

**A CONCISE ESSAY ON THE
MEDICAL TREATMENT OF
MALABAR COOLIES, EMPLOYED
ON THE COFFEE ESTATES OF
CEYLON AND INDIA**

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P R E F A C E.

A REQUEST has been made to me, on several occasions, to give to the Planters of Ceylon the results of my experience in the Medical management of Malabar Coolies, in such a form as should enable those who live far removed from professional assistance, to treat their Coolies for simple affections, and to restrain the progress of disease, until assistance arrives, in more formidable cases.

Many things have served to interfere with my wish to comply with this request at an earlier period. Practice through a large circuit of estates, where cases are widely scattered, does not afford to the Physician the same opportunities for collecting facts and concentrating his experience that are available with the Practitioner in a town, or with one who has charge of an hospital.

To collect facts, bearing on certain views, therefore, derived from such wavering quarters, and to arrange them so as to make them valuable to an unprofessional community, amidst the distractions of a large practice and the minor but not less troublesome ones of family affairs, takes time and patience; still, with the object continually before me, I have contrived to collect into memoranda, a sufficient amount of practical information to make the undertaking, to some extent, both feasible and valuable.

Should this small publication prove sufficiently acceptable to induce a revision of it, perhaps future opportunities may afford an opening for adding to the amount of information now published, as each day's progress in the advancement of general science helps towards improvement in single branches, and, of course, in that of medicine.

Unless a conscientious sense of "*Duty*," considered independently of any personal advantage or gratification, influences the owners of estates in the Hygienic management of their Coolies, little advantage will follow such general instructions as I can give; for the fulfilment of that "*Duty*" is both irksome, thankless, and unprofitable. A Coolie that has been cured of a serious illness will hardly thank his master for all the trouble and expense to which he has been put. He considers *him* as the obliged party; and, on his recovery, he will leave him and walk off forthwith to some other estate, denouncing his late master's as "*unlucky*;" or perhaps he will, as his appetite and strength improve, make use of his returning health to rob his master of his best fowls or vegetables, as a reward for his anxious care of him. (See Note 1.) It, therefore, is correctly termed an office, "*irksome, thankless, and unprofitable.*" But there is a duty towards those placed providentially under one's care that should sur-

mount every opposition and impel us to do what is "*Right*" under every provocation and against all difficulties. Under the power of such a principle, many, if not all the opposing influences which render medical care of Coolies difficult, will gradually disappear. But the irksomeness of the "*Duty*" will continue as long as the various gangs shift their quarters from one estate to another, and new men have to be taught new principles of conduct. Superstition and caste rise up in fearful proportions against innovation. They require steadiness to overcome them; but they are not invincible: and the Malabar Coolie possesses quite shrewdness enough to see when "*Master*" will have his way, or else he (the Coolie) will suffer. The apathetic excuses that their men "*will not come for medicine,*" or "*will not consent*" to so-and-so, is quite true as long as they are allowed a "*will*" in such matters; or when they are obliged to consent at a great sacrifice. But while I have known a master complain so in one instance, in another I have merely heard him say "I will have it done, so let me hear no more about it," when his will became a law, and it was done without even a murmur.

Considering, however, the great and various obstacles which the Malabar Coolie himself opposes to any improvements even for his own benefit, too much praise cannot be given to the planting community generally speaking; for they are, as a rule, anxious to help those under them, and make no trifling sacrifices of time, money, and patience in the service of their Coolies. This is done, too, without any particular personal advantage, beyond the consciousness of doing what is *Right*: for some to whom such a principle is a matter of indifference will tell us that their "work goes on as well, and with far less bother, than when they make a fuss about their Coolies." These are, however, the exception, and neither their feelings or position are to be envied, because "To him who knoweth to do good and *doeth it not*, to him it is sin!" (See Note 2.)

The following are the principal Hygienic arrangements which should be made for the preservation of the health of Coolies: but these cannot be expected to be immediately adopted where previous fixed ones have been made; and can only be employed where a new estate is being opened, or new lines are being built.

Lines.

The Lines should never be built in a hollow; always on some raised piece of ground, and if possible, near water—a running stream is the best,—so that a proper drainage could be kept up. They should be built of stone and roofed with shingles, as thereby an equality of temperature is preserved, and a sufficient amount of ventilation secured. Particular attention should be paid to cleanliness around as well as inside the lines; the Coolies who remain away from work, (for there are always to be found some skulkers) being compelled to sweep the ground about the lines, and remove all the filth, as a penalty for their idleness. (See Note 3.)

In the construction of the lines, decidedly the best is that of separate huts, with a narrow interval between each. It is the

most expensive, but especially with family men, it secures the inmates from those intrusions and petty robberies which are the cause of so much quarrelling. Moreover a man of good caste with his family in his own little house will not only be willing to remain as a permanent resident on the estate, but be certain, should he have to go to his country for a time, to return again to a spot that he thinks he can claim as his own; more particularly if he should have a small garden attached to it.

It cannot be denied by any one that such lines would tend considerably to the suppression of immorality, because it is an established principle that the greatest amount of profligacy is where the greatest numbers congregate, through the facility which is thereby afforded to one wicked person, to communicate his wickedness to the many. And in simple mud lines, where they are all under one roof, and the walls of each room only rise 7 or 8 feet, every word that is spoken is heard distinctly by those in the adjoining rooms; so that language both offensive and irritating can be, and is, bandied from one to the other with facility. Men who are therefore desirous of keeping their wives and daughters as free as they can from contamination (and every help should be given to the weak struggling professor of Christianity, who has everything to oppose him, and nothing but his principles to keep him steady) would find in those separated huts a degree of comfort which they would prize, and which would induce them not only to remain, but to try and bring others, of a better class than usually come to estates, to the one on which they reside. (See Note 4.) If, therefore, a distinction was made in favour of such professors of Christianity as could produce certificates of their sincerity from the head of the Tamil Coolie Mission, one proof would be given, at least, *out of the many wanted*, that the Christian is held in higher esteem among his fellow professors, for his integrity and morality, than the mere heathen around him.

Where there is so great a demand for labour, it would well pay the owners of estates to make allowance for a high caste Head Canghany, whose business should be to have charge of all the lines on the estate, to enforce cleanliness, to prevent or settle disputes, to look after the sick, and administer medicines regularly to such as cannot leave their lines, and to bring up, at a regular hour, all such as are able to go to the Bungalow for advice; and to see that no native doctor, either Malabar or Singhalese, had admission to the lines. Medical Canghany.

The great difficulty in such an arrangement is to get a person who will not be liable to corruption; otherwise the expense will go for nothing, and the annoyance to "Master" be increased; for nothing would be more tempting than to take a bribe for overlooking some idle or sick favourites, and thus to frustrate the whole arrangement. But, when a person employed expressly for such a purpose can be found, he would prove invaluable in maintaining the health and keeping at their work a number of Coolies, who would otherwise be only an encumbrance on the

estate. I make this statement from experience of the fact itself.

The idea that the services of a "*Christian*" would not be available among "Heathen" Coolies is not correct. I can testify to the contrary most completely. One instance, that of a man employed on the Boulana estate, named Daniel, for the express purpose, was most valuable in his assistance. His help was never objected to by any of them, and having been a high caste man, his influence with them was sufficient to accomplish any object I wished to have carried out. The poor fellow went to Madras, to see his friends, about 18 months ago, and there died of cholera. He was as sincerely simple-minded, and as consistent a "Christian" as I ever knew.

Another reason why the employment of such a person is advisable is that Coolies, like children, take fancies and will follow the advice and take medicine from one, while they will not listen to another person. I have been frequently stopped on the high road, even at a distance from home, by Coolies who knew me at some time or another, for the purpose of hearing their complaints; and a prescription on a coffee leaf or a slip of paper if I had it, has sent the poor creatures away quite satisfied. At other times I have found them quite intractable, and have had, many a time, after calling out at the door of a hut in vain, to go inside myself and force out into light the patient, who was trying to conceal himself. Coolies are, like children, close observers, shy, having strong aversions, and equally strong confidences, according to their ideas of "Master's" character; but, unlike children, they are also great liars, cunning, treacherous, selfish, without natural affection, debauched. Such characteristics are not what can be termed "*engaging*." They are those of the heathen. Some of them are interwoven with their religious tenets; and should serve, if viewed from a proper light, to place in stronger contrast the simple, beautiful innocence of true Christianity.

Kandy, June 3, 1861.

PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION.

IN preparing for the press a Second Edition of this Pamphlet, I have been induced to do so by representations from different Planters of certain deficiencies in the former one.

Firstly.—The want of an Index. I have inserted one in this edition.

Secondly.—The want of perspicuity in the distinguishing characters of disease.

It is difficult to know how to remedy this deficiency, without making the book too expensive. As far, however, as is consistent with its publication, I have endeavoured to do so.

Thirdly.—The want of hints as to the Treatment of the Diseases of Women and Children, including Child-birth.

I have added a few hints that may be useful in suitable cases of both the latter. But the first is a subject out of the province of a popular work, and the less that amateurs have to say to it the better.

Fourthly.—The want of Instructions for the use of Europeans themselves.

These should not have been expected, as the work was solely intended for the treatment of Malabar Coolies. I have, however, deviated to some extent from my original intention, in order to satisfy such as may be far removed from medical assistance. But, generally speaking, their facility for procuring help, when required, should render them independent of a work of this kind, and it is to be hoped that, when circumstances will admit of it, they will avail themselves of the hints given as little as possible.

In the manuscript of the First Edition, remarks were made on the advisability of establishing District Hospitals, where severe cases could be properly attended to. These remarks were omitted by the Publisher for reasons unknown to me.

As long, however, as the views entertained by the planting community rest on the wishes of absent Proprietors, there is little hope of any decidedly advantageous steps being taken.

To bring Estates into bearing, to make them pay, to go home and live on the proceeds, are the sole objects of all who come to Ceylon as Planting Proprietors. While in Ceylon, and residents on the estates, they take the usual interest in the welfare of their Coolies; but once they leave this country, every extra expense is a matter for serious consideration, and the idea of a voluntary contribution to a District Hospital is (to say the least of it) not acceptable.