

H. 320.

Rangia, Lachima, and Patharughat Riots.

No. 320.

No. 760G., dated Gauhati, the 27th March 1894.

From—G. GODFREY, Esq., I.C.S., Commissioner of the Assam Valley Districts,  
To—The Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam.

In continuation of my letter No. 354G., dated the 5th February 1894, forwarding report from the Deputy Commissioner, Darrang, regarding the riot which took place at Patharughat on the 28th January 1894, I have the honour to furnish the following further particulars for the information of the Chief Commissioner.

2. The riot was no doubt closely connected with the events which took place at Lachima in the Barpeta subdivision, where, on the 21st January the subdivisional officer was forced to retire to Barpeta, and where the Deputy Commissioner was besieged on the 24th January, and only succeeded in dispersing the mob at imminent risk to himself and his escort, though happily without having recourse to the extreme method of firing on the mob, Patharughat is about 12 miles from the Kamrup border and about 30 miles from Rangia, where the riot took place on the 11th January. Though none of the killed and wounded were Kamrup men, still it was stated to the Deputy Commissioner, before the disturbance began, that there were Kamrup men in the crowd, and it is believed that these persons had disseminated the idea that even if the police fired, they would use only blank cartridge. At Rangia it will be remembered, some ineffectual firing did take place when the riots occurred there on the 11th January. At Lachima there was no firing. These circumstances, I had no doubt, emboldened the rioters of Patharughat and brought upon them the unexpected event of being actually fired upon with loaded rifles.

3. I am informed that in 1868, when the rates of revenue were doubled all round, a disorderly mob collected at this very place, and besieged the Deputy Commissioner, Colonel Comber, the subdivisional officer, Mr. Driberg, and the District Superintendent of Police, Mr. Weldon. These officers are said to have been shut in in a bungalow which stood much where the existing rest-house stands at Patharughat, but no extreme measures were resorted to on either side. I only mention this as showing the unruly and turbulent disposition of the people of this locality. In the present instance, emboldened, it is believed, by the immunity to life and limb which had attended the riots at Rangia and Lachima, and deluded by scheming agitators into the belief that the Deputy Commissioner could, if he chose, reduce the revenue, the people in the fore-front of the riot resorted to the insane method of throwing clods of earth and bamboos at the Deputy Commissioner and his escort by way of overawing him into granting the concessions which they clamoured for, and which he had no power to promise.

4. The Deputy Commissioner, as already reported, only informed the crowd which came up to the bungalow that the final orders of the Government of India were that the re-assessment rates were to stand, with the exception of the rates on *farmingati* lands, which were to be reduced to 12, 10, and 9 annas respectively, on the three classes of land, but with this the crowd were not satisfied, and they would listen to nothing but a return to the rates of the former settlement. Finding the people unreasonable and inclined to be violent the Deputy Commissioner ordered them to disperse.

5. The incident immediately preceding the riot, *viz.*, that of the District Superintendent of Police being sent to enforce execution of a distress warrant, requires some explanation, and it probably had something to do with subsequent events by putting the crowd into a bad temper. Here, too, it may be remarked no one was hurt, but Mr. Berington fired off his pistol into the ground, whereby the impression was encouraged that the escort would not really fire into the crowd with loaded weapons.

6. It seems that the ryots at a village close to Patharughat had absolutely refused to pay any revenue whatever, and the tahsildar had taken out a warrant of attachment, but had been unable to execute it in one case in which he tried to do so. This was reported to the Deputy Commissioner on his arrival at Patharughat by the tahsildar, and the first thing which the Deputy Commissioner did was to depute Mr. Berington with some police to assist the tahsildar in executing the warrant of attachment and, if necessary, to enforce the process. There was nothing illegal in this, and the Deputy Commissioner considered it a more effective measure for the purpose of securing obedience to authority than summoning the reculant defaulters and trying them for resistance to a legal process. Still, I think it is a pity that the step was taken, as it only served to exasperate the people, who were already in a bad temper,

SEPTEMBER 1894.

38

31

Rangia, Lachima, and Patharughat Riots.

H. 320-323.

and was somewhat akin to collecting revenue at the point of the bayonet. However I do not blame the Deputy Commissioner for what he did. He no doubt thought that a show of force would be sufficient, but unfortunately it was far from sufficient.

7. There is good reason to believe, indeed one of the police officers present has deposed to that effect, that the firing at first, when the actual riot occurred, was without aim and over the heads of the crowd. It was only later on that the firing was with aim. The fact of no one being touched at first must no doubt have emboldened those in the front ranks of the crowd, and they came on apace until stopped by ball and buckshot.

If the firing was at first over the heads of the crowd, it would account in a manner for the comparatively small number of casualties which occurred.

8. The escort was armed as follows:—The Military Police had 10 rounds of buckshot each and 30 rounds of ball. The Armed Civil Police and Civil Police had the converted (smooth-bore) snider, with ball. Altogether 15 persons were killed on the spot, or died of their wounds, and 37 were wounded, so far as is known. Many of the latter were just touched with spent buckshot. I dare say many more were touched, but it was to their interest to keep out of the way and not to let it be known, as they were aware that persons who were found with wounds on them were to be tried for being concerned in the riot.

Mr. Ransom has tried the case and has convicted 7 persons, and discharged the rest, 30 in number. The case is now before me on appeal.