Darrang, which give 49·0 and 40·1 per thousand, are probably nearest the mark.

There can be no question but that the conditions of labour affect seriously the chances of life of children born in Assam.

By no means all gardens can allow mothers all the leave they need before and after child-birth. And supposing it allowed, mothers on gardens, on which wages at best range low, may not be able to afford to take it.

Added to their rooted dislike to receive medical aid in child-birth, even when available, this working so soon before and after it, must have a prejudicial effect on their own health, and consequently on that of the new-born children. These, too, taken out so early into the garden, whether slung on the mother's back, or lying under a bush, whilst she hoes or plucks leaf, must receive a great deal less attention than is needed by an infant of days.

The following table deserves more attention than it will probably receive. The nationalities are graded according to their degree of obnoxiousness to death, as shown in 1892, among adults only.

NATIONALITY.	ANNUAL STRENGTH.		NUMBER OF DEATHS.		DEATH-RATE PER MILLE.	
	1891.	1892.	1891.	1892.	1891.	1892.
Madras	6,434	9,024	364	728	56·4	80·3
Central Provinces ... ..	.....	2,428	.....	182	.....	73·1
Bohar	17,949	20,084	894	1,168	49·6	58·0
N.-W. P. and Oudh	37,877	42,697	2,008	2,521	52·7	56·1
Ohota Nagpur	1,30,623	1,36,058	5,374	6,657	41·1	48·9
Bengal	58,273	59,491	1,874	2,261	32·1	38·0
Nepal	331	310	16	11	48·5	32·3
Bombay	365	408	6	12	16·5	29·4
Orissa	117	213	1	4	8·3	21·7
Assam	13,334	13,075	245	281	18·3	21·4
Total	2,65,315	2,83,819	10,782	13,825	40·5	48·7
Men	1,42,613	1,51,480	5,597	72,69	39·2	47·9
Women	1,22,702	1,32,339	5,585	6,556	42·2	49·4

These figures are taken from the Report, p. 34, which also gives the relative strengths of the sexes. "Medicus," in his letter has described the tricks of the trade of coolie con-

tracting; and it is probable that if those returned as Chota Nagpuris were all really such, they would not appear so high in this list, but, as the Report says; on page 4, "there is reason to fear that coolies from the North-Western Provinces, amongst others, are not unfrequently shewn by the recruiting agencies as junglies, or immigrants from Chota Nagpore, for whom a higher price is obtained."

The Madrasis are probably largely Ganjamis, and coast and plains-dwellers at that. The hill men are spoken of as of good physique, but few gardens will now, knowingly, take a Ganjami of any sort, at any price. It is obvious that their fairly equable, though warm climate, unfits them to stand the violent changes of Assam, where after a fortnight of almost "hot-wind" weather, may come a week, even in March, of cold rain, with the thermometer little above 60°, even in the day time. Beharis and North-Westerns are accustomed to intense heat, and to them, also, these changes are extremely trying. The number of coolies acknowledged as from the Central Provinces is so small that it is impossible to say whether their position on this list is exceptional or no. It ought, however, to make gardens very cautious in importing coolies from those parts.

"The following statement shows the proportion of unhealthy gardens in each district. All gardens on which ten or more deaths have occurred amongst the total population, Act or Non-Act, or Act and Non-Act taken together, and the death-rate of which exceeds 7 per cent., are classed as unhealthy gardens."

DISTRICTS.	Number of gardens.		Number of unhealthy gardens.		Percentage of unhealthy gardens.	
	1891.	1892.	1891.	1892.	1891.	1892.
Cachar	187	186	25	20	13·4	10·7
Sylhet	118	119	12	16	10·2	13·4
Kâmrûp	50	50	6	7	12·0	14·0
Darrang	89	90	15	33	16·8	36·6
Nowgong	59	56	8	11	13·5	19·6
Sibsâgur	224	223	12	32	5·4	14·3
Lakhîmpur	145	143	11	24	7·6	16·7
Total	872	867	89	143	10·2	16·4

On this table the Report comments as follows:—"Thus the proportion of unhealthy gardens for the Province, as a whole, shows a very considerable increase, as compared with the previous year, which was especially marked in the districts of Darrang, Sibsaigar and Lakhîmpur, Cachar being the only district which shows a decrease.....Mr. Ward desires to add that he entirely accepts the view of the Government of India, that the Sections of the Act which relate to unhealthy gardens should be applied with greater strictness than has hitherto been used, and orders have been issued, which, it is hoped, will produce the desired result. In these orders it has been pointed out to Deputy Commissioners that the fact that garden managers have taken all possible precautions against sickness and mortality on their gardens by adopting sanitary measures that have been recommended, is no ground for not

appointing a Committee to enquire and determine whether the garden, or any portion of it, is or is not fit for the residence of labourers or of any particular class of labourers. If in spite of all sanitary precautions, a garden continues to be unhealthy year after year, the provisions of Act I. of 1882, as recently amended, must be enforced, and the fact must be recognised that the Act *cannot be maintained for the benefit of unhealthy gardens.* (The italics are mine.) It has also been pointed out that the importation of bad batches of coolies can no longer be accepted as a valid excuse for high mortality, and that managers of gardens must now be held responsible for importing such batches. As has been remarked by the Government of India, if managers permit the continued importation of a class of coolies, large numbers of which they are certain to lose, and if such a state of things is allowed to be repeated, and it becomes clear that those in charge of the garden either cannot, or will not, provide a remedy, the law should be put in force without hesitation, and the garden should be closed to the coolies of the class amongst which the mortality has occurred.....Lastly, the instructions issued include a direction that Committees, when appointed, must, in accordance with the terms of the law, always record a definite finding as to whether the estate concerned, or any portion of it, is, or is not, fit for the residence of labourers generally, or of any particular class of labourers. In many cases it has been found impossible to take action on the reports of Committees owing to the fact that no distinct finding as regards the above point was placed upon record."

Before giving the Table of death-rates on unhealthy gardens throughout the province, I would draw your attention, Sir, to another one, which shows the number of gardens in each district in 1892: the total acreage under tea: the average acreage per garden, the total adult labour force, and average labour force per garden, and besides the out-turn of tea per acre, the proportion of labour per acre, with the death-rate of the adult labour force, *per mille.*

The labour per acre is important, for in spite of special pleading, and attempts to prove the contrary, it is certain that coolies on undermanned gardens are liable to be overworked. In your issue of November 18th, "A Garden Manager" says: "This overworking of coolies is a theory put forward possibly by Government officials, but well known by planters to be an illusion. The reason of its not being contradicted probably is that it is useless to argue with an Inspector, or one in authority, who has the power to shut up a garden if it is unhealthy (often a heavy death-rate is owing to unsuitable coolies having been sent up) and to increase the labour force is what the proprietors and managers are most anxious to do. The difficulty in the Assam Valley is to *get* the coolies, and it looks as if agents sooner than send up no coolies at all, have sometimes sent up people who have turned out utterly unsuited for the climate. Where the labour force is insufficient, the garden and its proprietors suffer, not the coolie; because the yield of tea is less, consequent on want of cultivation. I have been manager of a tea estate for more than 25 years, and never have known of coolies being overworked."

This statement is made in obvious good faith; none the less, as I have said in a previous letter, the time may come, when Government may insist on the labour force being in some fixed proportion to the acreage of a garden.

DISTRICT.	No. of Gardens.	Acreage under Tea Mature and Immature.	Mean adult labour force, 1892	Average of coolies per garden.	Average acreage per garden.	Proportion of labour per acre.	Out-turn of tea per acre in lbs.	Death-rate per mille.
Cachar	186	59,290	59,152	323.4	318.7	0.99	310 lbs.	47.4
Sylhet	119	47,874	57,942	486.8	402.3	1.21	463 "	41.1
Kámrúp	50	4,822	2,454	49.0	96.4	0.50	108 "	85.1
Darrang	90	24,630	35,496	394.4	273.6	1.44	540 "	60.0
Nowgong	56	12,002	10,860	193.9	214.3	0.90	296 "	57.8
Sibsagar	223	57,944	61,322	275.4	259.8	1.05	358 "	45.9
Lakhimpur	143	40,184	56,588	395.7	281.0	1.40	475 "	50.0
Total	867	2,46,746	2,83,814	302.6	263.7	1.07	372.8 "	48.7

The labour figure of 1.07 per acre is lower than it should be. I believe it is reckoned there ought to be two coolies per acre, including the working children, two of whom are counted equal to one adult. This, however, is a counsel of perfection. Anything over $1\frac{1}{2}$ coolie per acre is considered good. Now, there were said to be 173,000 children in 1892. Assuming that as many as 100,000 were of working age (which is, probably, very much beyond the real number), this only gives 0.4 child per acre, or 0.2 adult, to be added to the figure 1.07; total 1.27 per acre for the entire Province.

We may note that the death-rate is lowest in Sylhet, with its large gardens, and highest in Kámrúp where the gardens are smallest, and where, too, the proportion of labour is smallest. The climate of Kámrúp is very bad, but there is ground for suspicion that coolies on small, perhaps ill-financed, private-adventure gardens, so to call them, live under more onerous conditions than those on larger gardens. This applies to every district. Darrang has the next highest death-rate, though its labour force is numerically good: but then its out-turn of tea per acre is very high. Soil, of course, has much to do with this, but more than that goes to produce this large out-turn: skill and management, and machine-like organization. But human beings are not machines, and may be organised out of existence. When we hear of the machinery of a tea-house actually running day and night without stopping, for several months, we may admire the organization; but we feel perfectly certain that to supply leaf to that machinery the whole garden must be worked at high pressure; and that for eight months in the year, the coolies are not getting their full Sunday's rest. This is bad, and no doubt has a direct influence on the death-rate.

Managers may persuade themselves that the extra pay compensates for the Sunday work: but no doctor durst assert this. The coolie does want one day in seven to himself: he does not get it. The Sunday work, though paid for extra, is compulsory. If it be only half a day: it is half a day's rest he cannot spare without injury to health. There are gardens where there is no Sunday work, throughout the year. I know one large company, paying handsomely, which only plucks leaf five days a week. These gardens never have trouble about labour. Their people are happy and stay on, term after term. Leave is freely given, even in the busy season, for very slight causes: but with a benefit by no means slight to the general health. *O si sic omnes!* But they are not all so: and overwork has a great deal to say to the death-rate.

As regards the daily task of a coolie, again, there is a section (No. 117) in the Act which provides:—"If the Inspector considers that any schedule of daily tasks, or any part thereof is unreasonable, he may, by order in writing, direct that a reduction specified by such order, be made of such tasks." But how often is this section applied? The condition of things on a garden may plainly cry for some such remedy, yet the Inspector (perhaps a police

officer, or a young official knowing but little, and therefore diffident, or even if the Civil Surgeon, one without much practical knowledge of a tea garden) may be in doubt what reduction he ought to order: and feel a hasty visit of a couple of hours has not supplied him with sufficient data for action. The man who could best speak as to the proper tasks for the coolies on a particular garden, would be a European medical man, in constant attendance, if there were one. I do not suppose there is a doctor in Assam but knows what havock overwork produces on some gardens. But the doctors are terribly few. In Lakhimpur District, there is one European medical man to, say, every 9,000 coolies; in Sibsagar, one to every 12,000; in Darrang, one to every 10,000. These are round figures, but underestimate, rather than otherwise, the doctors' enormous charges. It may be doubted, too, whether even European garden-doctors hold that absolutely independent position towards managers, which alone can enable them to speak with authority, and compel attention and obedience to the directions and orders they may give, in all that concerns the health of the labour force. Nearly every garden has its Doctor-babu, indeed, but the qualifications of the majority of these are but slight. Some hold merely compounders' certificates. So that it will be seen that the medical attendance is still sadly insufficient, and fully justifies the plain speaking of the article to be quoted, later, from the *Indian Planters' Gazette*.

It will be answered that, in their own country, coolies have no European medical attendance. It cannot, however, be too often insisted on, that in their own country they live under *normal* conditions. Hard though these may be, the fact that they are normal, enables the native, in his own home, to resist them. Besides, in nearly every village, there is a hakim, or practitioner of native medicine. In every household, too, generally, there is someone with a considerable knowledge of simples. *But above all, other life-preserving factors, is this, a man feeling out-of-sorts, can take rest when he knows he needs it.* On tea-gardens hundreds of lives would be saved by timely rest, which they cannot obtain. It is a British belief, that there is nothing like regular work for keeping a man in health. This is not held by all European peoples: and supposing it a correct notion, as regards Englishmen, it is by no means certain that it holds good as to Orientals. The very regularity of the work may be truly killing to not a few. I have heard it said that many a coolie, whose illness resisted all treatment, has begun to pick up directly he was told his agreement was to be cancelled, and has been on the fair way to recovery, ere ever he left the garden. There was life in the very word "freedom." Dr. Hancock (in his "Letter on Anæmia and General Dropsies," published in 1881) says: "Space will not permit of my bringing forward proofs of the actual necessity of rest, and the utter uselessness of treatment of any kind, without it. It must therefore suffice to say, that the fact is thoroughly recognised by every authority on the subject."

The next table is compiled from the lists of unhealthy gardens in each district, given at length in the Report. The sturdiest optimist, the most strenuous upholder of the present system will feel himself non-plussed if called upon to explain away this schedule.

A garden is called "Unhealthy," or said to be on the "Black-list," when the death-rate for the previous twelve-months, or the average annual death-rate, for the previous three years, on the Act and Non-Act adults, *plus* all the children, is over 7 per 100. Class C. in the table.

It is called "unhealthy on Act labour," or "on the Black-list, with its Act coolies," when Act adults, only, have died, at this rate. Class A. in the table.

It is unhealthy on Non-Act labour, when the death-rate of Non-Act adults, *plus* all the children, is over 7 per 100. Class B. in this table following. The gardens scheduled here are those actually unhealthy during the year under report.

Gardens unhealthy on Act Ooolies, A : Non-Act, B : Act and Non-Act, C.

DISTRICT.		No. of gardens.	MEAN STRENGTH.		DEATHS.			RATIO PER MILE.		
			1st half-year.	2nd half-year.	1st half-year.	2nd half-year.	Total.	1st half-year.	2nd half-year.	Annual.
Cachar	... A.	11	1,734	1,679	79	181	260	45.5	107.8	153.3
	B.	1	1,060	977	38	35	73	35.8	35.8	71.6
	C.	8	5,230	5,305	203	229	437	39.7	43.1	82.8
	Total ...	20	8,024	7,961	325	445	770	40.4	56.0	96.4
Sylhet	... A.	8	1,460	1,295	46	76	122	31.5	58.6	90.1
	B.	5	2,560	2,539	97	200	297	37.8	78.7	116.5
	C.	3	1,820	2,012	64	87	151	35.1	43.2	78.3
	Total ...	16	5,840	5,846	207	363	570	35.4	62.0	97.4
Kámrúp	... A.	1	204	213	10	11	21	49.0	51.6	100.6
	B.	1	350	294	18	19	37	51.4	64.6	113.0
	C.	5	1,500	1,525	66	81	147	44.0	53.1	97.1
	Total ...	7	2,054	2,032	94	111	205	45.7	54.6	100.8
Darrang	... A.	17	6,156	6,191	254	316	570	41.2	51.0	92.2
	B.	4	581	608	29	24	53	49.9	39.4	89.3
	C.	12	6,945	7,277	372	390	762	53.5	53.5	107.0
	Total ...	33	13,682	14,076	655	730	1,385	47.8	51.8	99.6
Nowgong	... A.	3	718	746	28	31	59	39.1	41.5	80.6
	B.	3	802	927	51	37	88	57.2	39.9	97.1
	C.	5	1,334	1,954	83	90	173	45.2	46.0	91.2
	Total ...	11	3,444	3,627	162	158	320	47.0	43.5	90.5
Sibságar	... A.	15	4,813	4,831	203	267	470	41.9	55.2	97.1
	B.	3	1,129	2,154	97	73	170	45.5	33.8	79.3
	C.	14	6,639	6,640	326	323	649	49.1	48.6	97.7
	Total ...	32	12,611	13,625	626	663	1,289	49.6	45.6	93.2
Lakhímpore	... A.	12	4,380	4,768	170	284	454	38.8	59.5	98.3
	B.	4	1,973	1,969	66	85	151	33.4	43.1	76.5
	C.	8	4,609	4,842	205	307	512	44.4	63.4	107.8
	Total ...	24	10,962	11,579	441	676	1,117	40.2	58.3	98.5
Grand Total ...	143	56,617	58,746	2,510	3,146	5,656	44.3	51.8	96.1	

Causes of Deaths on Unhealthy Gardens.

DISTRICTS.		Cholera.	Dysentery.	Fever.	Dropsy.	Anæmia.	Other causes.	Total.
Cachar	... A.	13	85	16	25	12	109	260
	... B.	12	9	19	3	...	30	73
	... C.	124	98	39	39	...	137	437
	Total ...	149	192	74	67	12	276	770
Sylhet	... A.	12	27	14	15	1	53	122
	... B.	47	75	50	14	5	106	297
	... C.	15	21	28	18	7	62	151
	Total ...	74	123	92	47	13	221	570
Kámrúp	... A.	11	...	...	...	4	6	21
	... B.	3	...	14	...	...	20	37
	... C.	53	13	18	1	10	52	147
	Total ...	67	13	32	1	14	78	205
Darrang	... A.	94	140	98	10	96	132	570
	... B.	1	7	12	1	4	23	53
	... C.	223	121	109	67	87	155	762
	Total ...	318	268	219	78	187	315	1,385
Nowgong	... A.	12	11	4	2	3	27	59
	... B.	6	21	1	2	...	53	88
	... C.	18	43	16	...	4	92	173
	Total ...	36	75	21	4	7	177	320
Sibságar	... A.	64	87	40	23	51	205	470
	... B.	15	44	20	3	13	75	170
	... C.	160	167	55	22	47	198	649
	Total ...	239	298	115	48	11	478	1,289
Lakhimpur	... A.	81	153	20	2	69	120	454
	... B.	9	41	13	10	15	63	151
	... C.	138	117	22	4	42	189	512
	Total ...	228	311	55	16	126	381	1,117
Grand total ...		1,111	1,280	608	261	470	1,926	5,656

I now proceed to quote from the remarks made by officers on the unhealthy gardens. It is to be noted that these remarks, as given, refer only to gardens unhealthy on the Act population. I shall therefore make my own reflections, from time to time, on other gardens. My object is to prove beyond the possibility of cavil, that the death-rate in many gardens in all parts of the province is excessive: and that this is due, frequently, to sending up coolies "to whom the climate of Assam is certain death." This fact is disputed by "Ex Luce Lucellum," "Medicus," and Mr. Buckingham.

The figure at the head of each paragraph is the schedule number of the garden; the death-rate *per mille* follows.

We begin with Cachar. The District Commissioner writes:—

"(1)—150·3.—Was unhealthy only for second-half of last year, owing to importations of batches of bad coolies, 13 of whom died in six months. It is otherwise a healthy garden. I have issued orders that all new importations for gardens on the black-list, are to be taken at once to the Civil Surgeon, and any doubtful cases freely rejected and sent back to their country. This procedure has already resulted in a good many importations having had their agreements cut."

This order as to arrival examination by the Civil Surgeon, of coolies for unhealthy gardens, might well be made the order of the day throughout the province.

If Deputy Commissioners all round had the nerve to take this action, it would do much towards putting an end to that hunt-the-slipper game, played between planters, agents, and contractors, when search is made as to where the responsibility rests for the importation of "bad" coolies.

"(2)—108·6—The death-rate was owing to 22 deaths in second half-year weakly importations of the previous season."

"(3)—211·4—High death-rate due to—(1.) the usual weakly importations; (2.) an outbreak of Cholera."

"(4)—301·3—Unhealthy, owing to 27 deaths in second half-year—the result of importing totally unfit coolies."

Did 70 per cent. of the new coolies die?—The figures in the schedule look suspiciously like it.

"(6)—187·7—High death-rate due to small number of Act I. coolies, and importation of bad batches." The officer means, I think, that the Act-labour force having run down, through expiry of contracts or deaths, had to be recruited; not that the death-rate was due to the labour force being small.

"(8)—180·5—" Same as (6).

"(9)—128·1—Unhealthy during second half-year, owing to bad batches of new arrivals."

"(10)—165·9—" Same as (6).

"(11)—146·5—Only 1 death in first half-year, and 13 in second, owing to bad batches of new arrivals."

The death-rate of this table is terrific: though but 1,700 coolies were affected. But the death-rate on Act-adults throughout Cachar was 108·7, as already shewn.

Fortunately Cachar had but some 7,000 Act-adults: else the sky would have been black with the smoke of coolies' funeral pyres, or with vultures hastening, on extended wing, to feed on their scarce-buried corpses.

It does not surprise us that Cachar had to increase its Act-labour force during 1892, by 44·8 *per cent.*; whilst of the three great Act-labour importing districts—Darrang, Sibságar, and Lakhimpur—Sibságar added to its force only 20·0 *per cent.*: Darrang, even, but 22·2 *per cent.*; and Lakhimpur, with its large extensions, and constant drain southwards of time-expired people, 32·0 *per cent.*

Sylhet is the healthiest district in the province. Still one wonders why 5 gardens unhealthy on non-Act population, should have had a death-rate of 116·5 *per mille*, on some 2,500 coolies. The causes of death, diagnosed, probably, by doctor-babus, do not carry conviction to the mind. But of the 297 deaths, there are 47 ascribed to cholera, 75 to dysentery, 50 to fever, 14 to dropsy, 5 to anaemia, and 106 to other causes.

"(9)—127·6—" Cholera accounted for 34 out of 38 deaths.

"(11)—124·6—" Out of some 360 coolies, 40 died.

"(12)—214·6—" Of 107 coolies who died in one year, out of a mean force of a little over 500, there were 33 who succumbed to dysentery. This death-rate is awful: 21 persons out of every 100 died.

Kámráp is credited with a labour force of some 3,600, all told, and a death-rate of 70·6 over the whole. It stands first, in the order of de-merit, in the seven districts.

Darráng comes second. Out of 90 gardens, it had 33 unhealthy. It shares, too, with Cachar, Nowgong and Kámráp the unenviable distinction of having the whole of its Act-labour force, of some 24,000 adults, scheduled as dying at a black-list rate: *viz.*, over 70·0 *per mille*.

The Deputy Commissioner remarks as follows, on some of the Act-unhealthy ones:—

"(2)—82·1—Is an excellently managed garden, which has not been on our black-list since '84. It came on last year simply because it was supplied by contractors with coolies unfit for service in Assam."

"(4)—74·9—Has the best arrangements for hospital, water supply, feeding sick coolies, &c., in the whole district. A Committee could not possibly suggest any improvements. It is situated in a clearing amidst dense tree-jungle, and *such gardens are invariably unhealthy for years after they are opened.*" (The italics are mine.) Doubtless, it is the care taken of the coolies which causes this garden to have the lowest death-rate but one of the 17 Act-unhealthy gardens. On the other hand, the sentence which I have italicised gives the explanation of the mixture of fear and anger with which the possible abolition of Act I. is discussed. Nothing but the compulsion of the quasi-slavery, legalised by Act I., would keep coolies on gardens which are invariably unhealthy for years after they are opened.

"(7)—90·2—Adjoins (2), and is in all respects similar to it."

"(8)—85·5—This garden has been unfortunate in its death-rate. It was on our black-list in 1886, 1887, 1888 and 1890, but it has been importing largely, and the deaths are due, for the most part, to *the difficulty North-Western coolies have in becoming acclimatised.* (The italics are mine.) I do not think there is any present need to hold a committee on this garden, but it is one which will have to be watched very carefully."

"(9)—86·4—This adjoins (8) and the same remarks apply."

The marginal remark of the Commissioner, Assam Valley Districts, however runs:—

"(8), (9)—I think a committee might be held for the benefit of the North-Western Provinces coolies, who seemed to be doomed to die."

"(12)—71·3—This is a very healthy garden. The deaths (17 out of 21) were almost entirely among new coolies. For this the contractors, not the garden, are to blame."

"(13)—113·0—This is not an unhealthy garden for acclimatised coolies. It closely resembles (12), and the deaths were almost entirely among newly imported coolies."

"(14)—76·6—The same remarks apply; 21 out of 39 deaths were among newly imported coolies."

"(15)—97·6—Adjoins (14), and is in all respects similar to it."

As shown by the schedule, there were 12 gardens unhealthy on Act and non-Act population taken together. It is hard to understand why no remarks are made touching their circumstances. Of the 762 deaths among some 7,000 people, 223 are put down to cholera, 121 to dysentery, 109 to fever, 67 to dropsy, 87 to anæmia, and 155 to 'other causes.'

On (23)	the death-rate was	103·6	<i>per mille.</i>
On (24)	"	180·0	"
On (26)	"	108·9	"
On (29)	"	171·8	"
On (30)	"	130·2	"
On (31)	"	165·0	"
On (32)	"	167·8	"
On (33)	"	104·4	"

Nowgong has but one-third of the garden population of Darrang, say, 17,000. Its Act death-rate, 71·6, is but 1 higher than Darrang, but its death-rate for non-Act adults and children, 49·7 and 47·7 is much higher than any in the province, except in Kāmrup, which has 65·8 for non-Act adults. No information is tendered as to the cause of this; but the gardens average small, and the proportion of labour per acre is only 0·90. It is singular that in Nowgong, the average pay of a child is higher than that of any of the seven districts of the Province. Would they not rather ask longer life? I venture to suggest the term "*Wage-Unit*" (not as strictly correct, but as handy as another), for the aggregate average monthly wages, throughout the year, of one Act man and woman, and one non-Act man, woman, and child.

Nowgong has the highest Wage-Unit but one, in the Province, *viz.*, Rs. 23-1-6, the Wage-Unit of the whole Province being Rs. 19-7-3. One garden is noteworthy as evoking the following remarks:—

"(3)—77·4—Non-Act coolies—38·7—This garden was not on the black-list in the past two years, but in 1889 had a heavy death-rate of 165·0 amongst Act coolies, and 55·0 amongst non-Act. The mortality in 1892 was principally due to sickness amongst Ganjam coolies. The class of coolie imported appears to be quite unsuitable, and should no longer be recruited."

When dealing with desertions, the Deputy Commissioner of Nowgong speaks thus, p. 28:—"The Madras coolies shew the largest percentage of desertions, and the Sanitary Commissioner of Assam, in inspecting the Udmari and Amlokhi tea-gardens on 11th February, 1893, remarked that Ganjam coolies should not be allowed on these gardens." Regarding Udmari he writes:—"The manager states that a batch of Ganjam coolies, who were recruited for this garden, proved very unsatisfactory. They were not strong on arrival; they could do but little work; they were lazy and often sick, and were a cause of loss to the garden.' A batch of five were sent in to me, to have their names cut, under Section 122, within three months of their arrival. A more miserable and sickly-looking lot I never saw. They had to be sent in a cart, as they could not walk, and I had to send them to Silghat, also in a cart, to be put on board the steamer. How they were ever recruited was a puzzle to me. It was a simple swindling sending them up, and I should think it most probable that none of them lived to get home again. They were all coast Ganjamese. The hill men are good coolies, but the coast men should never be allowed to be recruited."

The sentence italicised by me, expresses what I have frequently felt about coolies of other classes, whom I have seen in Dibrugarh, who had been sent in to have their names cut, *i. e.*, their agreements cancelled: and who were afterwards put on board the steamer, without any escort.

In this connection, I will quote from a letter already in print, perhaps I may evoke an answer some day :—

“ By section 142 F, of Act I., amended, a magistrate may provide an escort, or make such other arrangements as may appear to him to be necessary for ensuring such labourer or person is actually conveyed to such district. Much I should like to know whether it is anybody's business to let the despatching magistrate know that the coolies do reach their districts. Does he ever hear a word more about them? How does he ensure their arriving: how is he assured they have done so?”

We come now to Sibságar (Mr. Buckingham's own district.) The Deputy Commissioner writes :—

“(3.)—84·9—” (on some 150 coolies).....The Civil Surgeon reported that “ most of the deaths are those of newly-imported coolies.....”

“(4.) and (5)—127·4 and 115·8—” These are *small* private gardens, with some 100 or so of Act coolies each. As the Civil Surgeon had failed to inspect them, no orders were passed.

“(8.)—89·8—.....The garden is usually a healthy one, but has suffered from a bad class of coolies lately.”

“(9.)—94·2—.....The Civil Surgeon reports :—‘ The unhealthiness of this garden seems to be due to a bad lot of coolies received in 1891.’

“(10.)—131·2—(over nearly 700 Act coolies), was unhealthy in 1891 on Act coolies. The Civil Surgeon reports :—‘ The water-supply and sanitary arrangements are good.....The coolies that have been imported are inferior and of poor physique, and the manager ought to have returned them, on, or immediately after, arrival on the garden.’ This report does not show that the estate is not a fit place for the residence of labourers, and there are therefore no grounds for holding a committee.”

So speaks the Deputy Commissioner. The Commissioner, however, writes :—“ Death-rate (non-Act) evidently not properly registered, 0·5 is absurd. Probably death-rate (Act) is under the real figure. Certainly, a committee should be held!”

“(13.)—84·4—.....The manager has been unlucky in getting such a bad class of coolies.”

(15.)—110·6—The Commissioner remarks :—“ The mortality was appalling, and was due to absolute recklessness in importing last year, *i. e.*, 1891.”

As usual, there are *no remarks* on the gardens unhealthy throughout, *i. e.*, on Act and non-Act population taken together. Over some 6,600 people the death-rate was 97·7. The deaths were 649. Of these 160 are put down to cholera. Now cholera is confessedly still imperfectly understood. In the strangest way, it often strikes down robust coolies, and leaves weakly ones untouched. But though its weird freaks are beyond our comprehension, yet it will generally play most havoc, where the water-supply is not good, and insanitary conditions prevail, whether this be on a tea garden in Assam, or in a city like Naples. Similar conditions offer a premium to dysentery: and we find that this accounted for 167 deaths: whilst fever only took 55: dropsy and anæmia 69, and “other causes” 198. In the entire absence of information, we can only say there is a strong presumption, that defective water-supply and insanitary conditions had much to do with the high death-rate on these 14 gardens: remembering always, that they also had, no doubt, been importing labour, and that a proportion of this importation, great or small, was of labourers unfit for Assam. Particularising, we note :—

“(20.)—125·2—” Cholera killed 45: yet *beside this*, there was a death-rate of 64·7 *per mille*.

- "(24.)—154·8—" Cholera killed 58: yet *beside this*, there was a further death-rate of 72·9 *per mille*.
- "(25.)—143·6—" Over some 300 coolies: 11 out of 48 deaths were due to dysentery.
- "(27.)— 80·2—" Out of 60 deaths, 31 were due to dysentery.
- "(28.)— 88·6—" Of 32 deaths, 20 are ascribed to dysentery.
- "(31.)— 81·9—" Dysentery accounted for 27 out of 59 deaths.
- "(32.)—114·4—" A *small garden* of little over 100 souls. Only 13 deaths were needed to give this rate.

We come lastly to Lakhimpur District. The information given is most meagre—

- "(1.)—121·3—" A *small garden*, with about 100 Act coolies. Conservancy and hospital arrangements not up to the mark.
- "(4.)—89·4—" On some 1,100 Act coolies. Is surrounded with a thick belt of jungle. Out of 106 deaths, 57 are ascribed to dysentery.
- "(6.)—138·0—" A *small garden*: with little over 100 Act coolies. Says the Deputy Commissioner: 'A committee should be held on this garden.' 'I agree,' says the Commissioner. No committee was held for over a year. Thirty miles of bad road, with a broad river to cross, separate it from head-quarters: and it involved an absence of some days from the station, of the Deputy Commissioner and the Civil Surgeon: a very serious interference with the work of both officers. Tied by Act I. to the garden, the coolies waited the convenience of the under-manned official staff.
- "(7.)—121·5—" On some 400 coolies. Dysentery accounts for 12, and anæmia for 17, out of the 49 deaths.
- "(9.)—147·0—" A new garden, with some 600 Act coolies. Of 90 deaths, though 25 were due to cholera, 24 are ascribed to dysentery. A defective water-supply might have been suspected. This was so. Government permitted this garden to be opened, without any preliminary enquiry as to the water-supply available. On wells being sunk, they were found to pass through coal shale, and to produce undrinkable water. Good water is now said to be provided, brought from a great distance, in pipes, at a considerable outlay. I hold Government largely responsible for the heavy death-rate on this garden. Why did the Administration not enquire about the water at the outset?
- "(11.)—87·2—" Some 600 coolies—"was unhealthy in 1887, 1888, and 1889. This seems to be a case for a committee." "Yes," said the Commissioner.

The labour-force on this garden was notoriously discontented. A large number, men and women, left the garden in a body to come into the station and complain to the Magistrate. They got little consolation, and were ordered to return. Certain of them urged the others not to do so, and no doubt talked wildly. They were promptly arrested, and sent to jail for some weeks. This was quite correct, and their attitude had not been correct; but then, they had been waiting for relief, and it had not come. Of the 50 deaths on this garden, 12 are ascribed to dysentery, and 13 to anæmia. The wages on this garden were low.

"(12.)—83·9—" The Deputy Commissioner writes: "This garden has a bad record. It has been especially inspected by the Civil Surgeon. It is in North Lakhimpur, and to hold a Committee would involve the absence of the Civil Surgeon and myself for a week or ten days from head-quarters. I will watch the garden carefully, and inspect it a second time, if possible." The Commissioner remarks: "I think a Committee should be held."

It was eight months before it was held. Again an instance of how officials, working constantly, cannot get through all that is incumbent on them, in a huge Assam District.

Of gardens unhealthy on non-Act population :—

“(13)—105·5—” A *small garden* with 100 or so non-Act coolies. Eleven deaths produced this rate.

“(14)—74·1—” Had 15 of its 41 deaths caused by dysentery.

“(15)—73·1—” With some 850 coolies ; out of 62 deaths, it had 14 from this cause.

“(16)—79·4—” Has 10 out of 37 deaths ascribed to dysentery.

The Lakhimpur list of gardens unhealthy, on Act and non-Act population, taken together, is a bad one. The death-rate over nearly 5,000 people was 107·8 *per mille*.

“(17)—121·1—” Out of 36 deaths, 20 were due to dysentery.

“(18)—144·7—” On more than 1,000 people.

“(19)—139·3—” On about 400. Both these are coal mines. The work is much harder than on a tea garden ; and necessarily more unhealthy and dangerous for those not brought up to the trade.

There can be no doubt that many of the coolies imported had no conception of what the work was like. Many of them were unfit for it. “(18)” Is surrounded by dense jungle, which up to the present the Company has not succeeded in obtaining permission to cut back. It would seem there are administrative difficulties ; on the one hand the Company naturally would wish to retain some sort of control over the land they cleared, so as to be sure that those who might squat on it should not allow it to relapse into jungle : on the other hand, the Government is chary of taking action, which might be held to be a conveyance of zemindari rights over settlers on the land.

The hospital accommodation, at this place is excellent, with a European medical man. The water-supply, aforesaid not good, is now made so, by being filtered and preserved from pollution. Although wages ranged higher than on tea gardens, provisions were scarce and dear. Efforts are being made to encourage the importation of vegetables, and other provisions by a weekly market train taking them up at nominal rates. Wages, too, have been increased. The hours of labour have been much shortened. Over-work, as stated before, has much to say to sickness and death. If a coolie have not time to cut firewood, to wash himself and his clothes, and to cook his food, he is bound to suffer terribly in health. If, in addition to this, a paternal Government insist on placing a liquor shop at his very door, then small wonder if chilled with rain, fireless, foodless, unclothed, he finishes himself off with country spirit. Twenty years ago, when Europeans could get no proper feeding, they also died like flies. Their comparative healthiness, now, is due to eating more, and of better-cooked food, and being also better housed. Coolies in Assam are as much foreigners as their masters. Their condition is equally abnormal. To preserve their health, a generous diet is essential from their first arrival. No mere feeding up in an “hotel” for three or six months will suffice. Wages must be enhanced ; and greater freedom allowed to the individual. The very knowledge that he is bound for four years to a condition of things utterly unlike what the contractor’s native underling represented to him, has, no doubt, a depressing, death-hastening effect on many a new coolie. Separated from friends, and relations, and caste-fellows, what wonder that he succumbs to a perfect host of hostile influences !

To return to unhealthy gardens—

“(20).—81·0.—” On some 1,200 people, there were 98 deaths. Though cholera accounted for 20 : dysentery took 11, and anaemia 15. The garden is surrounded by jungle.

"(21).—77'5.—" The labour force was 600. It was on the black-list in former years, and taboo'd to Act-labour. Of 47 deaths, 8 were due to dysentery, and 8 to anæmia. Its conditions are similar to "(20)."

"(22).—134'2.—" Had some 200 or so people. Of 31 deaths, 11 were from cholera, and 8 from dysentery. 27 deaths were in the second half-year, after importing largely.

"(23).—71'7.—" Among 670 people, 48 died: 23 from dysentery.

"(24).—149'7.—" Of about 300 people, 45 died, of whom 20 succumbed to dysentery.

At great, but not useless, length, we have now passed in review the death-rates of the whole province. It will have become clear to the least attentive reader, that I was amply justified in saying that coolies "die by thousands in Assam," and that many of those yearly imported are of a kind "to whom the climate of Assam is certain death." What have "Ex Luce Lucellum," "Medicus," or Mr. Buckingham gained, by denying a fact so easily proved? What do they, as men of light and leading, intend to do towards altering the existing condition of things? Let them speak now, or for ever hold their peace, whilst others effect improvements, which they are too timid, or too adversely interested, to attempt.

In support of my remarks I will quote from a leading article in the *Indian Planters' Gazette* of November 11th, 1893. After giving his reasons in deprecation of the repeal of Act I., the writer proceeds: "The abandoning of, or absorption in, larger and wealthier, of the smaller unprofitable and precarious tea-estates might be the one salutary effect of a repeal of the law, Act I. For it may be the case that either the proprietors or the managing agents of such, in their thirst for profits or dividends are illiberal in their treatment of the labourer. There is no evidence actually available on record that this is the case. But a certain amendment of section 132, under which an estate may be closed to Act-labour on the bare fact of the mortality exceeding 7% per annum is significant. The omission of the words of the original section 'thereby' and 'rendered' point to causes of mortality such as *inadequate medical care, unreasonable tasks, and insufficient pay* (the italics are mine), each or all of which may be the cause of excessive mortality, and thus justify in law an estate being branded as unfit for the residence of labourers.....

"The tendency of the shortening of the contract time, is to induce an employer to get as much work out of the labourer as he can, in order to recoup himself for his outlay, the same now, as for the five years' contract. The advantages of the amendment (of section 132), however are that the immigrant would not be subject to the Act, and that the tendency to over-work him would not exist. The fact is, in our opinion, that the entire question of the maintaining of the penal contract—and with it the present existence of the industry—depends upon the reduction of coolie mortality to as near the normal as may reasonably be expected." He goes on to speak "of the obvious anxiety with which the Administration regards the excessive mortality amongst this class of people. So far as the tea-estates are concerned, we hold that the matter has not yet been seriously or honestly grappled with anywhere. The existing system for the treatment of the sick and weakly labourer is utterly inadequate, and the time has come to admit that it has broken down, and that some better one must take its place."

At some length, he sets forth a system of Central Hospitals, each with its resident European doctor, and its nursing staff, to which all the sick of a circle of gardens should be sent. His idea evidently is that gardens should themselves take action to forestall the application of section 126, or of new rules under para. K of section 143. Section 126 runs: "If any employer does not, in the opinion of the Inspector, provide such hospital-accommodation in a suitable place available to the labourers employed upon the estate of which he is in charge, or does not make such provision for the medical treatment of such

labourers, as the Local Government may direct, the Local Government may require such employer to contribute to the support of a central hospital to be established, or to the pay of a medical officer to be appointed, for the medical treatment of such labourers, such sum proportionate to the number of labourers so employed, as it thinks fit."

Section 143 says: "The Local Government may make rules consistent with this Act (K) to provide for the hospital-accommodation and medical treatment of labourers in such labour-districts, and to prescribe the nature, quality, and quantity of medical drugs and other stores to be provided for such labourers."

It is surely indicative of the extreme tenderness, not to say timidity, towards employers, with which the Administration have exercised their powers, that section 126 has never yet been put in force, anywhere, as far as I have heard.

The writer of the article concludes thus:—"We commend this matter in general of mortality, earnestly to all interested directly in tea. It is a most serious and vital question, and the present state of affairs, in this particular is nothing less than a blot on the Administration, and a discredit to Englishmen. If no real efforts are made to diminish the preventible waste of life, it will be to the benefit of humanity, and for the honour of the nation that the tea-industry in Assam should be made to pass into the limbo of abuses, condemned and swept away."

These are weighty words. They are also remarkable, as being the only acknowledgment made, as far as I have seen, by one speaking from the tea interest point of view, that the present condition of things in Assam, is not all that the heart could desire.

I must now continue my exposition, according to the lines marked out for me by Mr. Buckingham's criticism of my first paper.

I acknowledge I was not aware, when first I wrote, that a Committee could be held, when the mortality on *any portion* of an estate, or *any particular class* of labourer, exceeds 7 %. It is obvious, however, from the Chief Commissioner's remarks, that this important provision has not been made sufficient use of, heretofore, by district officers.

As to my statement that coolies do not die of diseases they bring with them, but the diseases are generated by the local conditions of the garden: Mr. Buckingham quotes authorities to prove that cholera and *anchylostomiasis (beri-beri)* are imported.

In the Report of Sanitary Measures in India in 1890-91, the Army Sanitary Commission remarks (page 14): "Supposed importation offers, no doubt, to some minds, a very easy solution of all the difficulties connected with the origin of epidemics."

Is proof forthcoming that cholera is not endemic in Assam, as well as in Bengal?

But granting that though the conditions of a garden are insanitary and filthy, yet cholera will not occur unless the "specific filth" is present; and assuming that this has been brought from outside, still generally insanitary conditions form an ideal *nidus* for the imported disease to increase and multiply in. Dr. Giles, in his Report on *Kálá ázar*, after speaking of defects in houses, water-supply, &c., thus refers to conservancy: "In this matter, the arrangements in use upon tea-gardens may be very briefly described—there are none. The entire neglect of this most essential of all sanitary necessities is the greatest blot to be found in the condition of tea-gardens The existing state of things cannot be described in too strong terms."

The Annual Report of the Sanitary Commissioner with the Government of India, published this year, speaking of cholera in Bengal, and its period of heaviest incidence, alludes to the "progressive deterioration of the supply of drinking water, scarcity of food, and consequent lowered vitality of the people," owing to a long term of drought. We

seldom have drought in Assam, but similar evils exist, though due to other causes. Again the Report speaks of "exposure, scarcity of food, and an extremely polluted water-supply as conditions favorable to the prevalence of cholera:" and "the conclusion to be drawn (from a number of data) is that a bad water-supply is the great danger, and a good water-supply an efficient protection."

Whilst on cholera, it may be permitted, perhaps, to an outsider to offer a suggestion, since few can do more, as to a possible cause of the seeming fact that if cholera prevails during hot dry weather, it will often cease when rain falls, whilst if prevalent during rain, the clearing of the weather will frequently have a similar effect. May it be that the cholera microbe is sensitive to sudden atmospheric changes, and that lying about in fecal matter, or other infecting media, it is killed or sterilised by any such sudden alteration of conditions? Could this be tested on cultivations?

Toucing a disease which killed, in 1892, no less than 762,695 people in India, and is, yet, so imperfectly understood, it cannot be considered presumptuous for anyone to hazard a conjecture.

Taking, however, the causes of death on the 143 unhealthy gardens of the province, we find that of 5,656 deaths, cholera accounted only for 1,111: and assuming all the deaths entered as from dropsy and anæmia, to be due to *anchylostomiasis*, we have only 731 from this cause. I am quite ready to admit that other fatal illnesses may have been complicated by the presence of *anchylostomiasis*. I make Mr. Buckingham a present of this admission, but proceed to analyse it. This "disease," is not only not necessarily fatal, it is not even actually injurious, to a man, in otherwise fair health, living under normal conditions. But bring him to the malarious climate of Assam, and let him get a go of fever, or dysentery (the latter frequently, though not always, a distinctly preventible disease, due to local conditions, such as Dr. Giles reflects on, or to insufficient or unsuitable food, or to exposure), and he collapses at once, rarely recovers his strength, and drags on a miserable existence, till he dies here, or is invalided back to his country.

In the Annual Report of the Sanitary Commissioner with the Government of India for 1892, on page 151, are some notes of the researches of Surgeon-Major E. Dobson, M. B., Civil Surgeon of Dhubri, into the effects on health of the presence of the *anchylostomum duodenale* or *Dochimus duodenalis*:—"Dr. Dobson selected 605 of the healthiest-looking of the coolies who arrived at Dhubri, with the intention of executing labour contracts in Assam, and set himself to ascertain how many of them harboured the parasite. As regards 58, observations could not be concluded. Of the remaining 547, in 454, or 83 per cent., *anchylostoma* were present..... He found the parasite in persons newly arrived from Bengal, Behar, Orissa, Chota Nagpore, the Central Provinces, the North-Western Provinces, the Punjab, Madras, and Nepal. Both sexes, at all ages, Hindu and Mahommedan alike, harboured the parasite without apparent ill-effect."

Similarly, Surgeon-Major Maenamara, M.B., Civil Surgeon of Gauhati, in Kámrúp (now at Tezpur), says: "I have satisfied myself.....that many men enjoy good health, with large quantities of the *anchylostoma*." The Sanitary Commissioner remarks:—"From the reports furnished by a number of medical officers of the tea-gardens, it appears that the chain of symptoms described as *anchylostomiasis* does not usually develop until some months after arrival in Assam." Further, "these conclusions seem justified:—

"(1). The presence of the *anchylostomum* in the intestines does not necessarily give rise to serious symptoms, unless other circumstances favour this result.

"(2). The presence of the *anchylostomum* in the intestines may be a serious complication, but is not the cause of *Káli-ázar*.

"(3). The so-called *beri-beri* of Ceylon and Assam has no connection with the disease known by this name (the signs and symptoms of which are chiefly due to the effects of peripheral neuritis) which occurs in the Dutch East Indies, Hong-Kong, the Straits, and occasionally in Burmah; it is probable that this disease rarely, if ever, occurs, in Assam."

The *Englishman*, commenting, in August last, on these facts, said: "The almost unanimous opinion of doctors who practise among tea-garden coolies seems to be that *beri-beri* is due to the parasite working upon *constitutions debilitated by malaria*" (the italics are mine), "and reference is made in several of the reports to the improvement which takes place in the health of patients who are treated upon this hypothesis." Dr. Shand, the medical officer of the Jorehat Tea Company, writes: "I have seen cases in a very bad state, almost immediately they got rid of the *anchylostoma* by the thymol treatment, improve rapidly under tonics and good diet".....Dr. Shand adds: "Again, in favour of the idea that the *anchylostoma* require a suitable habitat, I have tried the thymol treatment on strong healthy, coolies and found *anchylostoma*. In these cases they apparently produce no bad effect on the health of coolies." The experience of other medical officers is less satisfactory as to any *rapid* improvement, after the source of the injury is removed; but on the contrary, they have found the recovery so slow, that, as the Civil Surgeon of Dibrugarh states, "Managers prefer sending *beri-beri* cases to their homes at a heavy cost, to keeping them on the garden during the long time that must necessarily elapse before they are again fit for work." It is, no doubt, partly, owing to the clearer recognition of the policy of this, in Lakhimpur district, that of the 1,647 agreements cancelled, throughout the Province, under section 122 "for permanent unfitness," 1,074 were in this district alone.

In view of these facts, now fairly well established, as to *beri-beri*, I submit that Mr. Buckingham cannot claim to have disposed of the matter, and purged himself of all responsibility, by proving that this disease is imported. Including free labourers and dependents, 56,050 souls were brought into the province in 1892, and thousands, no doubt, brought with them *anchylostomiasis*, not dangerous to them in their own country, but acutely injurious, directly the climate and labour conditions of Assam begin to effect them adversely. What then is incumbent on those for whom Mr. Buckingham speaks? In 1892, of that host, 28,000 odd were to be put under contract. Two courses are open. All who are to be put under contract, at least, must, in future, be tested for *anchylostomiasis*, before they enter the Province, and rejected if they have it; or if that be impossible, then wages must be so enhanced, that the new coolie, from the very first, shall be able to provide himself with a generous diet, very much more abundant than he had in his own country, without being taken into the "hotel," which he naturally does not like, absorbing as it does nearly all his pay, and leaving him only a few annas, for clothes and small luxuries, which, indeed, as we know by our own experience, are not to be called luxuries, for a man living in a climate which takes so much more out of him than his own. Better fortified, he may make a better fight against climatic influences, and Assam's especial dangers to health. We are apt to forget what a terribly trying climate Assam has. Coolies from countries where the annual rain-fall may be from 35 inches to 55 inches at the very outside, find themselves in one, where it is anything from 90 inches to 150 inches. And they have to work out in this; day after day, getting soaked through: women the same, with children on their backs. These, working as well as their husbands, cannot "mind the house," and dry, during the afternoon, the clothes wetted in the morning: so husband and wife return equally uncomfortable to their hut, and may not have dry things to put on, when they set to work to cook their food. The

nights too are often chill: but they do not realise the necessity of precautions they were accustomed to. What wonder they get fever, and diarrhoea and dysentery too, which are never very commonly due to exposure! What wonder, if after some months of this kind of thing, if not very much sooner, the *beri-beri* does declare itself, and section 122 is all there is to look forward to. "Low wage-rate and high death-rate are convertible terms," I, greatly daring, wrote. Low wages and consequently insufficient food are a cause, if not *the* cause of much of the sickness and death amongst coolies. No doctor in Assam, with a reputation to lose will deny it. "What we call *beri-beri*," said one not long ago, "just means starvation, under-feeding:" implying of course, it is the fact of the disease working on a subject debilitated by short commons, that often brings about the condition we know and recognize.

Mr. Buckingham gives figures as to wages in two districts. He shows the pay a man or woman gets in the manufacturing and non-manufacturing seasons respectively, together with the highest pay earned by a man or woman. I should wish to see tables of the pay on the 143 "unhealthy" gardens. I believe they would bear out my statement as to the close connection between wages and death-rate. I gather that the next Immigration Report will only show the average monthly wage *throughout the year*: and this is the really important information, whilst it is of very minor interest to learn what exceptional men and women may be able to make, under especially favorable circumstances. The figures quoted by Mr. Buckingham seem somewhat under those in the last Report; they are none the less misleading; for he lumps together the pay of Act and non-Act people. It is essential they should be shown separately. The non-Act coolies are acclimatised, and fairly well able to take care of themselves. It is the Act agreement coolies, who need most abundant food to carry them through the process of acclimatization. They start with the lowest wages, and their death-rate is highest. The following is the wage-sheet for the province. The subdivisions of Sylhet and Darrang are shewn in the Report. It is to be regretted this has not been done for every district. Different portions of a large district are often widely different in their conditions, *e. g.*, there is a difference of nearly Rs. 2½ in the pay of Act labourers, between two subdivisions of Sylhet, and nearly a rupee between two contiguous subdivisions of Darrang. Supplies, too, are much more abundant in some parts than others. As the proportion of classes of labour varies greatly, the sub-joined table should be considered with the wage-sheet.

DISTRICT, OR SUBDIVISION OF DISTRICT.	ACT.		NON-ACT.			"Wage-unit."	DEATH-RATE PER MILLE.			
	Men.	Women.	Men.	Women.	Children.		Act.	Non-Act.	Children.	
	Rs. A. P.	Rs. A. P.	Rs. A. P.	Rs. A. P.	Rs. A. P.		Rs. A. P.			
Cachar ...	4 7 9	3 3 1	4 13 2	3 8 6	1 7 9	17 8 3	108.7	35.8	27.5	
Sylhet {	N. Sylhet ...	4 1 2	2 13 5	4 4 9	3 3 6	1 13 10	16 4 8	55.3	39.2	29.5
	S. Sylhet ...	3 15 2	3 3 9	4 4 10	3 4 7	1 11 4	16 7 8			
	Karimgunge ...	6 3 5	3 1 11	4 9 1	3 8 7	2 5 5	18 12 5			
Habigunge ...	2 12 2	2 6 6	3 11 7	3 3 10	1 7 6	13 9 7				
Kamrup ...	4 8 10	3 9 5	4 13 2	3 12 1	2 7 11	19 3 5	115.0	65.8	42.3	
Darrang {	Tezpur ...	4 13 5	3 14 0	5 12 7	3 13 4	2 7 0	20 12 4	70.6	38.5	40.9
	Mangaldai ...	5 12 7	4 4 3	7 6 6	4 0 9	2 2 11	23 11 0			
Nowgong ...	4 15 3	4 7 7	5 9 0	5 3 4	2 13 0	23 1 0	71.6	49.7	47.7	
Sibsagar ...	5 3 3	3 7 0	5 14 0	3 15 1	2 3 10	20 11 3	55.5	29.4	29.6	
Lakhimpur ...	4 15 6	4 0 6	6 7 0	5 9 3	2 13 0	23 13 8	60.1	34.4	31.8	
AVERAGE ...	4 9 9	3 7 11	5 3 2	3 14 0	2 2 8	19 7 3	64.3	37.7	31.1	

DISTRICT.	ANNUAL MEAN.			Total Annual Strength.
	Act.	Non-Act.		
	Adults.	Adults.	Children.	
Cachar	7,810	51,812	45,051	104,204
Sylhet	7,194	50,748	38,337	96,280
Kámrup	953	1,501	1,253	3,708
Darrang	23,756	11,740	15,118	50,614
Nowgong	3,985	6,875	5,985	16,847
Sibságar	38,878	22,444	39,140	100,463
Lakhimpur	34,420	22,168	29,010	85,599
TOTAL	116,499	167,320	173,897	457,717

It will be seen from this wage-sheet, that throughout the Province, except in a subdivision of Sylhet, the non-Act coolie, or free man, gets higher wages, often very much higher wages, than the Act or agreement coolie, and can feed himself better. He is no doubt often worth much more, as a labourer: but the Act coolie is worth just as much to *him* or *herself*: and ought to receive higher wages than he does: so that he may feed himself as well as the non-Act coolie. It is surprising to find Sylhet where wages are lower than elsewhere so healthy. It may be that provisions are more plentiful: and again a notable point is the proportion of Act to non-Act labour: only some 7,000 of the former to 50,000 of the latter. These latter, as free men, comparatively speaking, live under more normal conditions. They are much more their own masters as to going to work, or staying away, when they feel they want rest. Sibságar, the district which comes next in healthiness to Sylhet, has a still lower non-Act death-rate: the non-Act wages being materially higher than in Sylhet. The Wage-unit of Lakhimpur is much higher again, but this is counteracted by the deficiency of supplies: so the death-rate is higher also. Whereas in Sibságar coolies often get their rice from the Assamese, cheaper than the Rs. 3 a maund, they would have to pay their masters, in Lakhimpur, any rice, more than he can eat, which a coolie has bought, at this rate from his master, he can sell again at a profit.

This fact speak volumes. The food-supply question is indeed a matter of life and death. Cachar has the appalling death-rate of 108·7 per mille on Act coolies.

Though these be supplied with rice from the garden store-house, other things they have to buy for themselves, and these may be dear in Cachar.

The 50,000 non-Act people, as usual, however, seem to fare not amiss. In some "Cachar District Notes," published in *The Planter* of March 30th, it is said, however: "Rice is still very dear, and consequently the death-rate among old and sickly people who cannot earn much pay has been very high." Complaint is made, and apparently, with some ground, of the small amount expended by the Administration on roads, and the consequent, difficulty of getting up supplies into the Mofussil. I see no reason, at any one's bidding, to withdraw what I said in my first letter, about insufficient food being a factor in the death-rate.

Mr. Buckingham says, the average cost of a coolie's living in Assam is Rs. 3 a month, and proceeds: "It should be borne in mind, that the above does not represent the only means of living, or I ought rather to say, of saving money, the coolie possesses. For instance the Planter is compelled to supply rice at Rs. 3 per maund (eighty pounds), and many

gardens incur a loss of thousands of rupees *per mensem* on this head alone." There is here some confusion of thought. The fact that gardens may lose money in selling imported rice, at Rs. 3 per maund, as they promised the coolie when they engaged him, adds nothing whatever to the coolie's means of living. It is part of the contract, and he would not have taken service on any other terms.

A man may buy a horse, and sell it at a loss, yet the new purchaser may have no cause to boast of his bargain. There is no stipulation as to the quality of rice to be supplied. I am assured it is sometimes very bad indeed. There is a kind called "red rice," not unfrequently supplied, which is declared to be very innutritious. It is said of a very poor man, by natives, in their own country: "he eats red rice."

Mr. Buckingham is far and away too sweeping in his assertion that a coolie can live on Rs. 3 per month! A friendly critic assures me this is possible in *some parts* of Sibságar district; but it is certainly not possible in Lakhimpur, if in any other district. It is an utterly incorrect idea that a coolie can live on rice alone. Try it on your dog, and you will see through his ribs in a month. A man might perhaps make shift to live, for some time, on eggs alone: but feed him, however abundantly, on the whites of eggs, and he will soon die of starvation. Rice is almost entirely an albuminous food. Without the addition of the nitrogenous elements contained in *dál*, oil, vegetables, &c., it will not sustain life. Ulceration of the cornea, and consequent blindness is not uncommon among coolies, and it is known by doctors, to be due to a too exclusively albuminous food. Night blindness is still more common, and proceeds from the same cause. It can be quickly cured, if the patient be properly fed up.

Dr. Hancock, the chief promoter of the so-called "Hotels," or Garden Messes, at which new coolies, and weakly and sickly ones are fed, says in his pamphlet, "A System of Feeding Coolies," published in 1883, that a male adult should have some 47 lbs. of rice *per mensem*, 18 lbs. of *dál*, and over 1 lb. of oil, irrespective of salt, onions, and mixed vegetables, and he estimates the monthly cost of this as Rs. 4-3; and for an adult woman, two-thirds, say Rs. 3, and the average cost of feeding a boy or girl over 10 years of age, one-half of a male adult, say Rs. 2-1, or about Rs. 3-8 per head all round, over 100 men, women and children.* Prices have not gone down in the last 10 years. I was lately allowed to examine the pay-sheets of a very large concern, and found that the coolies compelled to feed at the "hotel" or public kitchen, had to pay over five rupees a month for their food. Fortunately their wages were exceptionally high. Set against this, what I was recently told of a garden on which a Committee had been held, that it came out, that more than 100 coolies, after paying for their rice, had one-quarter of a rupee (4 annas), wages to receive, wherewith to buy, throughout the month, all the nitrogenous elements of food necessary, as well as clothes, oil for their lamps, and tobacco, &c.

If it cost what Dr. Hancock sets down, when feeding a number together, it may be accepted that the individual coolie cannot feed himself properly for less.

Mr. Buckingham goes on to say that a coolie "is allowed land to cultivate rice on, or garden land, free of rent." This statement is also too sweeping. Mr. Buckingham knows that very many gardens have no rice-land at their disposal, many do not allow coolies to have vegetable gardens of their own, for sanitary or other reasons, as some also refuse to allow them to keep cattle, on similar grounds, or because they are apt to get among the tea-bushes.

As to getting "the last pound of work" out of a coolie, a phrase Mr. Buckingham protests against, it is no exaggeration. It has been done, nor has the employer always taken care that the coolies should be well fed. I have myself known notoriously hard masters, however, who

* Dr. Hancock tells me he has now brought the cost down to Rs. 2-11-6; but this *includes no vegetables*.

by taking this care, have kept their gardens off the black-list, though working their labour-force severely. By no means all employers, even at this day, take care that their coolies get properly fed, any more than all who use horses know how to look after a stable. Mr. Buckingham must know that, without, perhaps, any actual barbarity, gardens have been worked upon the avowed policy, that it pays better to drive a coolie hard during the time of his contract, and then let him go, and import another, than to drive easy, on the bare chance of his being willing to re-engage. Of course this statement will be, at once, contradicted; but it is true; and although the increasing difficulty of obtaining labour may tend to make such a practice less profitable now, it cannot be regarded as an altogether discarded method.

Mr. Buckingham is indignant that the garden labour system should have been called a "thinly disguised slavery," and says, "it is hardly possible to imagine that any one but an agitator, lost to all sense of honour and truth, would dare even to hint at such a degraded state of things." These be great swelling words! but I do not object to being called an "agitator," and I do not believe myself "lost to all sense of honour and truth," when I say it is only playing with words to call it anything else, and that nothing but that colossal British hypocrisy, which foreigners make merry over, whereby we will tolerate any profitable abuse, if we can but gently re-name it, can blind anyone to what the system really is. In saying this I do not deny that tens-of-thousands of coolies, on good gardens, are infinitely better off than in their own country, just as thousands of negroes were better off as slaves in the West Indies, than they were when at home on the Guinea Coast. I do not for a moment question the correctness of Mr. Heberlet's report. But Mr. Heberlet personally brought up his party of Christian coolies to a probably personally-selected garden, in Sylhet; they had not been kidnapped or enjoled, and brought away in ones and twos from their villages, passed from hand to hand, till they found themselves herded in a contractor's depôt, whence they were bought by the first comer who thought them worth the price asked, and were shipped off to some place unknown. Mr. Buckingham declares it is wrong to say that an advertisement in a paper: "Coolies, any quantity, warranted junglies," implies that they are "for sale:" and he asks: "Would your correspondent hesitate to pay a Commission Agent in Calcutta, Rs. 10 for sending him up a cook or a khansamah? Where is the difference?" Here is the difference! My cook might leave me the day after arrival, and though I had paid his passage up, I could only sue him civilly for a refund, and it would be throwing good money after bad to do so: for he would have no money to pay me with, and the law would not compel him to come and fulfil his agreement with me. Whereas, if Mr. Buckingham buys a coolie from a contractor, at a certain price, delivered at the garden, and that coolie runs away next day, Mr. Buckingham sends out men to hunt for him; he sends notice of his loss to neighbouring gardens, notice to the ferry-men if there be a ferry near, warning them not to cross such-and-such a man, and when he has captured him, without the need of a warrant, he brings him back to the garden, or gets him sent to jail, to learn what is meant by a contract under Act I. The law will not allow domestic servants to be brought up under this Act: or to sell themselves into servitude, even for a limited period. For tea-gardens, however, there is this exceptional legislation. I think I have shown there is a wide difference between Mr. Buckingham's privileges and mine.

Mr. Buckingham says: "As to the remark regarding the ownership or proprietorship of a coolie, I would ask your correspondent again if he would take the trouble to try and recover a fugitive servant, whom he had imported, say at a cost of Rs. 50, or would he consider that the honour and glory of importing a servant for his next-door neighbour, was a *quid pro quo* for the money expended, and forego all claims to the

man ? ” I have just shewn that, however much I might wish to recover a fugitive servant, I should gain little by the attempt, for I possess no such rights of ‘ownership or proprietorship’ in the person of a servant, as the law at present grants to the planter in the coolie. These rights are purchased. Buying and selling are the terms habitually used by all concerned. If it be objected that the coolie often gets his debts paid by the *arkati* to enable him to leave his home, and that the “price” of the coolie includes the sum thus paid to free him from his liabilities, we remember, at once, that in countries where slavery prevails, it is no uncommon thing for a man to sell himself, either for life, or for a term of years. He is, then, just as much a slave, as if—a captive in war—he had been bought in the open slave-market. In saying that the present system is a quasi-slavery, I do not assert it has all the attributes of the institution formerly existing in the Southern States of America. A coolie’s evidence is admissible in a court of law, a slave’s was not so, in America. The law promises the coolie a large measure of protection : the slave had practically none. The slave was a slave for life unless he could purchase his freedom : the coolie’s contract is for four years only. But it matters very little whether your contract be for life, or four years only, if your purchaser have the power of compelling you to start work in a pestilential climate, or place, in which from 10 per cent. to 30 per cent. of new coolies are sure to meet their death, within a year or two, or much less, of their arrival, and they have no legal means of delivery, until so many of them have died that the attention of the Executive is drawn to a garden, or unless their health is so hopelessly shattered that employers, from motives of self-interest, decide it is more profitable to cancel their contracts and send them home again, than to retain them, and treat them till such time as they shall be able to make a return to the garden, for their prime cost, and the subsistence allowance they have received. The Chief Commissioner, commenting (p. 190 of the Report) on the increased number of cancellments of agreements, under section 122, “for permanent incapacity,” ascribes it to “the fact becoming more widely recognised that the sooner a garden gets rid of labourers of poor physique, the better it is for the interests of the garden in many ways : ” and seems not to see what an admission this is of the inactivity of Executive Officers, that a section of the Act expressly intended for the protection of labourers, remained inoperative in their hands, till motives of self-interest on the part of gardens brought it into play. Was it regarded as an unwarrantable invasion of the rights of proprietors in a chattel they had bought with money, like compelling a man to shoot a horse, before he is certain it can be of no further use to him ? Or was it because, until last year, when the cost of re-patriation was thrown upon the employer, the Labour Transport Fund could not afford the re-patriation expenses of more than a limited number of coolies each year ? I was told once by an officer that he had a hint from his immediate superior, not to be too ready in cutting coolies’ agreements, because there was so little money available for sending them to their country. It would be interesting to know how many cases are on record of coolies themselves asking to be released from their contracts under section 122. Did they know they had the power, or did they believe that the law bound them for four years whatever were their own condition, or the condition of the garden, and that desertion was, in fact, their only remedy ? Does their ignorance, to speak plainly, strengthen the hands of those whose interest it is to possess a “manageable” labour force ? Is not the complaint beginning to be heard that coolies already “know too much ? ” When we say a state of semi-slavery exists, it is no answer to declare that coolies are well fed, housed, and clothed, even if it were universally true ; or that they are given the best of medical attendance when ill, if even that were true, which it certainly is not ; for all this could be said quite as correctly of slaves in America, as may be read in a defence of slave-owners in the *Weekly Scotsman* of March 17th.

The writer calling himself "Trebor" declares even that though bloodhounds were used frequently to run down fugitive slaves, yet when they captured a negro, they were too well trained to do him serious injury; and he deduces from all this, that the outcry against slave-owners and slavery was a dire mistake. There is no question that a very large number of coolies on tea-gardens are in a state of comfort: there is no question, on the other hand, that a large number are very much the reverse, and *cannot help themselves*. The figures already given shew that though the death-rate (the ultimate test) in 1892, might be, perhaps, considered moderate, on the whole body of tea-garden coolies taken together; yet on 143 unhealthy gardens, some 57,000, or 58,000, more than one-eighth of the total force, had a death-rate of nearly ten per cent. per annum. This not being able to help themselves, is not the Act of God, but the Act of man—Act I., in fact. This alone entitles the present system to be described as a "thinly disguised slavery."

In saying this I am bringing no charge against planters. Of course they have, individually, enormous power for or against the comfort and happiness of those under their charge, which a majority do use conscientiously: though others would find little difficulty in accommodating themselves to a system which should place coolies far more unquestionably under the yoke than they are now. But the planters are *not responsible* for the present condition of things. They are generally, but paid servants, liable to dismissal at a month's notice, with or without cause given, from their managerships: and assistants are still more powerless, and have sometimes much to endure themselves. I have known young men, sons of gentlemen, living for years in the most wretched cock-lofts, or in the end of a leaf-house, partitioned off with mats, to the serious injury of their health, because the expenditure needed to house them properly, would have lessened the year's profits of their proprietors, or diminished the commission of a manager or superintendent. No, the contest is the old one,—between wealth and intelligence on the one side, poverty and ignorance on the other. Capital, as represented by Companies, or bands of proprietors, is fighting for its 'pound of flesh,' its right to exploit to the fullest extent, the weakness of those in its power. Planters themselves are but pawns, for Capital to move this way or that!

How else does Mr. Buckingham explain the significant fact that, throughout a large province it is recognised that the main function of the entire Executive is to stand between the labourer and his employer. The Administration presses every class of official, save engineers and post office men, into this service. Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner, Assistant Commissioner, District Superintendent of Police, and Civil Surgeon, all have to inspect gardens, and re-inspect them, or hold Committees of Enquiry, and to be on the watch, generally, and at all times, to protect those who cannot protect themselves, so as to minimise, as far as may be, the inherent evils of exceptional legislation, which it has not been possible, so far, to abrogate. Abrogated it will be, one day, and then Assam tea will find its true economic level! At present, tea property has a fictitious value, due to protection. No otherwise can we account for the fact, that, though it is asserted that the margin of profit is utterly small, yet we see capital offering itself and large tracts of jungle taken up and opened out for tea, with feverish haste, and constant extensions proceeding on existing gardens. We object to the principle of bounties. English sugar manufacturers complain because their German and French rivals, being subsidised by their Governments, are able to under-sell them. The tea industry has been subsidised by Government: subsidised indeed, with a specific view, and warned, all along, that the subsidy might, at any time, be withdrawn, but none the less subsidised. It has enjoyed that most vicious of all forms of protection, namely, exceptional legislation, enabling it to obtain

labour at less than its value in the open market. As a proof of this last fact may be quoted Mr. Buckingham's own statement, that "Government officials, in all grades, have to pay coolies double what planters do, and they consider themselves fortunate if they can get them at this rate."

Reverting to Mr. Buckingham's letter, I must acknowledge that, as regards the 'cutting' of sickly coolies' agreements, and their being given Rs. 17 : I was in error as to the amount payable. As to their being left to their own devices to find their way back to their country, I was also misinformed. It is very difficult to obtain accurate information on anything concerning the Coolie System. Government officers, even when questioned, will give a sidelong glance and look down; also, they look uncomfortable, as if the subject were a painful one, and they turn the conversation. Sometimes such a man is incorrigibly reticent, and goes about holding his sides, and looking furtively right and left, as if he were the "Real Original Asian Mystery," in imminent danger of being unravelled.—I believe I confused the section 122 *nám-káts*, with unfortunates of another sort, who may be met with, namely those who have left gardens by an extra-legal "cancelment by mutual consent." It has been suggested to them by some officious Babu that a change might do them good, and they have left the garden without any formalities, and the Babu has marked them off the books—"Dead," or "Absconded," as occurred to him; and the garden had nothing to pay.

Mr. Buckingham says, "there is no need of Poor Laws, for there are no poor;" and that "the Charitable Dispensaries are kept up by voluntary contributions from planters, with a Government grant-in-aid." Poor there *are*. As to the statement about the support of dispensaries, will Mr. Buckingham say how many planters in his district subscribe, and how much, to the support of Charitable Dispensaries?

To Dibrugarh Hospital, twenty-six gardens—not planters—representing crores of rupees of capital, do subscribe, amongst them, thirty-three rupees a month (less than £2 sterling); the Assam Railway and Trading Co., alone, Rs. 10 per month: six residents of the station, Rs. 14, and some Native gentlemen, a few rupees more.

Now as to the pressure put on a coolie to give an agreement, after his original agreement has expired. I was not alluding to one single case, but to a widely prevalent practice, due to the almost universal opinion that the garden that imported a coolie had a "moral right" (so I have heard it expressed), to his continued services, if he did not return to his country, when his contract expired. Mr. Buckingham having brought up a particular case, I will ask him whether the circumstances were not these: A certain manager filled up and signed coolies' names (in their absence, and without their consent) to a whole lot of re-engagements, and presented them to a Government officer for confirmation, or registration. The fraud was discovered, and a prosecution ordered. Mr. Buckingham can say if it be not a fact, that although this gentleman was in bad odour amongst his follows, as a "*fúsaldo-er*," an enticor, *i.e.*, one who took on time-expired coolies without the permission of their former owners, yet a subscription was raised for his defence, and he only fell into further disfavour, because he was so indiscreet as to allow the observation to escape him, that he had but done what lots of other people did, in the matter of wrongful execution of contracts.

Again, the Chief Commissioner may have expressed the opinion that it is "practically impossible for a manager to retain coolies on a garden, who are unwilling to remain:" but this would mean—if the law be observed. A provision of section 141 directs that the employer shall give the Inspector notice in writing of the expiry of the contract, within one month from the date thereof. This is obviously intended to put the law on the alert,

and to guard against undue pressure being put on the coolie to make him renew his contract. In Mr. Buckingham's own district, in 1,863 cases in one year, this provision was not complied with; and the Chief Commissioner can only say with regard to the Province, as a whole, that there is some improvement in the extent to which managers complied with this provision.

I was not speaking without book as to the cajoling of a woman to give an agreement without her husband's consent, and the threat of being turned off the garden being held over him, if he did not engage also. It has been constantly done. Some three years ago, a Christian couple reported themselves to me, as new arrivals, and complained that having been brought up to a certain garden, as free labourers, it was sought now to put them under agreement, against their will. I handed the case on to the Deputy Commissioner. He sent out a young officer to enquire and settle the matter. The following Sunday, the couple came to me again, and reported as follows:—The officer had called them up, and asked them if they were willing to give agreements; the husband declined, and was discharged from all obligation; the officer had then turned to the woman; her husband spoke for her, declining again, but was told to hold his tongue, and she, through fear, answered that she would give an agreement, and so it was ordered. The officer was doubtless unaware, that a woman could not give a contract without her husband's consent. I scolded the woman for not speaking up, but she said: "What could I do? the Sahib was angry (this officer had a short, snappy manner), and the Babu had threatened me, if I did not say 'yes,' so I consented." At that time, I had little acquaintance with the law, and I told them they must make the best of it. The planter was better than his word, and did not turn the husband off, but gave him work, though retaining the wife as a contract coolie.

My statement that a coolie needed a *hâth-chit*, or statement, that he was a free man, in order to travel unmolested, else he was liable to be stopped at ferries, or actually carried forcibly away, is denied flatly by Mr. Buckingham. He calls it a "mere fabrication." It is not so. I am told, and quite recently again have been assured, that ferry-men, for instance, regard themselves as holding a power-of-attorney from the planting community generally, to stop any coolies who do not give what they consider a satisfactory account of themselves: hoping no doubt to share the reward of five rupees per head, for run-away coolies, given by their owners. As to coolies being captured outright, it is not impossible. Had I space I could describe how a batch of new coolies were "cut out" from the depôt at Dibrugarh, at dead of night, taken, by land and water, to an out-of-the-way place, whence they were only recovered by their master (after spies had found out their whereabouts), by a regular tactical investment of the spot. Again, I would draw Mr. Buckingham's attention to the following letter, copied by myself, from the notice-board of a public place. I suppress names:—

"—Tea Co.—P. O. 26-6-93.

"DEAR SIR,—Two men, one very tall, over six feet, two women, and a child in arms, have been caught here, evidently run-aways, but appear to be old coolies, if you should know of any garden who have lost any people tallying to the above description, kindly inform the manager without delay. Yours faithfully,———."

Readers of the "Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin," will remember that advertisements of similar import were common in the Southern States, before the war, generally followed by the words: "If not claimed within 14 days, will be sold to defray expenses." The significant thing is that neither writer, nor recipient, of this letter thought there was anything abnormal in it, or that it would clash with public sentiment. The "catching" of coolies, like this, is utterly illegal, but it is done: and regarded as quite *en règle*.

They "appeared to be old coolies;" how were they "evidently runaways?" They may have been coolies travelling on their own business, from one place to another. Or they may have been coolies, whose engagements had only recently expired, who had been so badgered to re-engage, that they had left the garden in despair of getting their contracts back, endorsed that the garden had no further claim on them. Never mind. Freedom of the subject counts for little in Assam. Whoever they were, it was the kindly thing to catch them, on the chance of doing a neighbour a good turn.

As to the matter of settlers in Assam. I am aware that some 40,000 acres are held by immigrants, of sorts, from Government. I am very glad to have Mr. Buckingham's assurance that some 97,000 people have settled down, on their own account, to other pursuits than tea; but he can scarcely claim credit for this, remembering, that when some five or six years ago, the administration proposed to give every coolie who had served his five years on a tea garden, a plot of land at a nominal rent, in order to encourage immigration the proposal was strenuously and successfully, and most short-sightedly, opposed by the Tea interests, on the avowed ground, that though it would greatly encourage immigration, and the settlement of the province, it would also encourage time-expired coolies to go away, and become cultivators, instead of re-engaging as labourers on the gardens.

I have now carefully, and, I trust, good temperedly, answered all Mr. Buckingham's criticisms of my original article. I have done more. I have taken the opportunity of setting forth in greater detail my views on the general question. If I be singular in my opinions, that is, I hold, an additional reason for expounding them, for I would seek to gain converts to them, and have others think as I do.

A controversial letter is not, perhaps, an ideal form, in which to express one's views on a question of this magnitude, yet there are, obviously, decided advantages in having, like a row of pegs, on which to hang one's remarks, a series of statements, lending themselves so easily to reply as those in Mr. Buckingham's communication.

Yours faithfully,

CHARLES DOWDING.



APPENDIX.

"ASSAM COOLIE RECRUITING."

The "Indian Churchman," July 15th, 1893.

[Since articles have appeared in *India* and other papers with regard to the iniquities of the present system of Coolie Recruiting in Assam, we wrote to the Rev. S. Endle, who has been a missionary in the country for nearly thirty years, to know if there was any truth in these statements. Mr. Endle has been kind enough to favour us with the following reply.—ED., I. C.]

I have read with some care the letters and articles in *India* dealing with the system of recruiting labourers for the Tea-plantations of Assam; and I must say that many of the statements made therein seem to me quite uncalled for. There are, apparently, two questions dealt with in these articles: (1) the system of recruiting labourers; and (2) the *condition* of the labourer when domiciled on a Tea Estate here. These questions seem to me quite distinct, though the writers in *India* seem to have confused them not a little.

I. As to the former question (Recruiting of Labourers), I do not know that I can speak with anything like authority, or indeed that I have any special right to speak at all. A large proportion of our labourers here come from Chota Nagpur, and the Bishop of that Diocese and his Missionary Clergy could probably give information of great value on this point. I visit among the Chota Nagpur immigrant labourers here very frequently, and in the course of now nearly thirty years in Assam, I cannot recall even one instance of any complaint being made regarding the conditions under which such labourers were induced to come to the Province. They are, as a body, remarkably cheerful, happy and contented, and the conditions of life to them seem to me far lighter and brighter than those of the labouring classes in England. One does, indeed, not unfrequently hear of labourers running away from their employers, but the runaways are in the vast majority of instances new arrivals in the Province, where everything is dark and strange to them; and as a rule they very soon make themselves at home in their new sphere of work.

There is *one* evil, indeed, in the labour-recruiting system to which I should be most thankful to see a speedy and effective remedy applied; I mean, the dislocation and dismemberment of family life. Recruiting agents send up sometimes the father of a family, with perhaps one grown-up son and daughter, the wife and other children remaining behind. Many obvious evils follow from this vicious system, the father perhaps forming new (*i.e.*, criminal) ties in his new home, and the deserted mother perhaps doing the same. I can see no reason why this should be so. The conditions of Tea-factory life are such that employment, and *well-paid* employment, can, as a rule, be found for *all* members of a family above six or eight years of age. It is the *plucking* of the tea-leaf that absorbs so much labour, much of the remaining work being now done by machinery, and as leaf-plucking requires not so much physical strength as a certain quickness of eye and hand, women and children can generally earn better wages at work of this kind than even their husbands and fathers. I shall be very thankful if the attention of recruiting agents can be drawn to this matter, so that they may endeavour in future to send up entire families, and not merely isolated members of such families.

II. As to the second question that seems to be raised by the writers of the articles in *India* the condition of the labourers settled on Tea Estates, I think I can fairly claim to speak with more freedom as well as with some little authority. The labourers on most of the Estates I have

visited have always seemed to me perfectly contented with their lot, and I do not doubt that, as regards material things, their condition is far better than their original one in the country of their birth. I have indeed known cases where the mortality has been great, especially on newly-opened-out estates; but the ailments from which immigrant labourers suffer and die, are not as a rule generated on the Assam Tea-factory but brought up by the immigrant himself from his own home. The wages earned on a good yielding estate are invariably high. I have known a coolie woman earn as much as 12 annas in one day, and this in *addition* to her monthly wages. The labourers are in this way enabled to supply themselves with many little luxuries to which in their own country they were probably entire strangers. The relations of employer and employed are on the whole satisfactory, and I have known instances, somewhat exceptional I fear, where the planter takes a keen and kindly interest, not only in the material well-being of his labourers, but in their mental and spiritual welfare as well. To speak then of the Tea-factory labour system as a "thinly-disguised slavery," is to use language for which the facts of the case give no warrant whatever; and much the same may be said of the once much-abused phrase which spoke of the "brutal planter," a being whose existence I cannot but regard as wholly mythical. Certainly, I can recall one instance of undoubted and most atrocious (though unthinking) brutality. Some twenty-eight years ago a coolie woman at a garden about twenty-five miles from this place was for some offence so severely beaten by her employer that she *died* from the effects of the beating, though the death so brought about was of course unintentional. The offender in this case lived in a very out-of-the-way and inaccessible part of the District—at least it was so in those days—and it was by no means easy to induce labourers to settle on his estate at all; he was, moreover, a very dark Eurasian, and had special difficulties in dealing with and controlling his labour-force. But this case is the only one of the kind that has come to my knowledge, and by no one was his conduct more strongly condemned than by his fellow-planters. Many of the factory labourers accumulate considerable sums of money, and with this at the expiration of their three or five years of service, they often settle down as highly prosperous *rayats* in the neighbourhood of their former employers. Not a few, indeed, re-engage for a second term of service, quite of their own free-will; and in any case they need never fall into the clutches of the money-leader—that great scourge and curse of rural India; for at the different factories abundance of suitable and well-paid employment is always to be had by those who are willing to avail themselves of it.

On the whole then, I think, that it would not be well for the Church to take any part in a crusade against an evil which is, to a great extent, an imaginary one. But if in future, recruiters of labourers can be prevailed upon to avoid sending up isolated members of families, and will, in particular, take care not to separate husband from wife, and parents from their children, then no small service will be done to a cause which we all have at heart, that of morality and righteousness.

The "Indian Churchman," September 9th, 1893.

We desire to call special attention to a communicated article on Coolie Recruiting in Assam which appears in our present issue. This article certainly presents a view very different from that of Mr. Endle, which appeared in our columns a few weeks ago. We can, however, answer for the absolute *bona fides* of both writers, and their knowledge of matters is probably about equal, so that the discrepancy in their accounts is probably to be attributed to the fact that their respective districts are some two hundred miles apart. We must confess to having somewhat hastily committed ourselves to Mr. Endle's view. We desire, however, to keep an open mind on the subject, and to invite a further statement of the facts. Certainly, if in any appreciable number of instances, the "brutal planter" survives, as our last correspondent's article suggests, it lays a grave duty not only on the Government, which appears to be doing its best to fulfil its part, but on the Church, the natural protector of the weak and the champion of those who, like the coolies on tea-plantations, have none else to speak out for them. Unfortunately the Church itself is but thinly represented in Assam; the sparse European population is

ministered to by but two chaplains, and the missionaries of the English Church are only an equal number. This, however, is a matter in which there can be no question of ecclesiastical differences, and all those in the Province who desire to be guided by Christian principles, whether clergy or laity, churchmen or dissenters, might well act together in watching and mitigating the evils which seem to be to a great extent inherent in the system of imported labour.

“ ASSAM COOLIE RECRUITING.”

(Communicated.)

The expansion of the tea garden industry demands yearly more coolies than the natural flow of emigration from even the most congested districts, *inhabited by people whom Assam will suit, can afford.**

This is the prime cause of many of the evils of the coolie system. But for this, there would be no need of the vile trade of the European coolie-contractors and their crimps in Bengal: no temptation to recruit labour from amongst people to whom the climate of Assam is certain death: and no compulsion laid on managers of insufficiently manned gardens to work, as best they may, with such labour as their Calcutta Agent sends them, or look out for other billets.

Coolies die by thousands in Assam. Not till the death-rate is 7 per cent. is a garden placed on the Government “black-list,” and subject to more frequent and minuter inspection. They do not die of diseases they bring with them: the diseases are generated by the local conditions of the gardens: these may include overwork and insufficient food, owing to wages being docked for tasks incompleting by debilitated labourers. Wages are not invariably high in Assam. There are gardens on which the average wages of a man is less than four rupees a month, and of a woman less than three rupees a month. The causes have just been mentioned. Low wage-rate and high death-rate are convertible terms. The over-working of coolies is, however, not always due to insufficiency of labour. The manager or superintendent of some very large concern may be a *cruel man*: possibly not intentionally, but simply from insensibility, from an absolute inability to grasp any other consideration than this one,—that it is his right, nay his duty, to get out of his coolies the utmost amount of exertion the law will tolerate. As in the old coaching days, there were “whips” who were famous for getting out of a horse the last “pound of work” it was capable of performing, so there are, in these days in Assam, those who almost pride themselves on doing the same with their labour-force. They work hard themselves, they make their European assistants work hard, and their coolies shall work hard, too, or they’ll know the reason why.

Some men there are, of another kind, who by their very temperament, are unfit to be placed in charge, with almost despotic power, of large bodies of men. There are men of uncontrolled temper, liable to be reduced to a state of stuttering incoherence by any crossing of their orders. Others are nagging men, carping, querulous, scolding, without a word of approval for any one, European assistant, Babu, servant, or labourer, whom they come across. It has been said, that the garden labour system is a “thinly disguised slavery.” This is a question of terms. Read the advertisements in the *Indian Planter's Gazette*. “Coolies, any quantity, warranted junglies!” “For sale” is not added, but it is implied, and the man who can pay the price takes the coolies: who, meanwhile, have been kept in walled enclosures, under lock and key, to hinder them from escaping. The above paper had an article recently openly discussing what constituted ownership or proprietorship in a coolie.

Leaving, however, the question of the recruitment of coolies, to which Government is giving increasing attention, let us pass to the garden, and the coolie's life there.

* This I believe to be absolute fact: although at the time of writing I had not gathered one tithe of the evidence I now possess. C, D.

He is put under a four years' agreement, a contract enforced by penal enactments. This is necessary, because you cannot punish, by civil process, a man who has no property.* It would be impossible to work a garden, if after it has cost some hundred rupees per head to get labourers up, they could repudiate their contracts at will. But the coolie, who has never entered into such a contract in his life before, and who, though he has cost his employer or purchaser a hundred rupees, has himself received no *quid pro quo*, beyond being brought a great way from home, finding himself under conditions he never contemplated, with his brethren sickening and dying around him on some unhealthy garden, may often feel that the obvious and only course is to make a bold bolt for his life. We cannot expect him to understand that he and his fellows must wait to be acclimatised, and that though five, ten, fifteen per cent. may die in the process, the odds are still in favour of his being among the survivors. If a European sickens soon after coming to Assam, people say how hard it is that he cannot stand the climate, and he goes home. But when coolies succumb to the climate, the pity is felt, not for them, but for their employer, "What rough luck having so much sickness on his garden," a man will say of his brother planter. Up to recently there was a way of keeping down the death-rate, which was permitted by Government. Weakly and moribund coolies from gardens, and other labour employing concerns, could be brought into the station to the magistrate, and their agreements, at the request of the employer, cancelled. He had to hand them seventeen rupees each, † and he was quit of them. They were free: no one was responsible for them. ‡ They might stagger to the station hospital, and die there; or crawl out, and linger on, wherever they could. There is no poor law. If of their Rs. 17 enough was left to take them to their homes, six hundred miles away, they could go, if they had strength and knowledge to get a ticket. † This clearing off of useless and worn-out coolies, could be gone through as often in the year as desirable. It has, this year, been enacted that their agreements are only to be cancelled if they are fit to travel, and their employer has to pay the whole cost of their passage to their own home, with messing allowance for the journey.

A very real hardship is the pressure put on coolies to make them re-engage, when their time is expired, and if they refuse, the hindrances placed in the way of their getting work on other gardens. Supposing the agreement of a man and his wife expire at the same time, the woman will often be cajoled into giving a fresh agreement, and the man will be told he will be turned off the garden and not allowed to visit his wife, if he do not also "renew." It is said to be illegal to take an agreement from a woman without her husband's consent; yet, what does a coolie know of this? There is no doubt that on many gardens the coolie is regarded as behaving badly who won't re-engage. Some men refuse the *hálh-chit* to a coolie; that is, the paper certifying that the garden has no further claim on his services; they consider they are entitled to know where he is going to, and won't give the *hálh-chit* unless they do. This is, of course, absolutely illegal; but it is done. It might not matter so much, if the law were complied with that the coolie should possess the duplicate copy of his agreement, but nearly always the manager holds both. The coolie who leaves at last in despair of getting his *hálh-chit*, is liable to be harrassed at every turn; stopped as he goes along the road, by enquiries who he is: stopped at ferries till neighbouring gardens, that have lost coolies, and are on the hunt for them, have had a look at him to see that he is not one of their men. Or he may be captured outright by *arkullis*, hurried off to some distant place, where no questions are asked, and kept at work till he manages to make his escape. Even time-expired labourers, who have been settled for years on their own holdings, if they have to make a journey to their country, or even the next district, will obtain, if they can, from some European who knows them, a pass stating that they are free men. Without something of the sort, they know what risks of arrest and detention they run. A system which brings about such interference with personal liberty certainly partakes of the nature of slavery. The abuses of almost compulsory re-engagement of coolies, have so forced themselves upon the attention of

* In saying this, I was adopting the current opinion as to the necessity of Act I. My opinion since then has been greatly modified. C. D.

† Those statements were made under misapprehension. Three months' wages had to be handed to each, whatever more was needed to take them home, the Administration was to make up. C. D.

Government, that recently it has been enacted that all contracts of re-engagement must be signed in the presence of the magistrate, who will satisfy himself that the new agreement is given willingly.

Supposing, however, the coolie has his *hâth-chit*, he may be met with a new difficulty before getting work. His late master and the majority of the planters around may belong to an association, the members of which have mutually bound themselves not to take on coolies coming from one another's gardens: and the man may be compelled to leave a district in which friends and relations are living, because he has refused to re-engage with a master whom he may have ample and valid reason for not wishing to work under any longer. Of course no exception can be taken to such action on the part of planters; yet it is an instance of the restrictions which hedge round the coolie.*

It would be impossible to arrive at a just view of the whole matter of coolie treatment, without considering the enormous difficulties of a planter's position. It may be compared to that of the captain of a vessel at sea. He is in command of a large body of men, quick to discern and take advantage of the slightest relaxation of discipline. He may be miles away from any magistrate. His labour-force may contain notorious *badmâshes*, for all sorts of broken men come to Assam, who have made their own homes too hot to hold them. These men are always ready to hatch disturbances or fan discontent on a garden. Such a one may head a mob of coolies, who will come up to the manager's bungalow with some pretended grievance. Brave in numbers, they declare they won't go to work to-morrow, that they will leave the garden in a body, and complain of him, on some charge, to the magistrate. What is he to do? He has had warning probably, from his head Babu, that such a gathering is intended, and also, who is the instigator. He might send for the Police, but likely enough, there is no Thanna nearer than the magistrate. It would be a day-and-a-half ere they turned up. Meanwhile work would be at a standstill, his lines in a ferment. The Police would stay a day or two, and go away to make some confused report, without having done anything to quiet the garden.

Instead of this,† what course is open to him? Why directly the mob begin to get insolent, he may go for that ringleader, knock him down, or give him a thrashing, and follow it up with a lecture in round terms to the crowd. They, seeing their leader's fall, will declare that he had egged them on, and that they are very sorry for their behaviour: go back to their lines, perhaps give him another thrashing on their own account, and turn out next morning to work as quiet as lambs. No doubt the planter has broken the letter of the law, but he has quelled a disturbance, which might have cost the garden thousands of rupees, and endless trouble to the Magistrate, before it was proved that there really was no grievance at all, but that everything was due to the above-mentioned *badmâsh*, who had got up the row to pass the time. The three or four months' imprisonment the Magistrate might give the ringleader would be no sort of compensation to the garden for the loss sustained by the stoppage of work during the busy season, together with the probable desertion of a score or so of coolies, who had taken advantage of the tumult to make a bolt for good and all. Coolies certainly need a strong hand. Everyone knows how an ordinary Indian household goes to pieces if the master be not a bit of a Tartar. There is no doubt that the exercise of power over large bodies of men has a *tendency* to brutalise, against which a man needs to be on his guard. Old sea captains and army officers are sometimes examples of this. The manager of a garden is called upon to exercise a great deal of domestic jurisdiction. Coolies are constantly quarrelling amongst themselves, quarrelling about women, about money, about cattle and pigs.

On all these matters, often involving the holding of a regular court, and the patient cross-

* This statement has been denied. I remember once finding a gathering of employers in high dudgeon because a neighbour, whose garden belonged to the Association, declined to admit that he was bound by Association rules as to a small garden, part-owned by himself, which he was allowed to manage by his proprietors.—C. D.

† In the latter portion of this letter I endeavoured to put the planter's position, as I thought he would plead it himself. It has been censured as conflicting with the first half of the communication.—C. D.

examining of parties and their witnesses, the planter has to adjudicate. Anyone who has been much on gardens must have been struck with the obvious trust the coolies have that the Sahib is the one to settle their disputes. Sometimes he inflicts a fine, sometimes (especially in cases where some man goes interfering with other peoples wives and daughters) he inflicts something else, and justice is done. There is no doubt that this jurisdiction has had a tendency to extend itself in a very questionable manner : as for instance in the treatment of deserters. When these are brought back, their capturers receive five rupees per coolie, which is docked from his wages ; but widely prevalent has been the practice of inflicting corporal chastisement as well. Law and sentiment are against the exercise of autocratic power by the planter, and more decidedly so each year ; and it is well, for, as said before, there are those who ought not to be trusted with power of any sort. But it is really a question what is to take its place. The restrictions now placed, and justly, on the planter's old domestic jurisdiction, must be made up to him in some way, by a prompter and more effective application of Government law. It seems as if it would produce a dead-lock if the planter is to be running into court to prosecute every malingering or mutinous coolie : nor can he possibly allow his coolies to be going off at will, to harrass each other with law-suits about women, cattle, and money.

Still, in spite of these difficulties, the relations of employers and employed are, on the whole satisfactory. As regards very many gardens, indeed, they are wholly satisfactory. The labourers look up to the manager as their real friend, and their resource in every trouble. They have every possible liberty consistent with the due working of the garden. They re-engage freely, often without more than a verbal agreement. They are allowed land on which to cultivate paddy out of work hours ; and as to these, for a good part of the year, coolies may be seen going to their houses, their hoeing done, and their garden work over for the day, by half-past ten, or eleven in the morning. They acquire live-stock, and are perfectly happy and prosperous. On some gardens there are schools for the children : on others, where there are Christian coolies, these are helped to build small chapels, and encouraged to hold their Sunday services. But this healthy state of things is to be found only where there is an ample labour-force. Here we find ourselves back at the point noted at the beginning. The time may come when Government will insist on a minimum number of coolies per acre of tea, either agreement coolies, or "local labour" permanently entertained. One thing is certain. No relaxation of any rules binding on gardens will be made by Government. Every alteration in the future will be in the coolies' interest. As already pointed out, this may act disadvantageously at first ; but good planters will know how to surmount all difficulties, and by firmness, tact, and kindness do as well as ever. Though such as they might have been trusted with wider powers, others cannot be trusted farther than the eye of Government can see them. For the faults, nay vices of these, they may have, in some degree, to suffer. But this is unavoidable, and the way of the world.

Were the European population of Assam groaning under some intolerable tyranny, it would be no consolation to them to be told that in the rest of India their brethren lived happily under the laws. And in like manner, whilst all might be well on hundreds of gardens, though planters had freer hands than even in the past, yet Government has to legislate as if with a sole view to a stamp of manager, who has shown what he is capable of, however closely watched.

"Only here and there such a man" it may be said. Granted, but under his single rule there may be a population greater than the number of European residents in the whole of the province.

"COOLIE RECRUITING IN ASSAM."

The "Indian Churchman," September 23rd, 1893.

Sir,

I have been asked by a very dear clerical friend to look over an article in your last issue calling special attention to a communication, also contained in the same issue, upon the treatment of Tea Garden coolies in Assam.

Writers of both articles appear to me to handle their subject as if not practically well versed

in it, for in the opening sentence in the one, "Coolie Recruiting in Assam" is referred to in a sense in which it does not exist, while in that of the other the "natural flow of emigration from even the most congested districts" is apparently referred to as an existent state of affairs, while this is the one great object which the combined efforts of planters and of the Government have failed to bring about.

Surely, also, the revival and stereotyping in a Church journal of the academically obsolete and objectionable expression of "brutal planter," is as much wanting in relevancy as it is in courtesy and good taste?

On first reading the article to which attention is specially drawn, one must, I think, be pardoned for entertaining the feeling that it is intended as a strong indictment against Assam planters as a body, on account of the manner in which they treat their coolies; and it seems to me possible that this impression might remain, nay, might even become exaggerated, in the minds of those who cursorily read the article, and have only a superficial knowledge of the subject it treats of, or worse still, none at all.

Take, for instance, the intemperate description of the "vile trade of the European coolie contractors and their crimps in Bengal." What might not this be interpreted to mean if read in England without any explanation? Or, say, the statement as to the supposed recruitment of "people to whom the climate of Assam is certain death."

At all events the character and position of the planter would not by such statement be raised in the minds of your readers. But permit me to assert that no one is more anxious than the planter, that these contractors and their crimps should cease to exist; that no class has striven harder to accomplish this, nor would any class be more benefitted by its accomplishment than the planter.

To explain—what a planter most desires is to recruit by means of his own servants and sirdars, properly supervised, and to discourage, and extirpate, if possible, such contractors, and their emissaries.

Then, apart from every consideration except expediency and profit alone, what motive could a planter or his agents have in importing to Assam coolies to whom the climate is certain death? Why! I do not think I am exaggerating when I say that everything the wit of agents and planters can devise is done to prevent such coolies being sent to Assam. It pays no one to import them and certainly, as every one really interested ought to know, least of all the planter.

To further explain, before a coolie is put under agreement in the recruiting district, he must be certified as fit to proceed by the Civil Surgeon of that district. If he is put under agreement in Calcutta, he has to pass the vigilant eye of the Protector of Emigrants, always a doctor of high standing; and afterwards, he is examined by a physician selected by the Agents of the garden to which he proceeds, in order to protect their own interests.

Why do gardens pay a fee for each coolie examined by their retained Calcutta doctor, if not in the hope that his experience may assist in eliminating coolies physically unsuited for the work or district for which they are intended? What, may I ask, do the Army or the India Office authorities do if they wish to ascertain if a candidate is physically fit for employment abroad, but refer to their medical advisers? Yet, with all these natural precautions referred to, instances may be quoted and authenticated, where coolies strictly examined in Calcutta in the manner indicated, have been discarded by the European Medical Officer of a Company in Assam, and returned to Calcutta at the contractor's expense.

I by no means mention this to enable any one to draw the inference that there is a weak point in the supervision referred to, but simply as indicating the great care that is taken to prevent unsuitable coolies from settling in Assam.*

To give one more example, let me refer to a coolie put under agreement at Dhubri. And here, I think, I cannot do better than quote from the last Yearly Emigration Report issued by the

* In spite of the great care, official reports show that unsuitable coolies are imported in very large numbers.—C. D.

Chief Commissioner of Assam, to shew the manner in which the coolie is treated (after, I would point out, he has been passed by the Civil Surgeon as a suitable emigrant) by other responsible officials, and from a lengthened experience of responsibility in arrangements for the recruitment of coolies, for their selection and for their transit to Assam I have no hesitation in saying that the following description is a very representative one of the care and kindness displayed by Assam Officials in this portion of their work. The Deputy Commissioner in the report just referred to, resident at Dhubri, says :—

“The system of putting coolies on contract at Dhubri remains as before, and every possible care is taken to see that no coolie goes up without having his contract especially explained to him individually. Even after the coolie has executed his contract here, if he objects to proceed, his contract is cancelled, and he is next day sent back at the contractor's expense to where he came from. In this the several Depôt managers give us loyal support. It is evidently quite understood by every one concerned in emigration here, that it is to the interest of us all to see that no coolies are sent up against their wishes.”

Again, as I feel myself writing in a *pueris virginibusque cuncto* spirit, I should like to take objection to the fairness of the statement that “there are gardens on which the average wage of a man is less than 4 rupees a month, and of a woman less than three rupees a month.” In any honest endeavour to show the general position as regards the wages of the coolie in Assam, such a statement made by any one, even only fairly versed in the matter, can only be accepted as misleading. Such a one knows that if it be true, which one ventures to doubt, it is exceptional, phenomenal, and that it must be capable of explanation. According to the terms of the recently amended Coolie Act “every labourer shall for one day each week receive wages as for a full task done without being required to labour for the same.” That Act also provides that the wages of a coolie, man and woman, for the first three years of their agreement, shall be Rs. 5 and Rs. 4 a month, and for the fourth year Rs. 6 and Rs. 5, respectively. At this rate a coolie who did nothing would be entitled to, say, a rupee a month for doing it. But why not look at the matter from a broader and more charitable point of view, and endeavour to ascertain what are the average, or the highest, wages a coolie can earn under favourable circumstances? According to the returns given in the Emigration Report already referred to, the lowest monthly wages earned by any man coolie under the Act in Assam, was Rs. 3-13-2, and the highest Rs. 15-5-6, per month. Similarly, the lowest wages, earned by a woman was Rs. 3-5-0, and the highest Rs. 17-4-0, per month. And the same responsible authority shows that—just to take by way of example one large district alone in Assam,—Lakhimpur—a man can earn, and has earned there, on an average, during manufacturing season, (which let me inform the uninitiated, lasts for at least eight months out of the twelve) Rs. 20, a woman Rs. 20-13-0, and a child Rs. 8, a month.

But to return once more to the opening portion of your correspondent's communication, one cannot help being struck with his prejudiced classification of planters. First of all, there is the “cruel” man who is unable to grasp any other consideration than that it is his duty “to get out of his coolies the utmost exertion the law will tolerate.” This style of planter is, by a most infelicitious metaphor, compared to those who appear to have been famous “whips” of old, on account of their dexterity in getting out of a horse the “last pound of work.” How any one who intimately knows Assam planters will appreciate the amusement they will cull from this inapposite analogy! I am sure it may be “taken as read” that Assam planters are sufficiently sporting to realise that the moment a famous—I would prefer to say an infamous—“Whip” took the last pound out of his horse, that horse would be worth less than nothing, at all events, in Assam; for all that he would require at a kindly hand would be his decent interment. Surely even a brutal planter—if such there be—would be wise enough to know that such treatment either of a horse or of a coolie would not pay, for planters realise, and so it is generally understood do other people, that it's “the money makes the mare to go.” Then there is another class of planters referred to—that of “men of uncontrolled temper, liable to be reduced to a state of stuttering incoherence” under certain trivial circumstances. Again, there are apparently other classes of “nagging men, carping, querulous, scolding, without a word of approval for any one;” but it is impossible to gather

from the context of the sentence to which we are indebted for all these forcible adjectives, whether they apply collectively to one group of planters, or specifically to the different classes indicated. Further, it is difficult for any practical man to pass over the imputation laid at the door of those, evidently from the context in Calcutta, who are supposed to have coolies "kept in walled enclosures under lock and key, to hinder them from escaping." My Solicitor informs me that this language is distinctly actionable, and I have no doubt he is quite correct. Could it be proved to be accurate, I would not hesitate to undertake to get the Chamber of Commerce to make the position of the Protector of Emigrants not worth many days' purchase. But I must say that my experience tells me that it is inaccurate, for, without trouble, I could prove it to be so.

So much for the opening paragraphs of your correspondent's communications, which seem to me to be simply bristling with biased and misleading innuendoes. But when one turns to the concluding paragraphs, the hope seems almost forced upon one that perhaps, after all, your correspondent is really a "thinly disguised" Balaam. I fancy it is an association of ideas that leads me, as a man of business, to follow up this reference with another to the axiom among business men, that there is no more infallible retort in correspondence than that which convicts a man out of his own mouth. One therefore looks with satisfaction to the other side of the communication in question, where one finds references to the "enormous difficulties of a planter's position," which puts him sometimes in charge of men "always ready to hatch disturbances" and to "take advantage of the slightest relaxation of discipline." Yet, apparently, although the requisite specific "has a tendency to brutalise"—"any one who has been much on a tea garden must have been struck with the obvious trust the coolies have that the Sahib is the one to settle their disputes." And as one reads on, still more gratification awaits the friend of the planter, 'Balaam' himself proclaims that the "relations of employers and employed are, on the whole, satisfactory," and that labourers "look up to the manager as their real friend and their resource in every trouble;" and, strangely enough, we are told that these labourers "have every possible liberty consistent enough with the due working of the garden." I do not desire to take any unfair or illogical advantage of the expressions or arguments of your correspondent, but I must say that I cannot see what the conclusion of the whole matter that he, apparently, desires to arrive at is, unless it be that he contemplated a very unfair and badly-guarded attack upon Assam planters. I cannot resist the temptation of adding, that I fancy this attack was meant for the possible delectation of two audiences,—one an English and the other an Indian one: but we all know the folly of attempting to serve two masters. Every sensible man will admit that there are bad planters, just as there are bad preachers, and it would, no doubt, be as futile to hope to rid the world of the one class, as of the other. And I respectively leave it to your readers to determine, whether or not the world at large would be more benefitted by the extirpation of the one than of the other: but I am a friend of both, and I write with temporal authority.

It would be a very simple and a pleasant task to refer to other matters of vital importance, to what, I presume, may be termed my side of the question, had I the leisure to do so. I could refer to the paternal, the exquisite care, the Government takes of the coolie during his transit to Assam, to the inspection of the steamers that carry him by medical officers who certify that the accommodation is sufficient for his comfort, who examine and test the food he has to eat and the water he has to drink, the clothing he has been furnished with free of cost to him, and the hospital accommodation that has to be provided for him in case of sickness. Then, *en route*, the steamer carrying coolies is inspected, say, every couple of days, by the Civil Surgeon of a station, in case, for instance, any may be suffering from undue exposure to the sun or otherwise. On arrival at the garden, the coolie at once comes under the care of a European Medical Adviser—I know of no exception—who is responsible for the salubrity and sanitation of the lines, or rows of huts, in which he lives. Then, over the head of the European Medical Adviser and the garden manager, is the Government Protector of Labourers, who periodically inspects gardens, hears coolies' complaints, issues orders of the nature of the laws of the Medes and Persians, in protection of the coolie. In brief, the tea garden coolie in Assam is much better housed, much better paid, and much better fed than he ever was, or ever could have hoped to be—although even a friend would be slow to credit him with much imagination—in his own country.

Your correspondent depicts him as returning to his home "by half-past ten or eleven in the morning," having earned his day's wages and his night's repose, and it would be difficult, I think, to pourtray a more telling picture of a successful and comfortably situated working man, whose only grievance might be that the franchise had not been extended to him. I have myself been repeatedly round the principal gardens in Assam, as well as in Cachar and Sylhet, and have often seen the coolie returning from his completed daily task, much before the hour mentioned by your correspondent, with his certificate of wages in his pocket (if he had one), and it has more than once been a comfort to me, truthfully, to think of the garden coolie generally (possibly in the sense that the dear old lady gleaned comfort from the pronunciation of "Mesopotamia") in that old language which is ever new: "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage."

I am, dear Sir, in all respect,
Yours faithfully,
EX LUCE LUCELLUM.

[We are extremely glad to be able to publish another side to the depressing picture we presented in our last.—Ed., I.C.]

The "Indian Churchman," October 7th, 1893.

"COOLIE RECRUITING IN ASSAM."

SIR,

"Ex Luce Lucellum" criticises somewhat severely the second of the two articles which have appeared in the *Indian Churchman*. To some he may seem a little hypercritical. Complaint is made that "the natural flow of emigration from even the most congested districts" should be referred to as an existent state of affairs," whilst, really, it "is the one great object which the combined efforts of planters and of Government have failed to bring about." This sentence is rather obscure, but it would seem to declare that there is no "natural flow" at all; which is even a stronger statement than that of the original writer, that the "natural flow" was not equal to supplying Assam's yearly demand for coolies.

Complaint is made that the original paper reads as if "intended as a strong indictment against Assam Planters as a body." Can this be fairly said, in face of the fact that the correspondent himself makes merry over the unstinted measure of praise that the writer of the paper ascribes as due to the large majority of planters?

Complaint is made of the "intemperate description of the coolie contractor's trade, as vile" yet a few paragraphs lower, the correspondent declares the planters "are anxious that such contractors should cease to exist and desire to discourage and extirpate, if possible, such contractors, and their emissaries."

If the trade be not a "vile" one, why desire to "extirpate" those who carry it on; and if it be vile, why is it "intemperate" to call it so?

Again, as touching the "supposed recruitment of people to whom the climate of Assam is certain death," the correspondent cannot be ignorant that such *are* recruited and sent up: and that the planter, or his garden doctor, can recognise them as unfit for the climate, and constantly sends them straight back again to the contractor, with a complimentary letter. This he does, if in charge of a large concern, with ample funds, and able to take a high line with his contractor; if otherwise, he has to put up with them, and they with the climate. To say this cannot "lower the character of the planter in the minds of readers."

The writer of the original article did not profess to deal, except incidentally, with the subject of recruitment, and is not therefore concerned to discuss all that "Ex Luce Lucellum" has to say on the subject; but it might be asked how this correspondent accounts for the actual lame, halt, and blind (!) being sent up by contractors as able-bodied coolies, in spite of the supervision he describes as so perfect? As regards the language of the paper being "actionable," it might be so if the old legal maxim held good: "the greater the truth the greater the libel." The writer's authority as to the "walled enclosures," was a planter who went down to the recruiting districts to look after his own Sirdars. By them he was informed that some coolies whom they had recruited,

had been "fasalao'd" by a local contractor, and were supposed to be in his godown. He tried to interview this gentleman, but in vain. The servants declared their master was not in: which was true, for he had seen him crossing the back compound, as he came up the front drive: they also said they knew nothing of his whereabouts. The planter, not to be balked, went to the coolie godowns, and made his way in. Here, sure enough, he found his coolies, and took them away: nor did the contractor think it expedient to call him to account for so doing.

As touching the wages question, "Ex Luce Lucellum" declares it "misleading" to state there are gardens on which men earn less than four rupees, and women, less than three rupees a month. The statement was made on the authority of a Government medical officer, who said he could name three or four gardens in a district where such was the case. No one questions the fact that on very many gardens high wages are earned, but why is it more "charitable," or why does it bespeak "a broader point of view," to dilate on the "highest wages a coolie can earn under, favourable circumstances," than to allude to the fact abovementioned? Could the coolies on those gardens speak, they might say: "No doubt our brethren elsewhere, under favourable circumstances, are getting high pay, but our circumstances are not favourable, and we,—and we here are many,—are earning a bare subsistence."

"Ex Luce" should surely have touched on the fact, that though the Act prescribes the wages of men and women throughout the term of their agreement, yet their master can dock those who fail to complete their daily task. This daily task is fixed by himself, according to the work that must be got through; and if a man's labour-force is not large, he has to fix high tasks, too high sometimes: hence deductions, and low average wage-rates.* Also, when telling that the Act prescribes one day of rest each week on full pay, he does not allude to the fact that during the manufacturing season of eight months, on many gardens, coolies don't obtain this day of rest. They are paid, of course, over-time, for working on their Sundays, and are supposed to work voluntarily for the sake of the higher wages. Many no doubt do; but they are turned out of their lines to work, not left to come out, *if desirous*. Supposing they did not come out, would they be allowed to remain in their lines that day? This is an evil. However good for a man's Savings' Bank account, it is very bad for his health to work seven days a week for many months in the year.

As regards the personal characteristics of individuals who have charge of large bodies of labour, it was nowhere suggested that "cruel men, passionate men, or nagging scolding men" were other than in a very small minority: and they are becoming yearly fewer. As to the two first kinds, it is beside the mark to declare that self-interest must be enough to put them straight. Universal experience has proved the contrary. Men in all ranks and positions do things, nay, persist in lines of action diametrically opposed to their own interests, and to the interests of their employers, too, till the latter come down on them. This happened, not a great while ago, to one of the third and last-mentioned kind. His manner brought about such unsatisfactory relations with his coolies, that, after a crisis, he was called upon to resign his managership.

The concluding portion of "Ex Luce's" letter needs small comment. It might perhaps be pointed out, that it is unparliamentary to impute motives; and that it helps an argument but little to try and attach a nick-name to your opponent, even though the nick-name itself involve an imputation. The use of the name 'Balaam' makes the imputation that the writer of the paper had been called upon, by some person or persons unknown, to curse planters and the coolie system *en bloc*, and had been compelled, much against his will, to bless both. Unprejudiced readers must be left to judge if this be not a most unwarranted deduction. He certainly meant to shew that the system whereby vast bodies of people are imported into Assam, under very material restrictions on their personal liberty, is an abnormal state of things with grave inherent evils; and that though both Government and the large majority of planters do their utmost to minimise these, *some do not*.

* It is denied that the daily task is fixed by the manager. Be this technically correct or not, the fact remains,—where the labour-force is too small, it does suffer. A question Inspectors have to answer, in the garden inspection form, is whether the force is sufficient.—C. D.

It could scarce be considered unjustifiable to turn the 'Balaam' image into a retort on "Ex Luce" himself in regard to his treatment of the second-half of the paper. He would seem positively annoyed that he can blame no longer. He is obliged to acknowledge that what is said is fair and just, yet longs to pick a quarrel with the writer, all the same; yet, happily, restrains himself with an effort, passes into a milder mood, and dies away in a somewhat incoherent peroration, in which, however, an attentive listener may detect that, like Falstaff, "A' babbles o' green fields."

THE WRITER OF THE ARTICLE.

[We have received another letter on this subject from 'Medicus,' but we regret that its extreme length precludes us from inserting it in this issue; we hope to do so in our next.—Ed., J. C.]

The "Indian Churchman," October 21st, 1893.

"GARDEN COOLIES IN ASSAM."

SIR,

By an accident, pure and simple, I came across a letter in the *Indian Churchman*, dated 9th instant, upon "Coolie Recruiting in Assam" as it is very erroneously called, and there was so much nonsense in it that even, as a 'brutal planter,' I had sufficient *nous* to see that, ten to one, there would be hair flying around, so I write to ask you to be good enough to book me as a yearly subscriber to your paper. I believe you will find me good enough for the amount as years roll on. But what I really meant to say was, that I made up my mind to take in the paper when I saw the letter signed "Ex Luce Lucellum," which even a 'brutal planter' knows has something to do with matches,—but the fellow that wrote it seems to me to have fire-works up his sleeve besides. We planters up here recognise that he knows what he is about. He says himself that he has been "round," and I fancy he did'nt say that for nothing—and when a planter studies his article, he begins to feel that if it comes to a question of 'slinging ink' the man who wrote it will be about the first to catch the judge's eye at the finish. But that's not what I meant to say either. What I have been trying to say after a long day's work,—at least three times longer than the coolies have,—is that we planters recognise that "Ex Luce Lucellum" has treated his subject not only with a knowing hand but with a kindly one. And I fancy he—whoever he may be—has not been "round" without having found out that there is nothing that makes a planter throw up his hand like kindness, and yet, I think I see the "gauntlet in the velvet glove." Of course the planters have been called "brutal"—there's no getting over that! If I remember—I have sent away the paper—it is what "Ex Luce Lucellum" calls an "academic fact," or something like that. But all planters, like other people, have had mothers—its safe betting upon that—and lots of them have got sisters, too, and I reckon, although I am a planter, that there is no class of men in the world kinder and more unselfish in dealing with their women-folk than planters. There are no returns published of their home remittances, but I think myself "Ex Luce Lucellum" would be disposed to refer the matter to the Recording Angel,—and leave it there. At all events planters up here are very grateful to him for the way in which he has supported them, and feel far less brutal than before, when they admire the style in which he strikes straight from the shoulder. We planters talk a lot—"buck" we usually call it—we are blamed a lot, we are misunderstood, we are misrepresented a lot, but 'with a fair field and no favour,' we have a notion, which, as a rule we like to keep to ourselves, that our record is not to be sneezed at. I again thank "Ex Luce Lucellum," and wish more power to his elbow, which I wish he would unbend a little more.

I know I have expressed myself badly, but all I wished to say was, let the truth prevail. But wait a minute there! I would just like to ask a little commundrum before I close. It is this: What is the difference between a brutal planter and typical English Squire, described by the

greatest Poet Laureate the Nineteenth Century has seen, and to whom no successor can be found, as a man who holds his wife as "a little better than his dog, a little dearer than his horse?"

I subscribe myself, Dear Sir, as I have an inherited right to do,

A SON OF THE CHURCH.

SIR,

In the editorial notes of your issue of the 9th September, on "Coolie Recruiting in Assam," you invite a further statement of facts regarding the subject. I therefore venture to offer my opinion—the result of nearly eighteen years' continuous medical work amongst coolies in Assam. I have read the Communicated Article referred to, and that written by Mr. Endle, and published on the 5th of July last.

The writers of both articles are known to me; and the *bonâ fides* of each is unimpeachable. The difference in their views lies in their relative experience. Mr. Endle has had thirty years of intimate acquaintance with the coolie and his actual condition. The writer of the Communicated Article none whatever; and what he lays down as facts, and of common occurrence, are not so in many instances, and those the most important. Mr. Endle has his information direct from the coolies and planters on their own ground; your correspondent second-hand, from any source—hearsay at the best, and after only a short residence in Assam. I allow that I am biased in the coolies' favour: and, if I could help your correspondent, I would do so, if thereby I could benefit the coolie and improve his condition. But your correspondent's endeavour to run down and depreciate men who are, as a body, doing their best, is not the way to improve matters. To dismiss Mr. Endle's article:—In my opinion his view of the question, which appears to be mis-named "Coolie Recruiting," and is rather that of the "Condition of the Coolie in Assam," as a general one, is correct and that of the coolie's condition, true: it being infinitely better than his original state, or anything that he or his friends could have expected when the contract was made. I do not know if Mr. Endle has visited the coolie in his own home, as I have many times; but I know your correspondent has not, and has no official connection with any Tea Garden, and can only have seen anything of one as a casual and almost unknown visitor; and therefore, very unlikely to see anything of an exceptional nature.* I am not interested in disproving either your correspondent's or Mr. Endle's views to be correct; but, as the question has arisen, I am anxious to show what in my opinion is the truth, and how something of advantage may be gained for the coolie. Just as in any community there are black sheep, so are there amongst planters; and your correspondent appears to me to have misdirected his energies against an employment and calling most excellent in itself, instead of attacking weak points in the system and method of conducting such employment, and shewing how these isolated cases of mismanagement are to be avoided or prevented; and owing to what such mismanagement becomes possible.

A glance at the commencement of his article will suffice at once to show the absence of practical knowledge and acquaintance with the subject under discussion.

What natural flow of emigration is there, or would there be, from Bengal and the Central Provinces to Assam, without direct information regarding the advantages to be gained being personally put before, and explained to, the coolies, and all that is implied by recruiting being actively carried out? How could young gardens possibly carry this out without the aid of the contractor and his *arkatties*? Old and rich companies may do it by Garden Sirdars recruiting; and when this is possible it is always preferred and carried out by managers; but new gardens cannot. Out of the millions of inhabitants (in a semi-starving condition) of districts, whom Assam will suit, what paltry proportion have we up here? I may remark here that there is no difference between Tezporé and any other district in Upper Assam. The supply, I contend, is more than equal to the demand; but the means are deficient of communicating the want to those who would gladly supply it, if they knew of it, or could get information upon which they could

* Neither my friend, Mr. Endle, or myself, have any official connection with Tea Gardens, and are therefore more likely to have unbiased minds and sight, than those who have. It is a question of observation.—C. D.

rely.* Your correspondent, in his want of acquaintance with the practical working of a garden, speaks as though there were no such things as Proprietors—no Boards of Directors—no paid Secretaries at home, watching every item of expenditure, of which the cost of importation of coolies is the most heavy and important, to be informed of such high-handed proceedings as those of which he accuses Calcutta Agents. Shall I be forgiven if I say, only the homely expression of rubbish and nonsense can be applied to such remarks? Does your correspondent know that Superintendents and Managers have every month to send a full account of all deaths and casualties to their Agents; and, if these are excessive, an explanation is at once demanded; and thus goes through the Agents to the Home Boards, where they are again commented upon.

It is as much the Agent's interest to send up good coolies, as it is to the Managers to keep them well and healthy. Everybody now in a responsible position in Tea knows that the difference between profit and loss lies between the health and sickness of his coolies. Any one not realizing this, and not energetically acting up to it, could not keep his appointment a season, or at the outside two, on any property. The margin of profit is now so fine-drawn that the health of a coolie is at least as important as that of a horse: and when did a planter ever neglect his horse?† European Doctors are now almost universally employed, and are responsible for the health of the coolie; and they know exactly what goes on, and would not for a moment submit to be blamed for deaths and sickness the result of bad or cruel treatment by a manager. Your correspondent flatly contradicts Mr. Endle's statements, almost *seriatim*, but my experience shows that Mr. Endle is right, and your correspondent, except in a few isolated cases, wrong: and what is worse he is giving a handle to evilly-disposed persons to use against a system that is in itself right and just, and in its application as successful, every day improving, as any gigantic system of the sort could be expected to be.

Coolies do die, eventually, by thousands; but only at a fair yearly percentage, and so this apparently terrible assertion really means nothing. They do not die of diseases generated by local conditions of gardens. They die from diseases which are induced by their own inherent faults, so to speak, which are not in any way the result of "over work, insufficient food, or owing to wages being docked for tasks incompleted by debilitated labour." It is entirely incorrect to assert this in the face of the fact that, I may say invariably, a coolie gets full pay, with rice at Rs. 3 per maund, for which the planter pays Rs. 4, 5, or 6, or even more, for four to six months after arrival, entirely without reference to whether he works or not. If he works even fairly well he is paid in money, if not he is put into the "hotel system," as it is called, and fed there, and given clothes, and pocket-money for tobacco, &c., at the planter's expense; and put to do any work he may seem capable of doing. Nor is that expenditure debited to the coolie in order to be recovered hereafter. It is only after a long trial, when it becomes perfectly apparent that a coolie either cannot or will not work, on the certificate of the European Doctor, the coolie is sent into *Kutcherry*, his contract cancelled, and he is sent back to his country at the expense of the planter, whatever it costs. Your correspondent apparently thinks that it is only this year that it has been enacted that their agreements shall only be cancelled if they are fit to travel. He is quite mistaken, it has always practically been the case, and if any coolie was found unfit to travel, he was put into Government hospital, and the planter made to pay for his keep there. I have known instances of this having been done for a year, and then the planter informed, that the coolie had bolted from the hospital: but the bill had to be paid all the same.

As to wages in the garden, Mr. Endle is well under the mark when he says a coolie during the plucking season can earn 12 annas a day in addition to his pay; and free labourers, such as Cacharis, can, and do, hoo for months together, during the worst season of the year, three *háziras*, or tasks, one of which is given to the imported coolie under Act I. as a day's work. It is quite certain that, if coolies do not earn full pay, or more, it is their own fault. Any fairly able-bodied and willing worker can earn sufficient to keep himself, wife and family, properly, and save fifty %.

* Why do gardens not send their recruiters to the right quarter, if indeed, the supply be more than equal to the demand?—C. D.

† Few planters do really understand horses.—C. D.

of his pay, and this is amply proved by the fact that coolies often are found owning hundreds, even thousands, of rupees accumulated on a single garden—I can give instances of the latter amount.*

To explain what I mean by inherent faults in the coolie himself, and to show how the planter becomes saddled with coolies—who earn no pay and thereby decrease the average of the labourer's pay, as seen in the pay-sheet, although, if the total cost of maintenance of such coolies in the hotel and hospital were added, a very considerable difference would be seen—I must turn to the question of coolie recruiting, and statistics generally. I will first show how it is that the recruiting system by contractors is objectionable: and afterwards how the figures themselves are often both incorrect and misleading, and cannot alone be taken as a basis upon which to calculate the true death-rate of coolies in Assam. Recruiting by Garden Sirdars—of this system little need be said. Only men of the *játs* suitable for Assam, and natives of districts whose inhabitants can live in health in Assam, are sent down; and they of necessity only bring up friends and relations of the same description as themselves; since no other castes would listen to them or become recruits. These people on arrival probably meet old friends, go out to work with them, and as a rule give no trouble whatever. If, as Mr. Endle says, any relations are left behind, they can be traced without difficulty and brought up. A planter is always willing to pay the cost of their journey, and even give a handsome bonus for any able-bodied labour so brought up. But in recruiting by Government licensed recruiters the case is altogether different, and it is owing to certain regulations that planters not only are swindled in importing coolies, useless as labourers, but are, owing to the action of Government, unable either to put a stop to it, or punish the contractor for his rascality.

Under this system all coolies are placed under Act I. of 1882, and by Section 32 of this Act the *arkatti*, the emissary of the contractor, as soon as he persuades a coolie to go to Assam (no doubt often by exaggerated promises, &c.), has to take him to the local magistrate, there register him, and fill in a form (No. 9) giving all particulars as to his caste, district, and description generally. This form cannot afterwards be corrected or altered in any way. If a coolie be of the description required in Assam, he is allowed to tell his own story, and without doubt it will be a true one, as he does not know what class is, or is not, required in Assam; but if not, and he be of fair physique, he is coached up by the *arkatti* to act the rôle of the *ját* acceptable in Assam which he most nearly represents. The *arkatti* dresses him, puts on any ornaments, paints marks, &c., for the character. He is then taken to Calcutta to the "walled enclosures" spoken of by your correspondent, which are strictly under Government supervision. Here he is interviewed, on three separate occasions,—by the Civil Surgeon appointed by Government for the purpose once, and by the Inspector of Emigrants twice. He then proceeds to Goalundo or Dhubri, where he is passed by the Civil Surgeon as "fit to travel to the labour districts." If an extra fee be paid, a certificate will be given as to his "ability to work when he gets there." But this is not considered of much value, as the Civil Surgeon is often unacquainted with the nature of a coolie's duties on a Tea Garden, or the demands of the climate of Assam upon the particular races and *játs*. On arrival on the garden the truth comes out; and the poor wretch, who is unsuitable, finds he has come up to work and not to play—an occupation he has never engaged in, and never intends to. As examples of such classes, I may mention, Brahmans, Bostoms (religious mendicants), Fakirs, Chuttrees, Rajputs, Chamars, Hadjams, Sonars, Bomars, and the like, and as a rule, all Mussalmans.

The planter then wishes to refuse to take delivery, send them back to their countries, and prosecute the contractor for false representation: but he cannot! This form under Section 32 is thrown in his face, and the contractor says, "If I altered one word of this form I should forfeit my license (and so he would), I am not responsible for the description," which is in a way certified to be correct by the magistrate who first registered the coolie. This is the class—(which after costing the planter, say, rupees one hundred in cost of importation, from which by the way benefit has accrued to a certain extent to the coolie; since the *arkatti* has almost always paid

* Yes, but "Medicus" knows very well that thousands of imported labourers never have been, and never will be, really able-bodied, and therefore never can earn good pay.—C. D.

his debts, or given him *buksheosh*, to induce him to go to Assam, and as he has also received about ten rupees worth of clothes, pots, and pans, besides food and lodging for about one month, it cannot be said he does not get a *quid pro quo*.—this is the class, I say, which composes almost entirely the coolies, whose agreements are cancelled and are sent back to their countries—coolies, who deliberately tell you that they have never worked in their lives and don't intend to. Others there are, who are hardened criminals, the lowest of the low, who make a trade of giving contracts, and then absconding, or by malingering get their contracts cancelled. Owing to the large extent of country my practice covers, I have on several occasions come across coolies whose agreements I have caused to be cancelled, come up again under contract from Calcutta, and have had to repeat the same operation, as a coolie who will not work is as bad as one who cannot. Sometimes these coolies, who have absconded, are arrested, and brought back to the garden, suffering from acute disease contracted by exposure in the jungle.

This is what I call inherent faults of the coolie, and for which no planter or agent can be held responsible. I have often been myself to Calcutta, and elsewhere, and passed coolies from contractor's depôts. Not being able to get them away from the supervision of the contractor, I often could not discover the truth as to caste, and district of birth, and so could only go by physical appearance; but later on, when I returned to Assam, and again saw the coolies on the gardens, I found I had occasionally passed a coolie useless as a labourer, though physically perfectly fit, and have been laughed at to my face by the coolie for the deception he had practised on me, telling me exactly what he had been taught to say to me.

This clause * should rather be done away with, or the form should only state that a coolie, describing himself as such and such, is desirous of going to Assam, but the contractor should be held responsible for the correct description of the coolie he sends up, and be liable to prosecution for obtaining money under false pretences, if he fail to do so. Those acquainted with the professional contractor know he can do so with absolute certainty. I could do it myself, if I had the coolie alone for a short time.

Then as to figures representing the death-rate in Assam, I am willing to believe that your correspondent does not know how certain percentages are arrived at, and what they actually mean. A garden is put on what the planter alone knows as the black list, when the percentage over any class of coolies reaches seven per cent. Thus a garden may average three per cent. only over the total number of souls living upon it; but he may be in the black list with his Act I. labourers only; or his non-act (Act XIII) including children may be seven per cent., whilst his Act I. coolies have only three, and the total number show, say five per cent.: or lastly, the death-rate may be seven per cent. all round, which I may say is very rare, and where it exists, is due to some specific cause, which is quickly removed. †

These death-rates are really a pure matter of office work, and are not sufficiently correct or reliable to be taken as a basis upon which to calculate the death-rate over a large district. On account of two Acts being in force—Act I. of 1882, and Act XIII.—the former includes a penal clause, and allows planters to arrest a coolie without a warrant under certain conditions, which is really its only advantage. Act XIII. is less expensive in operation, and is practically only a contract Act, admitting of civil action only for default of any kind. Almost all coolies are sent up under Act I., so that they may be subjected to some discipline, until they settle down and become accustomed to the country and work; but after expiry of their contract, they are generally put under Act XIII. contracts. Thus unless a planter is very careful he would show a heavy death-rate by first putting all his *new* coolies under Act I.; debiting all the deaths, desertions, and time-expired losses; and then at the expiry of their contracts under Act I. transferring them to Act XIII. He would have to show his total death-rate over a total number of Act I. labourers reduced almost to nil; and his percentage of deaths correspondingly high. On the other hand, if he puts all his time-

* If this remedy be sufficient, "Medious" should urge it on the Tea Association, a powerful body.—C. D.

† It is not rare. Of 143 unhealthy concerns, 55 were unhealthy all round, with a population of 29,000 and a death-rate of 97.0 per mille.

expired coolies *back* under Act I., and imports a lot of new coolies on the 30th of December, he will reckon his death-rate on the mean between the total number of coolies on the first and last days of the year, and so reduce his percentage indefinitely. Still the actual number of deaths would be exactly the same in both cases.

It is quite right that the death-rate of newly imported coolies should be kept separately, as amongst all emigrants it must be high for at least the first year. These so-called black lists, therefore, are not conclusive evidence of high mortality; any more than is the advertisement in the newspaper any proof of "thinly disguised slavery"; or the words "for sale" implied, when a contractor offers, for a certain commission, to convey the necessary information to, and engage any number of coolies to labour for a given number of years for a planter. An agent does no less when he engages, and brings out and makes pay his own passage from England, any young Englishman on a five years' agreement. As to *háth-chits* your correspondent is again mistaken as to the object of this practice. It is to prevent "*fusalawing*," i.e., native or dishonest planters, of any kind endeavouring to obtain labour imported by other planters, by bribing, or the offer of higher wages. Of course every endeavour is made by fair means to persuade a coolie to re-engage; but unkindness of any kind would effectually frustrate such efforts, and a coolie, after five years' residence on a garden, knows probably as well as your correspondent, whether he can be stopped on his way with impunity or not. The object too of the Association alluded to is much the same—to prevent illegal practices of all kinds. I can only say that the abuses of the *háth-chit* to which your correspondent refers are grossly exaggerated. Time expired coolies do not leave gardens one by one, but in batches; and neither garden coolies would dare to interfere with them, nor *arkalties*, who do not exist in Assam, molest them.

If a coolie has his *háth-chit* he is free to come and go wherever he likes; and has a welcome on any estate upon which he may care to settle. The system of giving such *chits* is necessary, and they are not withheld, if the coolie is determined to leave a garden.* In conclusion, I would add that, however well treated, the coolie himself is responsible for any excessive death-rate in most instances. They will not help themselves or each other; and especially is this seen in the case of children, to which I have given particular care and attention. Take this case. A woman, probably turned out by her husband as a shrew, with two or three children, utterly neglects them, and although living in "hotel," refuses to wash or properly look after them, abusing with the vilest language anyone carrying out the doctor's orders, or attempting to compel discipline of any kind, telling you openly that "it will be very good if they die." What can you do with such as these? You cannot take the children away, and their fate is inevitable. Again, how many orphan children are reared if left to natives? Pay another woman full wages, and all expenses of the child; if an infant, or below that age at which it could do anything for the women, it will die from neglect. My experience shows that this is invariably the case.

All improvement in the management of coolies is a mere matter of development—evolution. There is no comparison between the days when I first came to Assam and now; and things will improve still more as time goes on. Due, not to Government interference, which although good and necessary in its way, only affects bad men and managers, who would of their own accord soon go to the wall; but by experience, showing what is best to be done in the interest of the coolie, which is identical with that of his employer. Strict discipline, Acts containing penal clauses and the like, have been required; but are gradually becoming altogether unnecessary or only in modified forms.† Just as the "Cat" has disappeared from the Army and Navy, and as war will very soon become obsolete in the world, though no one would like to say they were not necessary in the past, so no violent remedial measures, as are apparently advocated by your correspondent, are required. Gradual, steady progress in any direction is all that is wanted. If he wish really to advance the

* "*If determined*," but a good deal of pressure is put upon him, before the fact is accepted. On some gardens certainly this is the case.—C. D.

† I am glad to welcome *Medicus*' statement that Act I. is becoming unnecessary, though his opinion may not be widely held, say in Lakhimpur and Darrang. Sibsagar would, I think, be little affected comparatively speaking; nor Cachar nor Sylhet employing chiefly non-act labour.—C. D.

coolie, and I am sure he does, let him try to find out what little improvements can be effected, and little grievances redressed, without attacking the whole body of planters and their employment of native labour. It may be true that the management of coolies tends to brutalise. It may be that gaining an intimate knowledge of the native, his habits, and customs, such as Mr. Endle has, does this; but even then, the brutalised individual is in a better position to judge, as to what is, or is not, for the coolie's ultimate benefit, and so indirectly for his own, than a man not so accustomed, and bringing to bear on the subject only sentimental theories and the refined ideas of English society, ready to listen to grossly exaggerated or altogether unfounded grievances and hardship. I feel sure planters will agree with me in preferring the first to the second half of your correspondent's article. They will object to be "damned with faint praise," which on the face of it bears the impression, that it is only said as a sort of apology for the uncalled for and generally speaking unfounded charges he has brought against them. They have more, and more constant difficulties to contend with than your correspondent dreams of. To make use of such ignorant creatures as skilled labour requires, needs infinite patience and good temper; and the planter, reduced to "stuttering incoherence" by a simple disobedience of orders, would at the end of a month have become a drivelling idiot with what he would have had to endure. I cannot help thinking that perhaps your correspondent's host, for such he must have been, must have been making a terrible endeavour to control reflex muscular action, caused by the irritation of one of your correspondent's well-meant, but tactless, inopportune speeches, from laying violent hands on—well—not the coolie.

MEDICUS.

[We are compelled to hold over two more letters on this question.—Ed., I.C.]

The "Indian Churchman," November 4th, 1893.

DEAR SIR,

I read with much satisfaction the letter in your issue of 7th instant on this subject, signed "The Writer of the Article;" for although he does not quite say, in the reputed words of the now historical coon: "Don't fire Colonel, I'll come down," he has expressed himself in a manner which, it appears to me from my point of view, renders further correspondence on the subject almost unnecessary.

As stated in my last letter, I only entered the lists at all, at the instigation of the "dear old man, the Clergyman," who appeared to me personally to be positively distressed at the idea of what the effect might be if an article such as I replied to were left unanswered. Consequently, being a man of practical and wide experience in the matter under discussion, I took it up in order to assist my friend. He, as you know, Sir, is no mean judge of literary effort, and the interpretation put by him upon the article was such as, on my own knowledge, I unhesitatingly accepted as the correct one, namely, that it contained a general indictment against planters as a body—not that it was, as now appears, if I may say so, a citation of exceptional cases throughout. Had you, for instance, headed the article "The Exception: not the Rule," or in any way akin to that, I feel satisfied that no notice whatever would have been taken of it. And what better proof could I give you, Sir, of the accuracy of my interpretation, than the fact that you yourself described the effect of the article upon you as "depressing." Surely it would not be depressing to any man of commonsense, to hear that there are bad planters—planters of the baser sort—any more than it would be a surprise to an educated man to be reminded that—

"If all was good and fair we met
This earth had been the Paradise
It never looked to human eyes
Since our first sun arose and set."

But to appear to insinuate, even for a moment, "that nagging, carping, querulous, scolding men," and all the rest of it, are amongst planters "thick as autumnal leaves in Vallambrosa,"

must be to the mind of any man of knowledge, a mis-statement which is bound sooner or later to bring its own condemnation.

My idea—other than the one which I have specifically mentioned—in writing, was also to break a lance for the planters, who, as far as my information goes, were most unlikely to have an opportunity in this matter of speaking for themselves. I know them well—many of my best friends are amongst them—and I like to depict them, if I can, as a great Scotch critic always tried to treat his subject—“lovingly.” I feel sure I know them better than your correspondent; and when writing of them, or dealing with them, the experience of many years has confirmed in me the accuracy of the belief that, taken into account their isolation, their troubles, their trials, their temptations, and their many merits, a man of sense is right from a worldly point of view, as well as acting in a Christian spirit, when he consistently guides his actions by the thought—

“Be to their faults a little blind
To all their virtues very kind.”

And I have yet to meet the man who can entertain other ideas, and practically be an instrument of good amongst the planters.

Yours faithfully,
EX LUCE LUCELLUM.

DEAR SIR,

My attention has been called to some correspondence in the recent issues of your paper regarding Planters and coolie recruiting for the Tea Districts. After the reply of “Ex Luce Lucellum,” I might well afford to keep quiet and leave the matter in his hands. His statements about planters’ interests and recruiting carry conviction along with them, for the simple reason that they are based on the broad ground of common-sense; but though well versed in the subject he handles so skilfully, he evidently is not a planter and writes from Calcutta, and as you invite further criticism on the matter I venture to try and point out what appears to me to be the entirely mistaken starting-point of your first correspondent.

To begin with, he indicts the planters generally for certain supposed evils in coolie recruiting. Is he aware that the planters are absolutely powerless to prevent them, if indeed such evils do exist? The Government binds us down with laws, and hedges us round with regulations, which we are bound to observe to the letter. We have no ‘say’ whatever in the laws governing coolie recruiting, as represented by your correspondent. They are framed for the protection of immigrants, not for the benefit and advantage of the planters and if the efforts of the Government in this direction are mis-directed, they at least have the merit of being done for the best. The writer of the sweeping indictment himself would have more power to effect improvements than any planter in tea; and I must say I think his efforts would have been much more worthily expended in doing so, than in wrongly impeaching us publicly as he has done.

Of the planters’ system of recruiting, your correspondent appears to be quite ignorant. This system is as follows:—

During the slack season the planter sends the head of families, or *goosties* (with their women probably), who are settled and are happy and contented on the garden, back to their country (note, in passing, that these people must be happy and contented, or otherwise, being perfectly free, they would never come back) to bring up their own relations and friends. They have no connection whatever with what he calls “the vile trade of Bengal crimps,” and for the supposed evils of “unsuitable climate” “over-work,” “short pay,” “insufficient food,” and “ill-treatment,” the emigrant has what he values far more than all the Government Regulations ever printed, namely, the word of his sister, cousin, or uncle, as the case may be, that on the garden they are thriving and happy, with a good piece of land at a low rent, are comfortably housed, with grazing

* I believe the planters are powerless. But agents could do much, if it suited them to take common action: or are contractors too strong for all combined?—C. D.

for cattle for nothing and regular pay according to the amount of work done—a very different picture, Sir, I think you will allow, to that drawn by your correspondent.

With regard to what "Ex Luce Lucellum" terms the prejudiced classification of planters, those "cruel men," "those whips," "those with uncontrolled temper," those with "despotic temperament," and "stuttering incoherency," it is not for me—if indeed such specimens exist—to enter into their justification or defence. As a body I think we are prepared to leave it in the hands of our guardians and superiors, the Civil Officials of Assam, and in the hands of such straight and honorable men as "Ex Luce Lucellum," who have the courage of their opinions and are not afraid to support the side of the possibly most misrepresented and misunderstood community in all India. No doubt, as our friend remarks, there are bad planters, just as there are bad preachers, and he might have added, just as there are bad politicians and bad soldiers, or bad specimens in any other calling you like to name.

I always understood that this insatiate howl against the "brutal planters" was confined to a small section of the Native Press, but evidently there are others also seeking for a cheap notoriety. I remember once reading an article on this subject before, in which the writer said, 'Job, we are told, wished that his enemy might write a book. I have always understood this to mean that Job would have criticised the book, and have pointed out its fallacies.' In this case the planters' enemy has written a book, which contains more abuse and more fallacies than I ever saw in so short a publication. There is nothing more easy than to expose fallacies, but if left without remark they must do great harm. Job's patience became proverbial, but I think that had he been a planter it would have been sorely tried in this instance.

Apologising for the length of this letter, allow me, Dear Sir, to subscribe myself.

A CACHAR PLANTER.

The "Indian Churchman," November 10th, 1893.

SIR,

Noticing how much importance you attach to the discussion about "Garden Coolies in Assam," now appearing in your paper, and having seen Mr. Endle's and the subsequent letters, will you allow me to make the following remarks on the letters and article of September 9th and 23rd issues. Mr. Endle's article I have mislaid, but as far as my memory goes, it seemed a very fair one both to Europeans and Natives, whereas the other "Communicated" one seems to be written with a bias against Europeans, although trying to please both parties. The writer of the latter talks as if he *thought* he knew his subject, but from a practical, or planter's point of view, some of his statements are quite theoretical. It is useless to controvert his many inaccuracies, and to do so would take up too much of your paper, but the idea of coolies being over-worked, as stated, in both his letters, when the labour-force is sufficient, is ridiculous.

This over-working of coolies is a theory put forward possibly by Government officials, but well known by planters to be an illusion. The reason of its not being contradicted, probably, is that it is useless to argue with an Inspector, or one in authority, who has the power to shut up a garden if it is unhealthy (often a heavy death-rate is owing to unsuitable coolies having been sent up), and to increase the labour-force is what the proprietors and managers are most anxious to do. The difficulty in the Assam Valley is to *get* the coolies, and it looks as if agents sooner than send up no coolies at all have sometimes sent people who turn out utterly unsuited for the climate. Where the labour-force is insufficient, the garden and its proprietors suffer, not the coolie; because the yield of tea is less, consequent on want of cultivation. I have been manager of a tea estate for more than 25 years, and never have known of coolies being over-worked. Anyone who has had much experience of working coolies, knows that their principal object in life is to do as little work as possible for a maximum amount of pay.

Then, again, the writer distinctly says that low wages is the result of high tasks, consequent on a small labour-force. This is not the case, as *nirriek's* are well-known by labourers as well as by managers, and it is incorrect to say that if a manager has a small labour-force "he has to fix

high tasks : too high sometimes." Every old coolie is quite competent to look after himself, and he will not do more work than he knows is the custom, and new coolies, on first arrival, have often lower tasks than the old ones. The new ones, if a bad lot, are every manager's difficulty, and are treated with consideration, so much so that they often presume on it. Some will not work, and having been accustomed, it is said, in their own country, to beg and to do very little work, are utterly useless on a tea garden, it is a misfortune when such are imported for a garden in Assam. As long as the text holds good that "if any will not work, neither shall he eat," it is unfair for the writer of the article to imply that a coolie's wages are "docked" unjustly.

Again ; the writer says that coolies working on their leave day, or Sunday, is an "evil." From all one can hear, the work is so far voluntary, in my district, at any rate, that coolies are paid *tacca pice* as an extra inducement to pluck leaf, which proves that there is no compulsion, as implied. A coolie in reality has plenty of rest, his one idea being to go to bazaar twice a week, if possible, and the only person who gets little or no holiday during a rush of leaf is the European Manager.

At times the coolie may pluck on Sunday (generally for only half the day), but whenever work is slack he gets plenty of leave. It may of course be a question, from a religious point of view, how far Native Christians should be worked on Sundays, and Missionaries, or those interested in their welfare, might legitimately take up that ; but it is all nonsense to imply that coolies are over-worked if by any chance they pluck on Sunday.

Would it not be much fairer to contrast a coolie's position in the tea districts with that of an agricultural labourer in England, or with what it was in his own country, than to write as has been done in the article under comment ?

Unless it can be shewn that the coolie is no better off, labouring on a tea estate, with house, food, and medicines, as well as medical attendance supplied at his employer's expense, than he was before leaving his home, it is unjust to write as if many of the former are tyrants. *

A GARDEN MANAGER.

SIR,

It is one of the obvious drawbacks of a newspaper correspondence, that it is apt to degenerate into a mere logomachy, the original subject-matter falling into the background, whilst the combatants go through the regulation—"One ! Two ! Three !"

I will do my best to avoid this danger in my rejoinder to "Medicus." Still, if one's right to speak is impugned without justification, answer plainly one must. My residence in Assam is not so very short, but dates from January, 1888. Up to last Christmas I was in sole charge of the Christian coolies in Lakhimpur district, and they number a great many hundreds. Compared with the huge mass of labour, they are a small community, but the cases of hardship which crop up amongst them are not different from those the mass are subject to. I have also been about amongst their employers a great deal, in this district and Sibságar, have heard and seen much. I have always received kind treatment at their hands ; but they can bear witness that I have never hesitated to speak against such things, connected with coolies, as I have thought wrong. I do not, however, consider it is any disadvantage to a man not to have been long in Assam ; his powers of mental and moral perception are less likely to be blunted, than those of one who has, so to say, grown up in the midst of a prevailing system, a "peculiar institution," to whom it has become second nature to breathe its atmosphere, and to whom nothing that he sees occurring round him is any longer worthy of special remark, or deserving of reprobation.

In using the term "natural flow of emigration," I spoke somewhat loosely I admit. I did mean the emigration brought about by a fair statement, to ryots down country, of such advantages, as may be to be obtained by coming to Assam. Those who emigrate from England to the Colonies

* This argument is often heard, but there is a flaw in it. The only presentable excuse for, or set-off to, a Penal Labour Act, would be that the labourer was, during the time of his contract, very much better off than at home. The proof of this is lacking, as regards very many thousands in Assam. C. D.

or elsewhere do not go abroad without any information at all as to where they are going, or in ignorance that they may have hardships to contend with; but their case is quite different from that of those of whom the papers were telling, not long since, who were induced by all sorts of fraudulent representations to go to some of the South American States. These poor English people were "recruited" like coolies, because these States wanted more labour, and did not care at all whether ten per cent. of the immigrants died, or not. The English Government issued a warning to people against trusting these foreign recruiters. What warning is vouchsafed to those liable to be enticed to Assam with the idea they will better their condition, that this province is not the garden of the Lord? If the supply be "more than equal to the demand," how is it that in spite of sirdars, at this season, going down by thousands to try and bring up people from their own neighbourhoods, and in spite of contractors and their *arkattis*, gathering dumb herds where they may, gardens in Assam are still so short of the labour they clamour for! Are the masses at last learning that the information they get, is not information upon which they can rely?

And here, I ask your attention, whilst I set forth, at length my chief count against the system, which places in the hands of individuals, or individual concerns, such a potentiality of evil.

Sovereign States alone have the right of making war. To them alone it pertains to send forth thousands to meet the risk of death or mutilation for the benefit of those who stay at home at ease. War having begun, that commander, as Kinglake points out, is unfit for his post, who has it not in him, without truth, to sacrifice his men like flies, in order to carry out a necessary movement or to capture a certain position.

It may similarly be argued, I am not prepared to deny it, that a State may exercise the same rights in a war against Nature, in opening out and developing a new province. I do deny, however, most emphatically, the right of a State to hand over, *in thikadari*, (to lease) to a company, these powers of life and death. I state a principle which was affirmed when the Sovereign took over India from "John Company:" a principle to some extent lost sight of in the granting of Charters to African Companies of late years, but now, at this very time, in process of being re-asserted, by the extension of Imperial control in those distant regions. Has any Government the right to speak, as follows, to a Company?—"You have capital to lay out. Go to, now, we will give you, at a nominal rent, so many acres of forest to clear and plant tea on. We give you the right to recruit our subjects where you can, and for four years they shall be your serfs, bound to the soil, however deadly the climate."

To pass from generals to particulars. There are large gardens in Sylhet: magnificent gardens! But it is a matter of notoriety that the loss of human lives in laying out these gardens was tremendous. Did they know what they were coming to? Sufficient information must have been given them to bring them up: but it is open to surmise that had they had full information, they would have decided it was better to live on, as they might, in their own countries.

Again; it is reported and currently believed, that a large company in Calcutta is taking up a large tract of jungle (some eighteen thousand acres)* above Makum Junction. However rich the company, this will be a new garden, and therefore, as "Medicus" says, "cannot possibly carry out its recruiting without the aid of the contractor and his *arkattis*." Is it to be supposed that these will go to the recruiting districts and frankly tell the men they want to induce to emigrate the real conditions of their service or of the climate and surroundings it is to be performed in? Will they let them know, that of every hundred coolies who go to this new garden, it is almost certain that at least forty will be dead or invalided for life at the end of the four years' agreement.

* The amount was greatly exaggerated. C. D.

Once more, as regards this particular tract, has Government made enquiry whether it can produce the first necessary of human life, namely, good drinking water? From what I have learned ("by hearsay," as "Medicus" would put it) it is extremely doubtful if there be water suitable. I can hear of no big streams running through it, though these are a bad resource at best, nor is there any word of experimental wells being sunk.* Is Government inviting a repetition of the disasters of another large new garden higher up? Here, after the ground had been cleared by Nagas and elephants, and coolies had been brought up, on sinking wells, however deep, drinkable water was unobtainable for them. The death-rate became terribly high. Then Government began to enquire, and are still enquiring, and condemning, I believe, every sample of water that is sent them. Meanwhile, what of the coolies? They are under Act I., they must stay out their four years' term (unless invalidated to their country) though many will never *live it out*.

Was Act I. ever intended to tie men down to such conditions of life or death? It may be that Government does not intend it should do so any longer: and that here is the explanation of a passage in Act I., as amended this year, which so exercised the mind of the writer of an able article in the *Indian Planters' Gazette* of October 21st. He says: "By Section 132, the conditions under which the Local Government may declare an estate unfit for residence and close it, are extended to causes other than those arising from want of care, or neglect on the part of the employer in charge. The Commission which sat in 1880-1881 had this question before them, and they decided that the Local Government should be empowered to close a garden only, if 'the mortality be shewn to arise from want of due care and precaution, or neglect of proper and available sanitary measures, on the part of employer.' The alteration now made is significant, and it would be interesting to hear, on what evidence, and to meet what causes of excessive mortality other than carelessness or neglect, it was introduced into the law. The amendment is important only for those reasons, and because the enforcement might re-act to their detriment on the suppliers of labour." I would venture to differ from the writer as to the latter part of this sentence. Doubtless the closing of gardens *will* re-act on contractors, who will lose a portion of their market, but the actual purpose of the amendment would seem to be the closing of a class of gardens, which heretofore the Local Government had no power to close. In other parts of India, gardens have been and are being closed voluntarily, largely because of their not paying. This amendment would appear to enable the Government to close gardens on different grounds, to speak, in fact, thus to a company:—"Your garden is hopelessly unhealthy; you have done all you could, you say, and there has been little improvement. You have gone on pouring coolies into the garden, and they have gone on dying. We have waited long enough. It is possible, that if we gave you another ten years, the garden might be made healthy; but the result is too uncertain the experiment too costly in human life, for us to sanction. Close you must!" If this be the intention of the amendment, I am fain to confess my satisfaction, at the risk of being dubbed a sentimentalist, or even suspected of being a Non-conformist in disguise. †

That such companies should approve of action of the kind, it is contrary to human nature to suppose. Thus, the whole of the article alluded to is a forcible protest against the alterations in the Act I., and a summons to a threatened interest to gird itself for the battle.

In the previous week's issue of the same paper was a short paragraph conveying, in cruder language, the same idea. "Assam planters are bitterly complaining of the new Labour-Act, which will cause them great inconvenience and loss, more especially as it opens out such a large field for nasty official interference. 'It is,' writes one planter, 'but the thin edge of that accursed sentimentalism which is ruining Europe, and has 'done' for many of our West Indian plantations, and unless Government are taught to see the folly of the measure, bad days are in store for Assam.'" Sir A. P. Macdonnell, in his Minute on the Behar Survey, remarks that, from the address of the Planters' Association, it might be inferred that they wished the last potentiality of Government control...wiped out. Were this paragraph to be regarded as any way an

* Fortunately, good water has been found; the wells passing through sand. C. D.

† At the time this was written, I had not seen the Immigration Report of 1893. From this it is evident, my interpretation was correct. C. D.

authoritative utterance, the same *mutatis mutandis* might be inferred here. But we may echo the words with which he proceeds: "I prefer to think that they wish, as earnestly as I do, that there should be impartiality and fair dealing throughout this business."

To return to the letter of "Medicus." He asserts that the coolie death-rate is not enhanced by over-work: and that a new coolie invariably gets full pay, for four to six months after his arrival, whether he works or not. "Invariably?" *C'est un gros mot!* Shall we say 'often?' and that only on gardens with a good labour-force. How about new gardens, or the numerous others which are under-laboured, where the arrival of the new coolies is anxiously awaited? As much is done, no doubt, as can be, consistently with the carrying on of the work. But what is a man to do, short of labour, work accordingly in arrears, and with orders perhaps to boot, to put out so many acres of extension? He cannot afford new coolies much time for easy acclimatization, any more than he can allow much time for convalescence to coolies who have been sick.

As regards coolies dying "only at a fair yearly percentage," I would ask what is meant by this? I am told that a well-known planter had a letter in your last issue, which tries to shew that the death-rate in Assam is something over 3 per cent. If returns give it anything like as low as this, and even if these returns are official, I should desire to know what Government think of their own compilation. Is it based on garden returns which "Medicus" declares "are not sufficiently correct or reliable to be taken as a basis upon which to calculate the death-rate over a large district?" And if so, must not Government have suspected that there is a large margin of error, due to imperfect registration, and in putting forth the compilation as official, claim to assert no more than this:—"This is all the result we have been able to arrive at, from such information as it has been in our power to obtain."*

As to the terms "buying and selling," argument will bring us to no agreement. They are commonly used, and I maintain with a very close approximation to exactness. Shortly after I came out, I heard one planter say to another: "Do you want to buy any coolies? I have fifty more than I need." He turned to me, and said: "It sounds rather horrid to talk like that, doesn't it? It merely means, of course, that they would go from my garden to his, and he would pay me what it has cost me to get them up." *Arkallis* pick up coolies wherever they can; sometimes, for value received, sirdars part with those they have recruited for their masters' gardens. Money passes at every change of guardian, and may have passed several times ere the coolie comes into the hands of the contractor who has undertaken, "for a certain commission to convey to him the necessary information, and to engage him to labour for a given number of years for a planter." It is curious how much depends on the way you put a thing.

As regard *hâth-chits*; I am under no misapprehension as to their purpose. They do not however "prevent native or dishonest planters of any kind endeavouring to obtain labour imported by others," for the dishonest planter will take a man without a *hâth-chit*, as soon as with one. What is to hinder him? As far as I know there is no punishment for so doing. How could there be? The man might have had a *chit* and lost it. The *hâth-chit*, I still maintain, is a protection to the coolie, not a device for safeguarding the planter. I did not state *hâth-chits* were commonly withheld, but that they *are* withheld, at times, by some. Let "Medicus" tax his memory, and he will remember that coolies on some gardens *are* delayed on various pretexts, when their time is up, in the hopes that they may be induced to re-engage: he must remember cases where coolies have not only left their *hâth-chits*, but wages due them behind to escape the ceaseless pestering they have been subject to. I call this "pressure," not "fair means of persuasion." And that the coolie needed increased protection, is shewn by the increased stringency of the new law on the subject. To quote the article abovementioned: under the former Act, local contracts for any term under five years could be executed on the estate, in the presence of the Inspecting officer. Under the law as amended, contracts of one year only, can be so executed; other contracts of over one year up to four, can be executed, only if the employer, either in person

* This planter was Mr. Buckingham. I claim to have shewn that he had entirely mis-read the official statements on death-rate, and some other points. C. D.

or by agent, appears with the labourer before the local Inspector or Magistrate—that is to say, at the District head-quarters.

As regards the Association of gardens mutually agreeing not to take on one another's coolies, I have been assured that this rule is only applied to immediately contiguous gardens. Various things which have come to my own notice led me to believe that the rule was of very much wider application. I am not yet absolutely convinced of the contrary.*

As touching cancelling of agreements, I withdraw nothing; my statement was practically correct. An alteration there has been in the law, and it was not made for nothing, but in order to effect an alteration in practice. It is doubtless true that going to his country is often a man's last chance of life, and the river trip may do much for him; but it is obvious that terrible suffering may still occur in many cases. I saw a Court Babu recently trying to find out by question from some score or more of people, where their homes were, that he might know where they were to be sent. Some could scarce speak from weakness. They were asked what was the name of the Railway Station nearest their home. "Who knows!" some replied. "How far is it from the Railway Station to your home?" "Who knows,—ten kos." "How many days to do that journey?—eight days or six days," and so it went on. The Babu was most patient, and did his best, but put down some Railway Stations at a shot, I am sure. Concerns should be bound to keep a register of where their coolies come from, and send reliable information with the coolies whose agreements they want to cancel. South Sea Islanders, returning from a term of labour in Australia, were not unfrequently set down on an island hundreds of miles from their homes. The same thing must often occur with these unfortunate beings. These and other abuses led to the occasional killing and eating of "Blackbirders" in Melanesia. The Bengal Blackbirders is safe within his skin, as "Medicus" points out.

One statement of "Medicus" is noteworthy: "However well treated, the coolie himself is responsible for any excessive death-rate in most instances!" I will not comment on this. I merely draw attention to it. There are many doctors in Assam. I would ask their opinion of it. I wonder how far this statement tallies with official information!

The grievances I have spoken of I do not regard as "little grievances:" and speaking of them, I am not "bringing to bear on them only sentimental theories." "Sentimentalism" is derided by the writer of the paragraphs quoted above, who clearly looks back longingly to the times when slaves in the West Indies grow sugar under the lash!

As to wages, I repeat they are very low on some gardens. I saw the monthly returns recently of a garden of one thousand souls. The wages of the men were some Rs. 4-2, and of the women Rs. 3-6. Of course the average is lowered by the sick; but so it is on every garden, so that reply is absolutely valueless. "Medicus" challenges me to find out "what little improvements can be effected." I think *great* improvements are wanted in many points. I should like to see a "Protector of Immigrants," a special officer, with the powers of a Magistrate, in every district: a man, if possible, acquainted with the coolies in their own country, and with a thorough knowledge of their language, or languages. On him might be incumbent the systematic inspection of gardens, instead of its being left to the time the present officials can spare from their court or station duties. Such an officer would not have to *make work* for himself.

In conclusion, allow me space for a "personal explanation," as it is called in the House of Commons.

* *Vide* Bonus Rules, p. 70 of this Appendix.—When coolies leave a garden, they often formally plead that they are going to their country. This is to avoid being badgered to re-engage. Some planters profess to be greatly scandalised at this verbal fiction. I heard one at Dibrugarh announce that he should in futuro send the *hath-chits*, or certificates of expiry of contract, to the Steamer Agent, to be handed to coolies if they booked for the whole journey down the river; but not if they booked for some station in Sibságar District. This statement of intention evoked no protest from anyone but myself, though three or four somewhat leading planters were present. It is significant that in 1892, in the Lakhimpur District, only 866 people are recorded as "Received from other gardens," and only 321 in Darrang, as against, 1882 so received in the Sibságar District. C. D.

I regret extremely that my first communication should have been open to the charge of being an attack on planters in general, or, as "Medicus" puts it, "against an employment and calling most excellent in itself, instead of against the weak points in the system and method of conducting such employment." I am very sorry to have given pain to many who have been kind friends to myself, and whom I believe to be good friends, in the majority of cases, to the labour under their charge. I trust that this letter may show that my quarrel is with the weak points of the system, and not with the men who have to employ it. C. D.

The "Indian Churchman," December 2nd, 1893.

It is time that we should attempt to sum up the results of the controversy on Garden Coolies in Assam which has now run to an immense length in our columns, and at which we have been looking on as warmly interested spectators rather than as the partisans of either side. It will be remembered that it began as far back as July last by our calling attention to a statement, which has since been repeated, in *India* (a monthly periodical published in England, and representing the National Congress party), to the effect that coolie-labour in Assam was nothing better than a thinly-disguised slavery. That statement we desired to test, and consequently wrote to Mr. Endle, a missionary of more than thirty years' standing in Assam, to ask for his opinion on the subject. The opinion, as given in our columns, was on the whole favourable to the existing system, and we thought the matter, as far as we were concerned, was set at rest. A few weeks afterwards we were startled to receive a letter from another correspondent, who is well understood to have been Mr. Dowding, Chaplain of Dibrughur—he had no desire to withhold his name, but it is not the custom of this paper to publish signed articles—traversing the whole of Mr. Endle's statements. It seemed to us so shocking that such things as he spoke of could go on, that we willingly accorded Mr. Dowding space for a full exposition of his views, without, however, committing ourselves to them, but rather with a view of eliciting discussion; for we felt that whether he were right, or whether he only thought himself right, no Christian priest could be exceeding his duty in calling attention, with some emphasis, to a state of things so nearly resembling that which provoked the indignation of the prophets of old: "He looked for judgment, but beheld oppression; for righteousness, but beheld a cry."

On Mr. Dowding's article we should like to make one or two remarks. He justly says that in order to view Indian questions fairly it is an advantage not to have been too many years in India. India has a spell which she casts even over her adopted children, which in the end is apt to lead them to look at what they would once have thought abuses with sleepy eyes. But there is a counteracting disadvantage which we think Mr. Dowding has not fully weighed. We say nothing about the difficulty of an European getting thoroughly to know the natives, for on that point both the parties to the present discussion are on the same footing. But, before attempting to estimate the grievances of any one class of the population, there must be a general acquaintance with the conditions of life of the same class elsewhere. Mr. Dowding is shocked, as any Englishmen would be shocked at the general helplessness, the passive submission to unrealised ills of the people whom he has seen; he perhaps does not know enough of native life in country districts to understand that in their own homes these evils are far worse. It is quite possible that the conditions of coolie-labour may seem very bad to him, and yet they may be paradisaical compared with the conditions of the villages which those coolies have left. We have, for instance, known a snake creep into a hut and kill two persons in the same night; but, like Cardinal Beaufort, they 'died and made no sign,' and the people sleeping in the same hut hardly had their rest disturbed. For this reason we are disposed to think that he has made a great deal more of occasional instances of hardship than the due proportion of truth really warrants. His compassionate heart has, as was natural, led him to compare the coolie's case with that of an English day-labourer, whereas the comforts to which he has been accustomed at home are considerably less than would be expected by a self-respecting English pig. A strong point was made on behalf of the planters, when it was shown that it is to their interest to keep up the health and physique of their labour.

We believe that in most cases natural kindness and generous feeling would alone be sufficient to make managers look after the comfort and health of their employes, and indeed Mr. Dowding gladly allows this; but when behind kindly feeling lies self-interest, and when again behind self-interest lies Government inspection, the cases must be few in which real hardship occurs. We have indeed evidence to show both that they do occur, and that they are few. We have before us the Report on Labour Immigration into Assam for 1892, published this year by order of the Chief Commissioner of Assam, from which it appears that in one case, and in one case only, due hospital accommodation had not been provided. This Report says:—

“As regards Act I. of 1882, the results do not call for detailed remarks either in regard to the number of offences, the punishments inflicted, or the nature of the offences committed, except that in one case in the Sibságar District it was found necessary to fine an employer for neglect to provide hospital accommodation. The Deputy Commissioner gives the following particulars of this case:—One manager, Mr. C——, of Dhuli Tea Estate, in the Jorhat subdivision, was fined Rs. 300 under section 168 of Act I. of 1882, for neglecting to provide hospital accommodation and to employ a qualified medical man on a small garden, named Nagajanka, belonging to the same concern, at which 60 Act-coolies were employed. Finding at inspection that there was no medical officer engaged for the garden and that no hospital and no medical stores were kept on the estate, Lieutenant Gurdon, Inspector of Labourers, wrote to Mr. C—— that unless he complied with the law, he would be prosecuted. After two months Lieutenant Gurdon again inspected the garden, but found that his orders had not been carried out. It was found that by way of a hospital a *kacha* building had been raised, the floor of which was damp, consisting of mud recently thrown up to a height of from 6 inches to 9 inches. The building was neither well raised, ventilated, nor lighted, and in no way fulfilled the requirements of rule 125. No qualified medical officer had been engaged for the garden, and medicines and instruments had not been supplied as prescribed by the schedule. Mr. C—— was then prosecuted, and fined by me as above.”

Now, we have ourselves some acquaintance with the conditions of village life in Bongal, and we say without hesitation that if in any village even a *kacha* building, with a damp floor, “neither well raised, ventilated, nor lighted,” were provided for general use as a hospital, the inhabitants would be both surprised and delighted.

The Report from which we have just quoted is a careful document drawn up by Government officials, who are not, we should suppose, likely to overlook the shortcomings of planters. The perusal of a large portion of it has left on our minds the following impressions: (1) That instances of oppression or ill-treatment of coolies by the planters do occur; (2) that they are not common; (3) that instances are at least equally common in which the coolies have combined to bully the planter or his agents. In illustration of each of these conclusions we shall quote a single passage:—

(1.) “One Bondu, a non-agreement coolie of the Dhuli garden, wanted to leave the garden and to go to his country. Hearing this, Mr. C——, the manager, called him, and told him to give an agreement. He also asked the coolie to give to him the money he had, which he (Mr. C——) promised to take care of. On Bondu refusing, Mr. C—— gave him twenty-five stripes over his buttocks. The coolie was then sent to Nagajanka, $8\frac{1}{2}$ or 9 miles distant from Dhuli, and a choukidar was ordered to sleep with him for fear of his escaping. He was subsequently taken back to Dhuli, where he was kept at night in a house in charge of Mahes choukidar, being taken out to work in the day-time. After he had been kept in this way for a week, on the 13th September, he managed to come to Jorhat, and complained to the Assistant Commissioner. Mr. C—— was prosecuted, and fined by the Assistant Commissioner Rs. 100 under section 323, and Rs. 300 under sections 342 and 109 of the Indian Penal Code. Mahes choukidar was also prosecuted, and fined Rs. 50 under section 342, Indian Penal Code.”

(2.) “With the one exception of Mr. C——’s case the year has been happily free from the cases of serious oppression by planters, for which the district had become somewhat conspicuous. This is due to the principal offenders having left the district, and Mr. C—— has also now left. On the other hand, there have been a good many instances during the year of false and frivolous

complaints instituted by coolies against their employers. Mr. Horrocks' case was a very gross one, in which that gentleman narrowly escaped being prosecuted on a false charge of culpable homicide. I think the institution of these cases may reasonably be attributed to the convictions had against certain planters in the district during recent years. In this way the misconduct of a few individuals causes serious injury to the whole planting community."

(3.) "The manager of the Tiphuk Tea Estate complained that a gang of about thirty Ganjamese of his garden struck work, and left the garden. A choukidar was sent after them to persuade them to return to the garden. He was beaten by the coolies. After beating the choukidar and going armed in a riotous manner down to Panitola, these coolies attempted to attack their manager. Five of the ringleaders were prosecuted and punished under sections 143 and 323 with rigorous imprisonment for two months each. Three of the same accused were sentenced to three months' rigorous imprisonment each, under section 323, Indian Penal Code, for assaulting the choukidar above alluded to."

While, however, we are unable to go all the way with Mr. Dowding, nor to believe that the instances of hardship he quotes are anything more than unavoidable exceptions to the efficiency of a well-intentioned system, there are two points on which we are inclined to agree with him. He has spoken of the sufferings of those coolies who from sickness or any other cause have to be sent back to their houses, and has drawn a vivid picture of a perspiring Babu helplessly trying to discover the names of the stations to which they are to be sent. No doubt, when it is once determined that they cannot be of use, their manager is apt to lose interest in them, and will not put himself to any excessive trouble to see that they reach their destination in health, safety and comfort. We are not sufficiently acquainted with the details of the question to be able to say whether the law is at fault or its working, but certainly here is just a point where the most stringent regulation is required, because it is the point where self-interest fails and natural kindness can only operate at considerable expense to itself. Secondly, there is probably a real grievance in the case of new gardens, for in these, as a correspondent has pointed out, "there is more sickness and mortality than in old ones, due in a large measure to the turning-up of virgin soil and the rotting of newly-cut vegetation, but to some extent also to the fact that the proportion of new emigrants is very much larger than on old-established gardens," amongst whom the percentage of mortality is naturally greater. We think it probable that if the nature of their work were clearly explained to the new coolies before they came away few of them would come. It looks as though a law were wanted to the effect that the opening-up of new gardens should only be entrusted to coolies who have been long enough in the country to be acclimatised, who know to what they are going, and who should only serve in temporary batches, with special pay for the specially dangerous service. Whether such regulations are workable or not we cannot say. In the early days of tea-planting they were of course impossible, and as the same correspondent goes on: "If tea-planters were all of the same view as your correspondent (Mr. Dowding), Assam and Cachar would still be a howling jungle and the employment and contentment of many thousands of our fellow creatures would not be an accomplished fact, while the congested districts of Bengal would be still further oppressed by excessive population."

On the whole we are struck by the fairness and moderation of the reply to Mr. Dowding. The planters and their friends who have written to this paper do not write like men who are conscious of wrong-doing: if they were they would probably be more violent. And we are struck also by this fact—that amongst all the people to whom we have spoken and written on this subject, and they have mostly been people who view it not only in the light of true humanity but also of Christian principle, not one has come forward to support Mr. Dowding's contention. There must be a considerable number of people, Government Officials and other unconnected with tea-planting, who yet know enough of the circumstances to be able to endorse his conclusions had they been correct. Not one has done so. We cannot, therefore, help thinking that with the best intentions in the world, he has generalized from an insufficient observation of facts.

SIR,

Of writing many letters as of books there is no end. With something like dismay, I saw in your last issue five columns of print all traversing my views as to coolies in Assam.

Complaint is made that I exaggerate the evils of the prevailing system. Were it so, I would still ask my critics, not wholly in jest: by what title do you claim a monopoly of exaggeration? Who, reading your letters, and accepting them as a fair presentment of facts, but has longed for walnut juice, and burnt cork, that he might, dressing or undressing for the character, pass himself off as a coolie of a good *jât*, and, getting his debts paid by the complaisant *arkâtty*, be shipped free of cost with "ten rupees worth of clothes, pots and pans" to Assam to spend four happy years in "lucrative and easy employment," with entire liberty to re-engage for a further period afterwards?

"Ex Luce Lucellum" is to the fore again with a letter in which he says, I have climbed down.

Being given to understand by some whose opinion I value, that my paper, through faults of arrangement, or infelicities of expression, was liable to be interpreted as an attack upon the planting community as a whole, I readily strove to prune my periods, in order to make it plainer that I intended really an exposure of certain evils of the present system: including undoubtedly the fact that the contractor's coolie has no more power of choosing his master than a horse has that changes hands. It is a matter of chance whether he finds himself under a conscientious master who does all he can for him, or one who actuated by prudential motives does all he thinks necessary for him, or another who from sheer ignorance may overwork him as a lady may overdrive her horse, or still another sort whom he would never elect willingly to serve under and whom he would not stop a week with if he were free. But he is not free. This, I take it, is the point of distinction betwixt servitude and service.

"Ex Luce" quotes an editorial comment of yours, to the effect that my letter was "depressing."

To those who like myself have seen the querulous unwashed crowd on some garden where hard conditions prevailed, who have heard shopkeepers declare that they had not a pie to spend except on absolute necessaries, the view has much in it that is "depressing."

When you hear of emaciated coolies, brought down by rail to have their agreements cancelled, lying about at the railway station, till carts come to carry those unable to walk to the court-house, whilst the rest totter after, like the dead on their way to bury their dead; when you find them seated in front of the cutcherry, listless, forlorn, scarcely to be stirred up to give an intelligible answer to the Babu who is trying his best to discover where on earth are the homes to which these unfortunates are to be sent; "depressed" by the sight, you must feel.

When you have seen, as I have seen, such a batch of "*miserables*" helped on board a steamer by a policeman and khalassies, have noticed that haggard semblances of women among them had not a rag beyond what the most elementary ideas of decency require, and those rags soaked through with rain, have found by careful enquiry among the party, that they had not a shred of dry clothing to replace these wet rags, nor indeed an atom of property of any sort, nor ought to sleep on and cover them at night, "depressing" is the only word for it. I have wished I could get a photograph taken of such a group, and contrast it with the photograph a contractor will send up in advance of a batch he is forwarding to a garden, all nicely decked, and dressed, and oiled, and fed up, as described by "*Medicus*." Much less than a twelve-month might have sufficed to effect the change which the comparison of this picture with that would make so plain.

When you hear the very ticket Babu accustomed to such sights, say: "Sir, some one ought to go with these people, I do not think that they will all reach their homes; what will happen if they fall ill on the long railway journey with many changes, and their two rupees of messing allowance is spent?"—depressed, you agree with him.

Most "depressing" of all, to pick up, as I have done, an all but speechless coolie at the Ghât, to which he had dragged himself in the last hope of getting to his country, send him on a gharri

to the hospital, only to learn he was dead in two days, and to hear from the steamer agent, as I have heard, how such poor creatures press on board besieging and beseeching him to give them a passage, and as they have no money he is obliged to refuse and drive them off again.

"Fie! Fie!" say the objectors, "it is iniquitous to speak of such things, we never heard of them!" Possibly, yet, I with mine eyes have seen them.

Since writing these lines, I have interviewed a batch of four-and-twenty *nam-kát* coolies, in the bazaar, on their way to the Ghât, in charge of a policeman. Though the condition of the men was very deplorable, as the result of from a year to a year and a half's residence in Assam, yet the women (the sexes were about equally divided) were mostly in better case than one might have expected. Speaking generally, death had not so clearly marked this party as his own as others I have seen. As they came from the same place as those I saw before the Cutchuri, there is room for hope that an improvement is in progress, and that the cancelling of agreements will no longer be deferred till it is absolutely certain that a coolie has no chance of recovery and being of use, and therefore it is the best policy to get rid of him, and so save further expense. Taking all the circumstances, lamentable any way, into consideration, the cancelling of agreements, *under any strict supervision*, is not necessarily otherwise than humane, provided always the coolie's advantage is the prime consideration, the garden's interest in getting rid of an unprofitable burden, an entirely subsidiary one. The river air, and the knowledge that they are on their way towards home may do something for these poor creatures, and consequently some of them, at least, on their arrival five days later at Jatrapur, where their railway journey begins, may not be the absolutely decrepit beings they are when they leave here.

It must, however, be distinctly understood that this cancelling of agreements fundamentally affects and materially discounts the value of any figures to death-rate which may be brought forward, in an attempt to prove the healthiness of a particular place, or of Assam generally. If these people were not sent away, they would almost certainly die, perhaps within a few months, and so raise the death-percentage of a concern. In estimating the losses of a battle or a campaign, the wounded as well as the killed are counted in. Similarly in reckoning up the losses of a garden, or other concern, you must include the sick *nam-káts*, as well as the actual deaths.*

In the letter of a "Cachar Planter" two points only need notice. I may say, by the way, that of the planters' system of recruiting by sirdars (male and female) I am not ignorant. He describes for your information the sending of these people to their villages to bring up their own relations; but he adds, parenthetically "note in passing that these people must be happy and contented, or otherwise being perfectly free, they would never come back." I know not the *dastur* of Cachar, but, in Assam they are not perfectly free, and if they fail to return, can be, and are brought back by warrant. A further precaution was taken, to my knowledge, in the case of a Christian couple going down to recruit. Their daughter who had just grown to womanhood had to take an agreement, and remain behind. She was thus left by them as a hostage for their return.

Secondly, he speaks of a coolie "having a good piece of land at a low rent." This may be so in Cachar, and indeed elsewhere, but it is not the rule in this district. Primarily because by no means all gardens have paddy-land at their disposal, and again because it is not universally agreed that it is advisable to allow coolies to take up cultivation of their own. Some gardens, having some land do seek to get time-expired coolies to rent it, with a view to obtaining their services as free labourers; but others will on no account suffer such to settle near if they can help it, apparently from the idea that the sight of their easier circumstances might induce coolies whose time is up, to go away and become cultivators, instead of re-engaging. In Sibsaúgar District, the custom is, I believe, more prevalent. I was recently on a garden which, intersected by winding strips of paddy-land, does let this out on easy terms to its own people, thus making things much pleasanter all round.

* A "*nam-kát*" is a man whose "name is out," that is, whose contract is cancelled.

The third letter, in your last issue, over a well-known signature, requires longer and more detailed consideration. Some of the points have already been raised by previous writers, and dealt with in my replies. I will try to repeat myself as little as possible. As regards the "natural flow of immigration into the Assam Valley," I have already explained myself in my reply of the 18th November to "Medicus." I may mention one instance of natural flow. At Dibrugarh Steamer Ghât, there is a body of some 200 or 300 particularly sturdy North-westerners in the employ of the Railway, who coal steamers and handle heavy goods. These, when more men are required, write to their friends, and more come up. The pay and conditions of labour are such as to approve themselves to them. Again I may refer to the Cacharis, although their's is a migration from one part of the valley to another rather than an immigration. These come to Upper Assam in large gangs, and are gladly welcomed by most gardens, working, however, only for certain number of months. Here again, the pay and conditions of labour approve themselves to them, and they come willingly.

C. D.

[The rest of the letter, of which we have printed about a third, was illegible.—Ed.]

I told my good friend, the Editor, (now gone home after many years work in India), that I considered he had treated me and my case very scurvily in suppressing two-thirds, of my letter and summing up against me as he did. It is, to me, still quite incomprehensible how he could take such a roseate view of things with the Immigration Report actually in his hands. I can only suppose that, to him, as to many, statistics have no meaning; or that he looked only for information in it, bearing on the personal relations between employers and employed, which my letter evidently had dealt with disproportionately to the general subject. However, he sent me my letter back, and I began it again. Not till February did I myself obtain the Immigration Report, which aided me much in clearing myself, as I claim to have done, from the charges of "gross misrepresentation,"—of being an "agitator lost to all sense of honour and truth"—"of fabrication,"—let alone general ignorance of the subject,—brought against me by Mr. Buckingham, and, with less acerbity, by "Medicus," and others. C. D.

The "Indian Churchman," December 16th, 1893.

SIR,

Without waiting to see what letters your last issue may contain, I write this—may it be my final letter—on the subject of coolies in Assam.

I have arrived at the conviction that nothing is to be gained by continuing to notice the endless objections raised to whatever I write. Particular inaccuracies of detail may be the nominal cause of attack: but the real offence is, that I should have written at all. The feeling prevails that living as Chaplain in a Tea District, a sort of loyalty towards employers of labour, should have kept my mouth shut. I do not think so.

The following statements of mine remain untraversed by the comments of my critics.

1. That the tea industry demands yearly more coolies than are obtainable, of the sort whom Assam will suit.
2. That this leads to the Contractor's sending up all sorts of useless labour, including many to whom the climate of Assam is certain death.
3. That this leads to "coolies dying by thousands," i.e., in an excessive ratio. I do not say, the death-rate is excessive all over Assam: but it is so on many gardens. Over-work enhances the death rate. Among children also, it is often heavy. Mothers who are agreement coolies cannot give sufficient attention to their children. Attempts have been made to establish *crèches* or day nurseries, but they are not much used. Mothers fear what "Medicus" declares, that a hired nurse may be a Mrs. Gamp.
4. That Contractor's coolies are bought and sold: often shamefully deceived, and enticed to Assam. As "Medicus," however, says, some of them may deliberately enter into the Contractor's practical joke, and take service with malice prepense to swindle the garden they are sent to. In speaking of coolies' grievances, I never meant to assert that they are not well treated on the large majority of "well-laboured" gardens, i.e., where the labour-force is ample. But their grievances are enormous when they are delivered at a spot in a deadly jungle, which they are to turn into a

garden: and where for months, or perhaps years the labour-force, in spite of Contractors and Act I, will be insufficient. I hold Government to blame for allowing new gardens to be opened without previously making searching investigation as to the provision to be made for minimising the risks to health. It is said that Assam would never have been opened out, at all, if Government had been so particular in the past. Few but will acknowledge that ten years ago, if not much more recently, coolies had a very rough time, but it is argued they were sacrificed for the good of the many: and therefore the same process may be continued. This view I do not at all share.

That the cancelling of coolies' agreements will always need the most careful watching: and their re-patriation requires now more care on the part of those responsible for it. I consider sickly coolies put on board the steamer should be supplied with a blanket each, if not other articles of clothing, either at the expense of the garden, or the Inland Labour Transport Fund.

Again, by Section 142F. of Act I, amended, a Magistrate "may provide an escort or make such other arrangements as may appear to him to be necessary for ensuring that such labourer or person is actually conveyed to such district." Much I should like to know whether it is any body's business to let the despatching Magistrate know that the coolies do reach their districts. Does he ever hear a word more about them? How does he ensure their arriving: how is he assured they have done so? It has been said that these and other things I complain of are the fault of the administration. Like enough.

It does possess powers, *e.g.*, to close unhealthy gardens and do various other things for the greater protection of labourers.

When I complain of defects of the system: I am speaking of practical results, not of the "paper constitution." The Tea Interests and Government may fight it out between them as to who is to blame. I bring no railing charge against the planting community. No interest will lay restrictions upon itself. That is Government's business: and it is Government's business to see them observed.

The law, I believe, is strong: but the initiative and executive weak. Officials can but work all day: and doing that, cannot get through all that is incumbent on them in a huge district.

It is only fair to say that I have spoken of things chiefly as they have come to my notice in this district. The gardens here do labour under an exceptional disadvantage in that the drain of time-expired coolies southwards is constant. It has been said that this district "recruits for all Assam."

This is hard on gardens here: but it also shows that somehow or other coolies prefer, as soon as possible, to go to other districts to re-engage. Are the conditions harder here than elsewhere? Are provisions dearer? Is the climate less favourable?

CHARLES DOWDING.

MR. MACKAY.*

SIR,—The speeches made during the farewell to Mr. Mackay as reported in the *Englishman* of October 2nd, are instructive reading.

He was congratulated, and modestly congratulated himself on the following matters: *viz.*, "the statesmanlike attitude he took up in connection with the Indian Factory Act, the Inland Emigration Act, and the Indian Opium Revenue, in all of which he upheld the right of the Indian Government to be freed from the demands arising from the requirements or peculiar opinions of particular classes in the United Kingdom. Marine and mining matters had also been the subject of his judicious protest or persuasion in favour of caution, which had been of service to Government no less than to the interests he represented:" *i.e.*, monied interests.

* This letter is inserted for its general bearing on the labour-question.

As regards the Indian Factory Act, as amended under his influence: it appears that the new provisions have not "done much to hamper the undertakings of his clients: but have proved as unobjectionable as might be."

These provisions were to protect the hands, including women and children, in the Bombay mills. Be sure they needed protection; and remember that every Act to enforce such provisions at home was carried in the face of the fiercest opposition from the mill and monied interests.

Cobden and John Bright fought against them, tooth and nail; and Lord Shaftesbury has left it on record in his Autobiography that Mr. Gladstone on no occasion had ever given him any facility or aid in carrying through such measures.

Mr. Mackay "helped to *safeguard the interests* of his clients, when the Inland Emigration Bill was under discussion, last year."

In that Bill Government wished to reduce the period of a coolie's agreement from five years to three, a change in the *coolie's* interest. This was opposed by Mr. Buckingham, the Tea representative, and Mr. Mackay. Government gave way partly and fixed the period at four years. On other points, however, it stood firm in spite of "protest and persuasion."

On the Opium question Mr. Mackay is, of course, sound. He does not attempt to disguise his hope that the Opium Commission may prove abortive: and he alludes contemptuously to the "Hemp and Drug Commission wandering about the country seeking for evidence of the baneful effects on the people of the use of narcotics." Mr. Mackay did not respond to the reference to his exertions as to marine matters. Had they anything to do with securing proper treatment for common sailors, or hindering them from being poisoned with rotten beef?

With regard to mines he expands. "You have been good enough to acknowledge that a representation that I had the opportunity of putting forward two years ago, against the proposal to introduce a Mining Act into India, had helped to induce the Government to shelve the proposal at any rate for a time. I am sorry to say, however, that there may still be trouble in store for you, in connection with the question of a Mining Act for India. The home authorities, yielding I suppose to pressure, have decided to send an Inspector out to report upon the advisability of legislating for the working of mines in this country. Whether this Inspector is coming out with instructions in his pockets, or with an open mind, it is, of course, impossible to say; but if the latter be the case, I feel fairly confident that he will be convinced that there is no necessity for the introduction of restrictions and troublesome regulations in connection with mining in India. This is a matter which it will be well for the Committee of the Chamber of Commerce to keep before them, and it may be as necessary to fight for freedom here as it was to oppose the interested inclinations of those who sought to introduce measures calculated to hamper the manufacturing industries of India."

To "fight for freedom" is a noble thing: but it is a whimsical suggestion in this connection, and somehow reminds one of the Confederate States of America, who fought for freedom to hold slaves, and liberty to "whop their niggers." As to mines, see here. In England Mining Acts are necessary: mines are periodically examined by the Government Inspectors of mines, to ascertain that "restrictions and troublesome regulations" are duly carried out. If a miner meets his death in a mine, a coroner's inquest is held. The coroner's jury is no longer content to return a simple verdict of "accidental death." The inquest becomes a veritable and searching court of enquiry. The Superintendent or Manager of the mine is had up and examined unflinchingly. The underlookers or butties or gangers, and the man's mates are examined and cross-examined. Mining experts are called in to bear witness whether rules and regulations have been observed. If not, the jury return their verdict with a rider of censure, which may become the basis of a criminal prosecution of the proprietors or authorities of the mine. Doubtless mine-owners out here will be on their guard to thwart, as far as they can, the introduction of a similar procedure in India. But why is it unnecessary in India, whilst an acknowledged necessity in England? Remember too, that the Indian miner does not belong, like his brother at home, to a powerful union, well able to safeguard his interests and fight for his protection from preventible risks to life and limb. He is a labouring unit, worth so many rupees, nothing more. What happens when he is killed, say by a

fall of coal, in the mine? Notice is sent to the Police. The District may be without a European District Superintendent of Police: so a Native Inspector of Police goes out to hold an enquiry. He may be a smart and able man of his class, but what chance is there of his enquiry being searching and conclusive? He may have all the courage, but does he carry with him the authority and moral force to compel Managers and Deputy Managers and European mine employés to attend, and tell more than they have a mind to? And, indeed, if the Magistrate himself went out, would he even be able to make much of the enquiry? Would he possess the technical knowledge to decide whether all were right in a mine, or whether it were a case in which a Coroner's Jury at home would have added a censuring rider. The coming of an Inspector of Mines from England is a good thing; and though Mr. Mackay be fairly confident that his visit will lead to nothing, there is room for good hope in other minds that it may lead to a marked amelioration of the condition of Indian miners.

Had Mr. Mackay's admirers been content to dilate on his meritorious services as touching the Currency question, few would have denied the value of those services.

But no, they were not so content. Categorically they applauded his action on the points just commented on. And, in response, his trumpet gave no uncertain sound: "Up; monied interests! Be on your guard against those who threaten you! Shew a bold front to those who would tell you that property has its duties as well as its dues! Up! Quit you like men and fight!"

His harangue was rapturously received; and the whole function was an unqualified success. Verily the world loveth his own.

"RULES OF THE INDIAN TEA ASSOCIATION.

"BONUS RULES.

"1. That no Superintendent, Manager, Assistant Manager, or other Employé or Agent of any garden represented in the Association, shall engage or attempt to recruit or entice, directly or indirectly any labourer or labourers, from any other garden represented in the Association, by offering higher wages than those current for the locality, wherein the garden is situated or fixed by the Association.

"2. That no Bonus or perquisite, such as rum, rice, blankets, &c., shall in future be given to coolies engaged by one garden from another belonging to the Association. In cases where agreements are made with such coolies under Act XIII. of 1859, and it becomes necessary to make an advance in order to bring these agreements within the provisions of that Act, the amount of advance for a year's agreement shall not exceed Rs. 6 for a man, and Rs. 4 for a woman, and shall be recovered by equal monthly instalments during the last six months of its currency.

"3. That coolies engaged under the conditions of Rule 2, shall not be paid any Bonus, or any increase over the usual monthly rates of wages of the District, as fixed by the District Committees and confirmed by the General Committee of the Association, until they shall have served for a period of not less than two years on the garden employing them.

"4. That no Superintendent, Manager, Assistant Manager, or other Employé or Agent of a garden represented in the Association, shall without first informing the labourer's previous employer, employ or harbour any labourer from another garden also belonging to it, until a period, as fixed by the District Committee and confirmed by the General Committee of the Association, shall have elapsed from the time of the labourer leaving the garden, on which he was last employed.

"5. That the above Rules shall come into force on the 1st of January, 1886."

In my first paper occurred the following paragraph: "Supposing, however, the coolie has his *hâth-chit* (or discharge-note saying the garden has no further legal claim on him), he may be met with a new difficulty before getting work. His late master, and the majority of the planters around may belong to an Association, the members of which have mutually bound

themselves, not to take on coolies coming from one another's gardens: and the man may be compelled to leave a district, in which friends and relations are living, because he has refused to re-engage with a master whom he may have ample and valid reason for not wishing to work under any longer. Of course no exception can be taken to such action on the part of planters; yet it is an instance of the restrictions which hedge round the coolie."

This statement was strenuously denied. "Medicus" wrote: "If a coolie has his *hith-chit* he is free to come and go wherever he likes; and has a welcome on any Estate upon which he may care to settle. The system of giving such chits is necessary, and they are not withheld, if the coolie is determined to leave a garden." It might be supposed from this way of speaking that the giving of *hith-chits*, was almost a matter of favour. It is not; the employer is legally bound to give the discharge-note to a coolie who asks for it, directly his time is up. My statement, however, was so roundly contradicted, both thus publicly, and in private, that I was nearly persuaded that I was mistaken, in supposing that the cases of Association action affecting coolies, that had come under my notice, were other than accidental and exceptional, and, in a subsequent letter, I made a guarded apology for my statement. In these "Bonus Rules," I am able to tender documentary proof that the statement was correct, and I therefore withdraw the apology.

From additional Rules made by local Branches of the Tea Association, which I quote, it will be seen, that in some districts, a coolie leaving a garden is debarred from employment on any other Association garden for 12 months, unless his last employer gives his permission. This permission, if the Rules have any purpose at all, he will avoid giving, especially if his garden be one which, for whatever reasons, coolies seek to leave as soon as possible.

The Assam Branch prints no special rules, but no doubt, there is some understanding between the members.

The Central Sylhet Branch prescribes in Rule III., in addition to the general tenour of the Calcutta Rule II., that no "guarantee as to the price of rice shall be given;" and in Rule V., the form of discharge-note.

In Rule XII., in place of the Calcutta Rule IV., that a labourer shall not be employed by any other garden, "without first *informing* the labourer's previous employer:" it enacts that: "No Superintendent, Manager, or Assistant Manager...shall without the consent of the labourer's previous employer, employ or harbour any labourer.....until a period of 12 months shall have elapsed....." Then, however, follows Rule XIII., a gem of construction, but not, as crystal, clear.—"XIII. That for the better working of the Association, any Manager be entitled to employ any coolie that arrives at his garden. Provided notice of such arrivals is reported to the Honorary Secretary but in no case can this be done without risk of fine. If such report is not made prior to employment and also that all departures as well as arrivals, must be reported so as to check absconding as much as possible. Coolies going on leave from one garden to another must be provided with leave-chits, else will be treated as above."

There is no word, "above," to show how coolies, who venture to pay a visit to their friends, without leave, are to be treated: but one must suppose that the members of this Vehmgericht preserve the knowledge of the dread penalty within their gloomy bosoms.

The Balisera Valley Branch has not this rule, but imposes a fine of Rs. 25 on any garden infringing its rules, in the main, like those of the Central Sylhet Branch.

It will be observed that Rule II. of the Calcutta Association gives directions that an advance of Rs. 6 only is to be made to a coolie engaging under Act XIII., and this is to be recovered from him before the end of the year. This advance (bonus it is not) is necessary in order to bring the agreement, within the provisions of the Act, which was never originally intended to apply to garden coolies, but, by the tolerance of Government, has come to be widely used on Tea Estates. It is called: "An Act to provide for the punishment of breaches of contract by Artificers, Workmen, and Labourers in certain cases." The Preamble runs: "Whereas much loss and inconvenience are sustained by manufacturers, tradesmen and others in the several Presidency Towns of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay, and in other places from fraudulent breach of contract on the part of Artificers, Workmen and Labourers, who have received money in advance on account of work

which they have contracted to perform; and whereas the remedy by suit in the Civil Courts for the recovery of damages is wholly insufficient, and it is just and proper that persons guilty of such fraudulent breach of contract should be subject to punishment; it is enacted as follows:—(I give headings only).

“ I. If Workman neglect to perform work, on account of which he has received an advance of money, complaint may be made to the Magistrate.

“ II. Magistrate may order repayment of advance or performance of contract: may inflict Penalty if Workman fail to comply with the order: (in given circumstances even imprisonment).

“ III. Magistrate may require Workman to give security for due performance of order.

“ IV. Declares to what contracts the Act extends (*viz.*, to all contracts and agreements, whether by deed, or written, or verbal, and whether such contract be for a term certain, or for specified work, or otherwise.)

“ V. Act may be extended by Government.”

Now this Act is directed against fraudulent breach of contract and it is quite obvious, that, in spite of Section IV., it was never intended that it should be applied to coolies who should be given an advance of a few Rupees, for the express purpose of bringing their agreements within the provisions of the Act. This procedure savours of the measures taken by Brass and the lovely Sally to bring the unsuspecting kit's conduct within the provisions of the Law of Theft. The coolie is led to sell himself, for a year, more cheaply than did Bumble, who, at any rate, retained his tea-pot; whilst the coolie has to return his; by equal monthly instalments during the last six months of his contract. It is only fair to say, that (as far as I have been able to judge) in practice, Act XIII. works better than might have been expected. Its labourers draw invariably higher wages than Act I. people, and share most of the protection which Act I. prescribes. Employers have sense to see that it pays to treat them well, so that, at the end of their year's agreement, they may be minded to take service again, and I know personally of no cases in which they have been harrassed under the punitive sections of the Act. At the same time, I have heard it said that Act XIII. is an “ iniquitous ” Act: that the contract paper being of the same form and appearance as the Act I. contracts, the coolies, when signing, do not know that the “ bonus ” is only a sham one to be deducted again from their wages; and finally it is declared that should Act I. be abolished: they will be far worse off under Act XIII. than they are now. My answer to this last statement is, that, should the anticipation prove correct, it is certain that any Administration, which, in the interest of labour, shall have abrogated Act I., will promptly bring Act XIII. or some other Act, up to date, and will take very good care that labourers shall not be under worse conditions, than they were before.

NOTE.

I have to thank the courtesy of the Shillong authorities for a copy of the Special Report on the Working of Act I., for 1886-1889.

This did not, however, reach me till June. The whole of my reply to Mr. Buckingham was in the hands of the printers, and but one passage of my Introduction was strengthened by anything in the Report. I am glad to be able to say this, to guard against the possible suggestion that what I wrote was but a *rechauffé* of selected portions of this lengthy document.

I have to acknowledge that when reproaching the Tea Industry with having done so little towards cultivation, other than tea, I ignored (because I was unaware of) the Government rules by which, on "lands now leased for the cultivation of tea, the cultivation of ordinary crops is prohibited, without special permission." Para. 150. However intelligible and just the intention of these rules, the effect of them has been unfortunate in some districts. The special permission, however, could doubtless have been obtained, had the Leaders of the Tea Industry in any district, say Lakhimpur, approached the Administration with a representation of the absolute dearth of local food supplies. They appear to have done nothing of the sort, and it was the Administration's own motion, so far to relax these rules, as to allow gardens to give land to coolies, "in view of the distinct advantages to the immigration system arising out of this practice." This practice is least prevalent in Lakhimpur, though the need is here most urgent.

I am glad, for another reason, though it be a personal one, not to have seen this Report before. It enables me to test what I have written. I do not think I should have written otherwise, had it been in my hands. The crying evil of the importation of unsuitable coolies, though alluded to, was not so intense, even in 1889, as now; and that I have not written more strongly is due to the impossibility of speaking more strongly than the Chief Commissioner did in the Immigration Report of 1893, which I have quoted at length.

In replying to Mr. Buckingham's statement, that "the average cost of a coolie's living in Assam is about Rs. 3, a month," I should certainly have quoted his own words (p. 236, of the Triennial Report), *viz.*, "An adult man costs me about Rs. 4 per mensem to keep, a woman Rs. 3-8, a child Rs. 3:" even though I had to add that a Manager in Lakhimpur district, feeding as many as 200 daily, in his hotel, found he could do it for Rs. 2-14-6 per head. This, however, is for bare food. Even a coolie wants some clothes. And this Rs. 2-14-6 does not include vegetables, I gather.

Again, I speak as a fool, I take credit for excoigitating the relation between the out-turn of tea per acre, and the death-rate. I am glad to see this aspect of the yield has engaged the attention of Government.

Once more, it is satisfactory to me to find that the labour-force per acre has also been a subject of enquiry from the Administration. Of this, I was unaware when I stated that it might, or ought to, one day, become the subject of legislative provision. Para. 155 of Report.

I will not refrain from quoting from Mr. Fitzpatrick's Circular, No. 40, of 1889.

It is absolutely on all fours with a statement of mine, which has been flatly contradicted by all who have replied to me: and it actually raises and disposes of the particular contention, relied upon by my interlocutors, I do not call them opponents. He says: "It might seem, that as long as the daily task is a fairly light one, and those labourers, who are actually incapacitated for work, owing to sickness, or any other causes, are excused from it, as provided for by the Act, it is a matter of indifference except to the planter, whether the labour-force is strong enough to do all the work easily or not. But as a matter of fact, it is found by experience, that when a

garden is underhanded, the pressure (it may be perfectly legal pressure) which has to be exercised upon the coolies to make them perform the full task regularly, has a considerable effect on the health of the labourers, and tends to lower the garden in the scale of healthiness.

On the other hand, where there is a superabundance of labour, as there is on some of the wealthier and best-managed gardens, a coolie can always, except perhaps at the height of the working season, get a few day's leave to rest himself, and "*thus the first approaches of illness are warded off.*" The italics are mine.

I venture to express a very decided opinion of my own: *viz.*, that it was a great mistake to have made section 171 A of the Amended Act I, permissive only. I have lately taken several coolies whom I found begging in the bazar, to Court, for enquiry. They state they were just turned out, as unfit to work, and told: "*Jao, Zillah men mangao:*" "Go and beg in the town." The cases are under investigation, but it is almost certain that reply will come from the gardens (if they are compelled to acknowledge they know the coolies), that they absconded. It should have been *compulsory* to notify the Inspector of Labour of absconders.

The writer of an able article in the *Indian Planters' Gazette*, of October 21st, 1893, says: "The statement of desertions, will, for obvious reasons, not be sent in." One reason is this, such a statement, would put "*l'ennemi,*" i. e., The Inspector of Labour, on the alert, and make him ask himself, and then the employer, "Why do coolies desert so from this garden?" It might draw an undesired amount of official attention to a garden. On the other hand, such immediate notification would be a check on the officious Babu, when minded to rid a garden of a useless mouth, inexpensively.

Another defect in the Act is this. The cost of re-patriating coolies, who are ill when their contract time expires, should have been thrown on the garden. As it is, supposing a coolie breaks down towards the end of his term, there is every temptation to a garden to let him hang on, for the few remaining months, and then send him adrift, as it legally may. If the coolie knew his rights, he might, perhaps, claim to be sent home at the expense of the Inland Transport Fund: but he does not. He or she gravitates to the station, and wanders about begging. Such are nobody's charge. Mr. Buckingham says there is no Poor Law, because there are no Poor: but what are these? I do not say they are as numerous as people of the begging castes in Bengal (who, by the way, are hale and healthy, generally, and marry and bring up children to their profession), but I do say that the paupers in Assam are brought here by the Tea Industry. People, such as I have spoken of, may recover their health, or may die. Nobody cares. This week I found the dead body of a young woman lying by the side of a frequented road. She had died during the night. There she lay at day-break. The Police were informed at 9 A. M. They never appeared till 1-30 P. M., to take the body away. In the meantime I had driven the District Superintendent down to view the body. It came out, that this woman had been seen, unable to walk, dragging herself up and down a short stretch of this road, crying and begging for several days. No native would take the responsibility of sending her, on a cart, to the hospital. Who would pay for the cart? Then came her last night. A man told us, that he was awakened at 4 A. M., by a crying noise, and he went out, and finding this woman lying there, spoke roughly to her: "What have you come here for? Why are you making this noise?" She answered only with moans. Ten minutes later he went out again, and spoke to her, but: "*Kuchh nahin bola:*" she said nothing, she was dead. I believe this man was lying, and knew more than he chose to tell. It was obvious that the woman had been dragged to where she lay: and as a native will not touch a dead body, it must have been whilst alive. Her moans had probably disturbed somebody else first, who had taken her by the wrist, and dragged her off from his neighbourhood. This had finished her. Her right arm was stretched out at full length,

above her head, which lay over on the left shoulder, under which again her hair, full of dust and bits of grass, was tight drawn, as it would become, as she was being dragged. Her one rag of clothing trailed along by her feet. But the District Superintendent said he saw no reason to suspect foul play, and I was obliged to agree that there was probably not, technically speaking. She had died of disease and neglect, though her end was hastened by an act of brutality, proceeding from that callousness to suffering, so frequently displayed by natives, to others than those of their own caste. So, at last, she was taken away and buried, and that was the end of her. These things occur. Never mind, go study cheese mites, or the influenza bacillus!

The whole question of *post mortem* enquiries, Coroner's Inquests in fact, is, away from the large towns of India, in a most unsatisfactory state. Lately, at Dibrugarh, a Eurasian was found drowned. Again, it might be said, there was no cause of suspicion of foul play. But I was directed to bury the body, although there had been no medical examination of it: and no report had been received from the Police as to the circumstances of his death, of which three accounts were current. A European might be knocked on the head, and dropped into a river, and, if found some days after, unless the body bore patent indications of ill-usage, would be buried without more ado.

The truth is that (apart from defects of the law), the Government Services are so undermanned, the pressure of work so great, that not a few over-worked officials almost lose the power of initiative, which natives never possess: and unless seated in Court, and plied with reports and eight-anna-Court-fee-stamped petitions, can no more function, than a penny-in-the slot machine at home, if not fed with coppers.

C. D.

P. S.—In three weeks I have recorded the statements of twenty-eight destitute people, the class whose existence Mr. Buckingham does not believe in. Of these a minority only have any claim on any garden, but a claim they have on the Inland Transport Fund, many of them. That I should have had myself to take them to court, disregarding sundry rebuffs, proves to me how hopeless their case would be without assistance. My enquiries have brought several defects of the Act to light. Section 142 provides that a dependent of every contract-labourer, if incapacitated for work, may be re-patriated. I hunted down the following case. A cooli *A* came up as a contract cooli to a garden. His wife *B* was so obviously unfit to work, that she was refused a contract, and came up with her husband as a "dependent." Her husband died in six months. Soon after, she, being unable to work, was turned off the garden. I found her begging. Although she had a right to be re-patriated, she did not know it, and there is no provision in the Act compelling a garden to notify to the Magistrate that it is about to turn off a helpless dependent to starve. So the Magistrate, knowing nothing of the case, can take no action: and perhaps the first he hears of it, if hear he do, is that a dead body has been found in the bazaar.

Again although Sections 142 B, 142 C and 142 D provide for the re-patriation of certain classes of people, yet there is in the Act, apparently, no provision for re-patriating such as the following, namely, time-expired labourers who are incapacitated for work. I found a man begging who was stone-blind. He was an agreement-cooli, who had become blind on the garden. The Inspector had not discovered him before his contract expired, or he would have cut his agreement, and re-patriated him, under Section 142 B, at the expense of the garden. His time

expired, and he was turned off the garden to beg. Again I found a woman almost totally blind, with two children: she had been thus for some time: but the garden appears to have let her hang on till her contract time ran out, and then sent her away to find for herself.

A man and his wife, both terribly anaemic, and incapable of earning their living, their contracts having expired, were told to leave the garden, with their two children. I sent them to hospital, but, as I say, I know of no provision in the Act, for their re-patriation. A grave defect it is, that poor people have no ready access to a magistrate, in court, as they have at home, to tell their troubles. They are permitted no approach, nor are they heard, till they have feed some one to write a petition for them.

C. D.

