APPENDIX - D.

RATES OF LUSHAI TRIBUTE AND LABOUR.

From the Officiating Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Political Department. Shillong 27 November 1896. REFERENCE I.F. Extl A. February 1898. No. 76. pp 8-11.

"It is neither necessary nor desirable to levy tribute in the North Lushai Hills."

"With reference to the question of tributory labour, I am to say that the distinction drawn by the Government of Bengal between tributory labour and impressed labour other than tributory has never been observed in this province. The Chief Commissioner, however, entirely agrees with the Lt. Governor in thinking that neither Mr. Porteous nor Mr. Oldham has attached sufficient importance to the fact that the rate of payment for labour required from the Lushais is fixed at the full market rate, by which Sir William Ward understands, is meant a rate which will induce the Lushais to come forward and offer their labour voluntarily, the labour offered ceases to be tribute such as Government is entitled to exact from the Lushais. From the enclosures to this letter, it appears that Mr. Porteous is opposed to the policy of exacting any tribute in the form of labour, and that he would prefer to see the full tribute taken in the shape of an increased house tax and a 'living wage' or
the 'market rate' given for labour which, he considers will then always be forth-coming without impressment. These proposals I am to say do not commend themselves to Sir William Ward. He is not quite certain of the exact meaning attached by the Political Officer to the expression 'living wage'. If, however, the Political Officer means that a Lushai cannot live on four annas a day for the few days in the year that labour be exacted from him or that he would gain more by remaining in his own village, the Chief Commissioner is constrained to say that he does not agree with him, nor is it possible in his opinion, to declare what is the market rate of labour in the sparsely populated hill districts of this province, as such a rate must necessarily vary from time to time with the supply and demand.

The rate of house tax should not be regarded in the light of tribute. It should be treated as it is elsewhere in Assam, as a substitute for the land tax or price paid by the people for the use of land which on annexation has become the absolute property of the Government.

The right of the Government to fix what it considers a fair wage for ordinary labour in a newly conquered hill territory annexed to this province, without any reference to this question whether the people are satisfied with the rate of wages so fixed, cannot, the Chief Commissioner considers, be disputed. The right to impress labour, where impressment is absolutely necessary, must also be recognized, subject to certain limitations. In Sir William Ward's opinion, 4 annas a day is a fair wage to
give to any ordinary adult male coolie in the North Lushai Hills. This is the wage given to coolies in the adjoining State of Manipur, where the hill tribes pay a house tax of Rs.3/- and in the Garo Hills, where the house tax varies from Rs.2-3.

I am to point out that Mr. Oldham is mistaken in thinking that a maximum standard of 10 days' labour per house has been established in the North Lushai Hills. No such rule has hitherto been made it will suffice to prescribe the general direction that the Political Officer should as far as possible, endeavour to arrange that no house should be required to supply more than 10 days of impressed labour during the year, the days occupied in going to and returning from work being included in the number of working days.

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