

PRESIDENCY OF BOMBAY.

No. 11.

FORMATION OF THE ROAD AND TANK DEPARTMENT AT BOMBAY.

IN 1836, the Government of Bombay represented to the Court the bad state of the roads at that Presidency; that the tanks and bunds also were under no effective supervision, and reported that they had instituted the Department of Roads and Tanks, which measure was approved of by the Honourable the Court of Directors in 1837, as will be seen from the following extract from their despatch to the Government of Bombay, dated the 2d of June in that year.

Para. 8. "The bad state of the principal roads in your Presidency is attributed to the absence of systematic supervision, and to the employment of many persons on the same line, who are frequently without knowledge of road making, and have not time to look after the portion under their charge. The tanks and bunds are also stated to have been under no effectual supervision.

Answer to Letters dated 28th February (No. 6) 1836, and 18th March (No. 10) 1836.

Reporting the adoption of a new system for the improvement of the roads, tanks, and bunds of the Presidency, and various measures commenced or proposed.

9. "The measures recently adopted to remedy these defects, consist of the appointment of one engineer officer as superintendent of roads and tanks in the Concan, Poonah and Ahmednuggur collectorates, to act in concurrence with the Collectors of Poonah, Ahmednuggur and the Concan, having under him two junior engineer officers, as assistants in each collectorate; and you propose eventually to place other districts under similar superintendence. There will, as you state, be some increase of expense occasioned by this plan, but no additional appointments will be required; the officers employed will not be diverted from their usual duties, their operations will merely become more systematic and combined."

Although these measures were not altogether approved of by the Bengal Government, the Court's sanction is nevertheless requested, as they will prove of immense benefit to the inhabitants, and greatly increase the revenue. The construction of a causeway to connect Salsette with the Continent, at an estimated expense of 20,000 rupees, is also earnestly recommended for the Court's sanction.

2. Under date the 10th August 1836, the superintendent of roads submitted his first progress report under the new system, with a short description of the roads of the Presidency, from which it appeared, that there existed 449 miles of old roads, the repair of 211 miles only of which had been provided for, at a sanctioned charge of 36,449 rupees per annum. The only metalled road was that from Poonah to Panwell (38 miles); being the only made road up the ghauts between the Tull Ghaut on the north and the Parr Ghaut on the south, both of which are nearly 100 miles distant, and both exceedingly difficult, indeed almost impassable for laden carts; so that all the wheel traffic from the Deccan might be said to be dependent on this line. In continuation of this line to the northern stations was the road to Ahmednuggur, but this had never been constructed on any regular system, cheaply patched in parts, and expensively though imperfectly built in others, partly under civilians, partly under contract, partly under engineers. The next in importance was the Great Northern Road, leading by Tannah and Bhewendy to Nassick; this "was constructed several years ago, but the line chosen presents so many difficulties, in the want of forage and water, and the extraordinary steepness of its ascents and descents, sometimes exceeding one in four, that it has become absolutely necessary for the furtherance of trade to improve the old, or construct a new route for the introduction of carts."

Tanks.

Of the old tanks, it was stated in 1836, "few are now in use for the purposes of irrigation, * * * they are choked with the yearly accumulation of mud; one, however (the Paste), has to be partially cleared out for the purpose of affording drinking water; and one (the Goreygaum) has been thoroughly cleared, and its sides built up to the height of several feet."

Bundaras.

On the subject of bundaras, it was stated, that "in the Ahmednuggur collectorate, particularly towards Nassick, every stream appears to have been most carefully husbanded in former days, not by damming it up in large sheets of water, but by merely throwing low walls across them, at distances of three or four miles asunder, and diverting the channel into watercourses for the purposes of irrigation after the close of the rainy season; of these bundaras many are in ruins, and very few complete."

On the receipt of the annual report for 1846-47, Sir G. Clerk recorded a minute concurred in by the Commander-in-Chief, proposing to abolish the Department of Roads and Tanks, and by incorporating its members with the Military Engineer Establishment, to provide a concentrated and general system of supervision and control over the entire Department of Public Works. The plan proposed to provide each district with a superior professional executive officer, in whom should be vested exclusively (subject to the general control of the superintending engineer of the division) the duty of originating and personally planning all public works of importance, he alone being responsible for their proper execution, his subordinates being merely required to work out the details under his instructions.

Sir George Clerk did not, however, remain long enough in India to carry out the scheme, and the Government of Lord Falkland deferred the proposed reforms until the Court's sentiments thereon had been declared. The Court's instructions were communicated to the Government of India in their despatch,* dated the 30th January (No. 2) of 1850.

* See printed Parliamentary Return of the Honourable the House of Commons, No. 622 of 1851, pp. 149, 150, and 153.