

CHAPTER VI.

ECONOMIC CONDITION OF THE PEOPLE,
COMMUNICATIONS, TRADE, TOWN,
AND LOCAL BOARD.

Rent—Wages—Prices—Food and dress—Dwellings—Economic condition of people—Indebtedness—Sources from which villagers obtain cash—Social restrictions—Communications—Development of steam navigation—Railway—Roads—Waterways—Post and Telegraph—Commerce and trade—Municipality—Local Board.

Rent. When land is sublet the rent is paid either in cash or in kind, the former system is known as *sukani* or *khandua*, the latter as *adhi*. Under the *chukti adhi* system the tenant contracts to deliver a fixed quantity of grain irrespective of the character of the harvest, but the more usual procedure is for the tenant and the landlord to divide the crop. The following description of the different forms of *adhi* tenure is taken from a note by Mr. Basu, Assistant to the Director of Land Records and Agriculture:—

“The commonest form is *adhi* proper, in which the crop is divided equally between the landlord and the tenant. The produce may be divided either before reaping (*gach-adhi*), in which case the standing crop is divided in the field, each party reaping his own share; or after the tenant has cut the crop (*dal-adhi*) when the bundles (*danguris*) are equally divided; or after the tenant has cut and threshed the crop (*guri-adhi*) when the grain is divided. All work prior to the act of division and expenses

incidental thereto are borne by the tenant. The seed grain alone is, as a rule, found by both parties in equal shares, and if one party has advanced it in the beginning, one bundle of paddy per *bigha* is deducted from the whole in payment of the advance, and the remainder is then divided equally between the landlord and the tenant. There is still another kind of division in which the tenant undertakes to cultivate the land up to the stage of the puddle (*boka-adhi*), when the land is divided in equal parts, each party transplanting his share with the own seedlings and at his own cost.

In every form of *adhi*, the Government dues are paid by the landlord. As a rule, it is only good productive lands which can be let on *adhi* tenure, particularly on the *chukti* and *guri* forms of the tenure. In *adhi* tenure, no extra payments are called for. Cash paying tenants, however, are often called upon to pay various perquisites which go to swell the nominal rent due. The most common is gratuitous labour for a certain number of days in the year. This is ordinarily the case with all tenants holding temple lands. Not unoften the rent is partly, and in some cases, wholly remitted in consideration of labour to hereditary tenants who are descendants of former *paiks* attached to the temple."

Statistics of subtenancy were compiled in 1899-1900 and are summarised in the following abstract :—

Total settled area for which returns compiled. Acres.	Total area sublet. Acres.	Area paying produce rents. Acres.	Area paying cash rents. Acres.
181,900	9,597	1,009	8,588

It will be seen that only 5 per cent. of the settled area for which statistics were collected was sublet, and that a little less than a ninth of the area sublet was held on *adhi* terms. In the great majority of cases the cash rent paid did not exceed the Government revenue demand upon the land. This is only natural as it is obvious that land cannot have a high subletting

value in a district like Nowgong, where there are great expanses of Government waste, and considerable areas which have actually been brought under the plough, but have been abandoned owing to the ravages of *kala-azar*. According to the census the number of tenants in Nowgong, both workers and dependants was 3,322 in 1891 and 5,600 ten years later.

Wages.

There is really no such thing as a labouring class in Nowgong, and in 1891, when no railway work was going on, only 1,049 persons described themselves as being supported by earthwork or general labour. Members of the lower Hindu castes and of the aboriginal tribes will occasionally work for hire, but all the local revenue officers report that year by year the difficulty of obtaining servants or labourers, which was at all times great, is steadily increasing. The daily wage in the more densely populated portion of the district, *i.e.*, along the banks of the Kalang from Silghat to Raha, varies from five to six annas, but elsewhere it is generally about one anna lower. Harvest work is paid for at lower rates, while work on the railway commands a wage of at least eight annas a day. This curious difference is probably due to the imperative necessity of getting in the harvest, while railway work is optional, and, as it is done for foreigners, is probably regarded as involving a certain loss of social status. In the Garubat mauza, a ploughman who brings his own plough and buffalo gets ten annas, or, if he only uses bullocks, six annas a day, a rate considerably higher than that reported from the

neighbouring mauza of Kampur. Carpenters and masons are said to get one rupee, and blacksmiths thirteen annas a day. The number of these artizans is, however, quite insignificant, and in quoting a rate of wages for the district it must always be borne in mind that labourers cannot as a rule be obtained at all except through the intervention of some individual possessed of local influence.

The price of rice, the staple food grain, is subject to marked fluctuations, and the total volume of business done in Nowgong town, the place where returns are recorded, is so small that they do not afford a very reliable indication of the real condition of the market. Prices.

The statement in the margin shows that there has been a general rise in price, which has, however, been subject to marked variations, as rice, for instance, was very much cheaper in 1900 than it was either in 1879 or even so long ago as 1865.

	Seers purchaseable for a rupee.
1862	.. 20
1865	... 12
1867	... 20
1879	... 9
1889	... 16
1897	... 7
1900	... 15

The average price in each of the four decades ending with 1872, 1882, 1892, and 1902, was seventeen, fourteen, fourteen, and eleven seers. During the last decade the district has been passing through a period of extreme depression. *Kala-azar* was raging, the people died like sheep, and the survivors could hardly be expected to grow more grain than was absolutely necessary. Apart from this the seasons were unfavourable and the actual harvests were unusually poor. A gradual rise of prices has no

doubt been going on, but it is not so pronounced as the averages recorded would at first suggest. The price of pulse has also been rising since 1880, but there has been a considerable decrease in the price of salt. Now-gong like the rest of Assam has never suffered from famine since the days of British rule. Further details with regard to prices will be found in Table IX.

**Food and
dress.**

The staple food of the people is boiled rice, eaten with pulse, spices, and fish or vegetable curry. Amongst the well-to-do, pigeon or duck occasionally take the place of fish, but fish is a very common article of diet, and is said to be a substitute for *ghi*, which is not very largely used. Goat's flesh is eaten by Muhammadans and members of the Saktist sect, and venison is always acceptable, and is frequently procurable, especially in times of flood, when the deer are driven on to the higher ground and are ruthlessly slaughtered from boats. Tea drinking is very common, especially in the early morning. Sweetmeats usually consist of powdered grain mixed with milk, sugar, and *ghi*. The ordinary form of dress for a villager is a cotton *dhuti* or waistcloth, with a big shawl or wrapper, and sometimes a cotton coat or waistcoat. Women wear a petticoat, a scarf tied round the bust, and a shawl. Amongst the Assamese these cloths are generally home-made, and in the case of the women and of the large wraps used in the cold weather by men are frequently of silk. Men and women alike generally go bare headed, but the former sometimes twist a handkerchief round their heads, and on sunny or rainy days both sexes have recourse to the broad brimmed *jhapi*.

Boots and shoes are the exception, and in their own homes even well-to-do people wear wooden clogs. Wooden sandals are also used by villagers when travelling or working in jungle ground, where there are tufts of sharp-pointed grass.

The homestead of the ordinary peasant is generally separated from the village path by a ditch or bank, on which there is often a fence of split bamboo. Inside there is a patch of beaten earth which is always kept well swept and clean. Round this tiny courtyard stand two or three small houses, almost huts, and in a corner there are generally two open sheds, one of which contains a loom, while the other serves the purpose of a cow-house. The whole premises are surrounded by a dense grove of bamboos, plantains, and areca nut trees, and there are often numerous specimens of the arum family covering the ground. The general effect is extremely picturesque, but the presence of all these plants and trees makes the homestead very damp and excludes all sun and air. At the back there is usually a garden in which vegetables, tobacco, and other plants are grown. The houses are small, dark, and ill-ventilated, and must be very hot in summer, and as they are built on low mud plinths, must be extremely damp. The walls are made of reeds plastered with mud, or of split bamboo, the roof of thatch, the rafters and posts of bamboo. All of these materials can as a rule be obtained free of charge, and a house costs the owner nothing but the trouble of erecting it, but in spite of this they are small and badly built. The houses of the middle class are built on practically Dwellings.

the same plan, but they are larger, and wooden posts and beams are often used in place of bamboo. The furniture of the ordinary cultivator is very simple and consists of a few boxes, wickerwork stools and baskets, brass and bell-metal utensils, and bottles and earthen pots and pans. His bedding is a quilt made out of old cloths, and he either sleeps on a mat on the damp floor or on a small bamboo *machan* or platform. The well-to-do have beds, tables, and chairs in their houses, but these articles of luxury are seldom found outside the town. This style of house is common to all the Assamese, but in the flooded tracts there are none of the graceful areca palms, as the tree cannot thrive if the roots remain long under water. These orchards and gardens are a considerable source of wealth to the cultivator, and a house standing on a bare patch of ground, has always a somewhat poverty stricken appearance to eyes accustomed to the luxuriant vegetation in which the typical Assamese cottage is embedded. The aboriginal tribes nearly always build on platforms or *machans*, and as they keep pigs and fowls they seldom have good gardens round their houses.

**Economic
condition
people.**

of There are no rich men amongst the Assamese in Nowgong, and very few who are even moderately well-to-do, but the explanation of this fact is not far to seek. The Assamese is a cultivator and nothing more, and with wholesale trade, crafts, and industries, he has little or no concern. Practically the whole of the profits of the external trade of the district pass into the hands of the Marwari merchants, and, though large sums of money

were expended by the Assam Bengal Railway Company in Nowgong, coolies and contractors alike were foreigners, and the profits of capital and the wages of labour passed into foreign hands. Farming on a large scale is impossible owing to want of capital and the absence of a labouring class, and the immense mass of the peasant proprietors are petty cultivators, who drive the plough themselves and carry home the rice that has been cut by their wives and daughters. Such a community can never become rich, but it is well removed above the line of poverty, and it is seldom that any villager in Nowgong goes hungry to his bed. Along the banks of the Kalang, the people have as a rule good gardens, which are a considerable source of wealth. Their rice fields are above flood level and are not liable to be destroyed by sudden inundations, but on the other hand, there is a certain amount of pressure on the soil. On the *chapani* there is an abundance of waste land, but the floods of the Brahmaputra render the crop precarious, and prevent the growth of betel nut and other fruit trees.

The principal charges upon the indigenous inhabitants of Nowgong are, land revenue, local rates, and opium. In 1902-03, these three items amounted to Rs. 7,57,000, rather more than one-third of which had to be debited to the head of opium. The mustard crop in that year must have been worth to the villagers at least Rs. 7,76,000, so that from this crop alone they could meet all the demands made on

them by the state.* The people in the hills obtain money by the sale of lac and cotton, and the garden coolies put a considerable amount of cash in circulation. On June 30th, 1903, there were some 12,000 adult coolies in the district, who probably spent on the average about Rs. 2-8 per mensem on poultry, vegetables, and rice sold to them by the villagers, or about Rs. 3,00,000 in the year. There is a growing taste for the use of imported articles of food and dress, and the demands made upon the raiyats' purse are heavier than they were half a century ago, when the absence of any means of communication except country boats rendered it far from easy, either to buy or sell. The price of wives and the cost of the wedding ceremony is said to be increasing, a fact which points to an increase in the amount of cash in circulation, as the Indian vendor is very prone to adapt his price to what he considers to be the capacities of the purchaser. The increasing difficulty in obtaining labour also suggests a general advance in the position of the people.

**Indebted-
ness**

At the same time the various revenue officers report that more than half the village population are in debt. Indebtedness is said to be quite the exception in Kam-pur. In Gobha and Churaibahi only about one-fourth of the population are involved, and in the Raha and Samaguri tahsils one-third, but elsewhere the proportion ranges from one-half to three-fourths. But generalizations of this kind must, obviously, be received with

* The normal yield has been ascertained to be about 550 lbs. per acre, and it has been assumed that the mustard is sold for Rs. 2-8-0 per maund, an estimate, which, if any thing is unduly low. Against this must be set the fact that no deduction has been made for seed or for mustard consumed locally.

caution. The raiyats are very ready to descant on their poverty to all who turn an attentive ear, and it is doubtful whether they are as much in debt as they would fain appear. The system of taking advances on the crop, especially on the mustard crop, seems to be very common, but in many cases, no doubt, the necessity for taking these advances might be avoided by the exercise of a little thrift, industry, and foresight. It is difficult to believe that the indebtedness of the villagers can be very serious, as, apart from the standing crop, they have but little security to offer. The rate of interest charged is said to vary from 37½ to 75 per cent., the lenders being usually kaiyas or foreign traders.

The villagers obtain the cash required for the payment of land revenue from the sale of paddy, mustard, pulse, vegetables, and poultry. In the Langpher mauza they take work on the railway or hollow out canoes, and here and there raiyats are to be found who actually consent to work upon the roads, but the number of such persons is extremely small. The standard of comfort is distinctly low, but this seems to be chiefly due to the apathy and indolence of the people. Their houses cost them nothing but the trouble of erecting them, but they are dark, squalid, and ill-ventilated, and a strong disinclination to incur any unnecessary trouble is a marked characteristic of the Assamese. Mr. Melitus, the Commissioner of the Valley, reports that the average villager will ordinarily only cultivate as much land as is absolutely necessary and no more, and that this is not merely his personal opinion, but one that is shared by the local re-

Sources
from which
villagers
obtain cash.

venue officials, and by almost all officers with Assam experience from the time of General Jenkins and General Hopkinson to the present day. Under these circumstances it is not to be expected that there will be much of comfort or luxury amongst the Assamese or any considerable accumulations of capital.

**Social
restrictions.**

The following are some of the restrictions imposed by custom on the daily life of the people. Villagers will not plough on the day of the new moon or full moon, or the eleventh day after either of these dates. In places they decline to pay revenue on Saturdays, Mondays, Wednesdays, or Fridays, or to give loans of money or paddy on those days. There is a curious local diversity in this particular, as though Saturday, Monday, and Wednesday seem to be inauspicious days for any kind of business in almost every part of the district, in Kam-pur, Saturday, Tuesday, and Thursday are days on which no man pays his revenue; and in Kachamari, Sunday too is barred. There is thus not a single day in the week which is considered auspicious for the payment of revenue in every part of the district. In Pubtharia, it is said that the people will not build their houses, catch fish, or sow mustard on Mondays and Wednesdays, and in Juria, Dandua, and Tetelia, Saturdays and Tuesdays are considered to be inauspicious days on which to sow. In Gerua fencing must not be erected on Mondays, floors prepared on Tuesdays, or straw cut on Saturdays. All castes catch fish, but only Jaliya Kai-barttas, Nadiyals, Namasudras or Charals, and the aboriginal tribes will sell it, and the preparation and sale of

dried fish is eschewed even by the Hindu fishing castes. The *pat* worm is only reared by the Katani subdivision of the Jugi caste, and all the Assamese have a strong prejudice against hiring themselves out as labourers, especially if they are to be employed by Government. They are very scrupulous in many ways, object to the use of well-water, and the fear that his cart might be hired by a European and have a piece of beef or a fowl or two put in it, has been put forward by a villager before now, as a sufficient reason for not embarking in the carting business.

The communications between Nowgong and the outside world have passed through five distinct stages of development:—the country boat, the Government steamer, the private cargo steamer, the daily steamer service, and the railway. The country boat was the legacy we received from the days of native rule. It had served the Ahom princes well enough, they possessed a numerous and well appointed fleet, and as they had no wish to see foreigners in the valley of the Brahmaputra, and little desire to travel out of it themselves, it was nothing to them that Nowgong was many weeks journey from the sea.

But when the British came into possession of Assam, the difficulty of communications proved at first to be a most serious obstacle to the development of the Province. The Brahmaputra was the great highway which connected this portion of the Company's dominions with Bengal, but the journey up the river for any boat of ordinary size was a very lengthy business.

Communica-
tions.
Remoteness
of Nowgong.

Early
difficulties.

McCosh, writing in 1837,* stated that a large boat took from six to seven weeks to come from Calcutta to Gauhati, though the post, which was conveyed in small canoes rowed by two men, who were relieved every fifteen or twenty miles, reached Gauhati in ten days and Bishnath in three days more.

Few people, presumably, had sufficient time or patience to undertake the voyage at the rainy season of the year. Week after week the weary traveller must have pursued his tedious way, his view bounded as a rule by high banks of treacherous sand, which then as now were continually being undermined by the current and falling with a crash into the water. It was only occasionally that he could relieve the monotony of the voyage by a stroll on shore, as through the greater part of its course down the valley, the banks of the river are covered with high reeds and grass, which are quite impenetrable to a man on foot, and the tedium of this dreary voyage must have been immense. Canoes, of course, could travel faster against the current, but a canoe is not a vessel in which the ordinary man can journey for many days in comfort.

**Beginning
of steam
navigation.**

This was the state of things for twenty-two years after our annexation of the Valley, but in 1848, the Government steamers were deputed to ply between Calcutta and Gauhati. Three years later, the Commissioner, Major Jenkins, made the not unreasonable proposal that, three or four times a year they should be allowed to proceed right up the Valley to Dibru-

* Topography of Assam, pages 9 and 82.

garh. His suggestions were negatived by the Marine Department, on the ground that the voyages would be financially a failure, but his views were strongly urged on Government by Mr. Mills when he visited the Province in 1853. The proposal met with the approval of the Lieutenant-Governor, instructions were issued for the despatch of a steamer in that year, and several voyages were made with results that were not unsatisfactory even from the financial point of view. The journey from Gauhati to Dibrugarh and back occupied no more than fifteen days, an extraordinary contrast to the interminable delay of the same voyage in a country boat, and the facilities afforded were fully appreciated by the commercial community in Assam. The cargo tendered soon exceeded the carrying capacity of the steamers, and in 1855, Lieutenant-Colonel Jenkins complained, that the vessels reached Gauhati fully laden with goods shipped in Upper Assam, so that Gauhati and the ports below derived practically no advantage from the downward service of the steamers.

As was only to be expected, the rates at first charged were fairly high, and a ticket from Calcutta to Gauhati cost no less than Rs. 150. On the other hand, the accommodation was designed on an extremely liberal scale. The regulations issued in 1851 expressly authorized passengers to carry pianos in their cabins free of freight, provided that, they were required for use during the voyage and were not in packing cases, a proviso which suggests a very deliberate

voyage as compared with the speedier travelling of the twentieth century. Freight on ordinary stores seems to have been charged at the rate of one rupee per cubic foot between Calcutta and Gauhati, but for some time longer a great part of the trade of the Province continued to go by country boat. The planters could never count on being able to despatch their tea by steamer, and were thus compelled to keep up an establishment of country boats, and having got the boats, to use them, and the same objection held good in the case of native merchants.* The cost of working the line was heavy, but in spite of this, it showed a fair profit, and it was evident, that there would be a great development of the traffic if only facilities were provided for it.

**Private
steamers put
on the river.**

In 1860, the India General Steam Navigation Company entered into a contract to run a pair of vessels every six weeks, provided that the Government boats were taken from the line, and, since that date, the steam navigation of the Assam Valley has been in the hands of this Company, and the River Steam Navigation Company, with whom they are associated. But, in spite of the existence of a regular service, and the quickening effects of private enterprise, travelling still continued to be very slow. The steamers did not profess to run to scheduled time, the delay at the larger ports for the loading and unloading of cargo was considerable, and the passenger no doubt often required

* Memorandum by the Director of Public Instruction, Bengal, dated the 7th February 1857.

his piano to beguile the tedium of the way. In 1861, the Commissioner, Colonel Hopkinson, was disposed to take a gloomy view of the condition of affairs, and, in a letter to Government, openly gave expression to the opinion that, it would be better to compensate the planters for any loss they might sustain, and abandon the Province, unless Government were prepared to enter upon a course of vigorous material improvement. In the same letter, he drew the following dreary pic-

ture of the isolation of Assam:—"With the furious current of the Brahmaputra, still unconquered by steam, opposing a barrier to all access from without, and not a single road fit for wheeled carriage, or even passable at all for a great portion of the year, there is such an absence of the full tide of life running through Assam, such a want of intercourse between man and man, as does and must result in apathy, stagnation, and torpidity, and a terrible sense of isolation, by which enterprise is chilled, and capital and adventurers scared away. The profits of tea cultivation should attract hundreds where tens now come, but the capitalist is not always to be found who will venture his money in a country to which access is so difficult as it is to Assam, through which his correspondence travels at the rate of a mile and a half an hour, and in which it may take a month to accomplish a journey of two or three hundred miles; nor, on the other hand, is it every spirit, however bold, that cares to encounter so dreary a banishment, and to be so entirely cut off from his fellows in a place from which exit is only possible at rare intervals, and must be so literally a prison or tomb to him."

Matters, however, gradually improved, and in 1884, The daily mail service. a daily service of mail steamers was started between

Dibrugarh and Dhubri, connecting with a steamer which plied between the latter place and Jatrapur. Here the traveller who was pressed for time could take the train to Calcutta, though the line was not of the most comfortable, as more than one river had to be crossed in boats before the capital of Bengal was reached.

The introduction of a daily steamer service represented an enormous advance in the facilities for communication between Assam and the outer world. The large steamers were not uncomfortable, but progress was slow, and not only the hour but the date on which they left any given port was far from certain. The would-be traveller could not choose his own time for starting on his journey, but had to select a date on which a steamer was expected at the nearest ghat, and even then he not unfrequently had to endure a weary period of waiting by the river bank. The daily service changed all that, and combined the advantages of regularity with a speed, which, in comparison with that attained by the large cargo boats, was most commendable. During the rains Dibrugarh was reached on the fifth day after leaving Dhubri, while the downward journey was performed in three days. The navigation of the river is not entirely free from difficulty, the companies were not incited to further efforts by competition, and some years elapsed before any attempt was made to reduce the duration of the voyage. On the completion of the Assam-Bengal Railway, the companies realized that it was necessary to accelerate their

timing if they were to retain their traffic, and steamers now reach Dibrugarh on the fourth day from Dhubri, while the voyage from Dibrugarh to Goalundo only occupies three days. This, however, is the rains timing and in the cold weather it is a voyage of five days from Dhubri to Dibrugarh and four days from Dibrugarh to Goalundo.

Prior to the construction of the Assam Bengal Railway, the daily passenger steamers and the large cargo boats were practically the only means of communication between Nowgong and the outside world. Silghat which is 32 miles by road from Nowgong is the port of call and in the rains the passenger steamers are timed to reach Dibrugarh about 34 hours, and Dhubri, which is 19 hours by rail from Calcutta, about 26 hours after leaving Silghat.

The south of Nowgong is, however, now served by The railway. rail. The Gauhati branch of the Assam Bengal Railway enters the district a little to the west of Nakhola, and passes through the Gobha mauza and the Raha tahsil. At Chaparmukh it turns to the south-east and runs up the valley of the Kapili, and finally leaves the district $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles west of Dimapur. The stations going from west to east are Jagi Road, Dharamtul, Chaparmukh, Kampur, Jamunamukh, Lanka, Lumding and Diphlu. At Lumding the Gauhati branch joins the main line which makes its way through the North Cachar Hills and down the Surma Valley to the sea at Chittagong, while eastward it connects with the Dibru-Sadiya Railway at Tinsukia.

In the Gobha mauza the line runs most of the way through land which lies too low for cultivation, and though in the Raha tahsil rice fields and villages once more appear, the Kapili valley is a great savannah which is very sparsely peopled. East of Jamunamukh there are hardly any signs of the handiwork of man, and a little to the west of Lumding the railway enters the huge forest which covers the valley between the Naga and the Mikir Hills and stretches far beyond the boundaries of Nowgong into Sibsagar.

Cultivation is, however, beginning to extend near Lumding, and to a less extent near Kampur, Jamunamukh, and Lanka, and with the facilities for communication now afforded, it is to be hoped that population will increase in the neighbourhood of the line. At Chaparmukh the railway taps the trade that has come down the Kapili from the hills, and tea is booked from Jagi Road, Dharamtul and Kampur, but as long as so much of the land through which it runs remains untilled and uninhabited, neither goods nor passenger traffic can be expected to be large. Kampur is the nearest station to Nowgong and is 67 miles from Guahati, 282 miles from Dibrugarh, and 412 miles from Chittagong.

**Roads: the
Trunk Road.**

The principal road in the district is the trunk road which runs along the whole of the south bank of the Brahmaputra from a point opposite Dhubri to Saikhoa near the eastern frontier of Lakhimpur. It enters Nowgong a little to the west of Nakhola where there is an inspection bungalow, and skirting the hills crosses the

Umiam or Kiling by a ferry at Amalighat. The first halting place after Nakhola is Dharamtul $14\frac{1}{2}$ miles away, where the Kapili is crossed by a ferry; from there, there is a march of $12\frac{1}{2}$ miles to the Raha inspection bungalow, but before reaching that place the Kalang must be crossed by a ferry in the rains or by a temporary bamboo bridge in the dry season. From Raha to Nowgong it is 14 miles, but before entering the station the Kalang has to be recrossed, either by a bridge or ferry. Beyond Nowgong there are inspection bungalows at Puranigudam on the 8th, Rangagora on the 16th, and Kuwarital on the 28th mile. Here the trunk road turns sharply to the east, but there is a branch road to Silghat, $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles distant, which crosses the Kalang by a ferry when that river ceases to be fordable. The road now runs between the Mikir Hills on the south, and a swamp which separates it from the Brahmaputra. At Amguri, 10 miles from Kuwarital, there is a second class inspection bungalow; and there is another halting place at Bagari 15 miles further on, and three miles west of the boundary of Nowgong. The trunk road thus runs right through the district from the south-west corner to the north-east, a total distance of about 100 miles.

The Jagi road leaves the trunk road at Nakhola, crosses Other roads. the Kapili by a ferry at Jagi, and after passing Aujhari and Baropujia, where there are inspection bungalows, ultimately reaches Nowgong. It is only 37 miles in length, or nearly four miles less than the trunk road between Nowgong and Nakhola, and there are only two ferries to be crossed in place of four. The Lao-

khoa road runs north from Nowgong to the Brahmaputra, a distance of 21 miles, and from there a ferry conveys the traveller to Tezpur which is situated on the opposite bank. There are inspection bungalows at Rupahi, and on the high bank of the Brahmaputra at Laokhoa, 17 miles from Nowgong. The only other roads through the *chapari mahals* are those from Nowgong to Dhing 17 miles, and Nowgong to Juria 6½ miles, at both of which places there are inspection bungalows. During the winter fair weather tracks are made over the plain to enable the raiyats to bring their mustard seed to market, but more roads are wanted in this portion of the district especially in the western mauzas. The country at the foot of the Mikir Hills in Duar Bamuni is served by the Amlaki-Kathiatali road, which runs parallel to the trunk road from Kampur to a point beyond Salana up the Diyu valley. There are inspection bungalows at Kampur, (19 miles), Kathiatali (12 miles), and Chapanalla (12 miles) from Nowgong; and there are several branch roads which connect this road with the trunk road between Nowgong and Kaliabar. A branch also runs to Dabaka on the Jamuna river, where there is an inspection bungalow. There are altogether 342 miles of road in the district or one linear mile for every eleven square miles of area. This proportion is certainly not high but it has already been explained that there are huge tracts in Nowgong which are very sparsely peopled, and it is doubtful whether more roads are required except in the north-west corner of the district. Judged

by the standard of population there is a mile of road for every 760 people, which cannot be considered an illiberal allowance. All of these roads are raised above flood level, but, as they are unmetalled, sections, like the road between Nowgong and Silghat, which carry heavy traffic, become exceedingly muddy after rain. The smaller rivers and streams are crossed by bridges, which are generally made of timber, but there are no less than 48 places where ferries are still employed. In the early days of our administration goods when carried by land were either sent on elephants or were carried on men's shoulders, but bullock or buffalo carts are now freely used and there were nearly 1,100 of such carts in the district in 1904.

The Brahmaputra is the great high-way for steamer Waterways traffic, but country boats do not generally go far above Gauhati. Reference has been already made to the extent to which the Kalang and Kapili are used for inland traffic. The following statement shows the other rivers in the district which are recognised trade routes, and the distance to which a boat of four tons burthen can proceed up them in the rains. The principal articles of commerce brought down these rivers are mustard, cotton, lac, and other forest produce.

Name of river.	Highest point to which a boat of 4 tons burthen can proceed in the rains.	Name of river.	Highest point to which a boat of 4 tons burthen can proceed in the rains.
Barpani ...	Amtring hat.	Jamuna ...	Bokolia.
Deopani ...	Deopani ghat.	Kalanga ...	Kalanga.
Diphlu ...	Beyond district boundary.	Kiling or Umiam	Nearly to district boundary.
Doiang ...	Kyloo village.	Misa ...	Misa bridge.
Gatonga ...	Bagori.	Nanai ...	Chapanalla
Haria	Tetelisara ...	Jamuna river.

**Post and
Telegraph.**

The following statement shows that, though there has been a comparatively small increase in the number of post offices since 1875, there has been an enormous development of postal business.

Number of Post Offices in		Number of letters and post cards omitting thousands delivered in			Number of Savings Bank accounts in		Balance at the credit of the depositor in	
1875-76	1903-04	1861-62	1870-71	1903-04	1872	1903-04	1872	1903-04
							Rs.	Rs.
6	11	12	41	138	5	1,131	97	2,42,800

There were only 11 offices in 1904, as compared with 6 in 1875, but the number of letters and postcards delivered was nearly twelve times the number handled in 1861-62. The savings bank has also made most satisfactory progress, and considering the low rate of interest given, and the scarcity of capital in the district the volume of deposits is considerable. The figures given for 1872 were, however, returned after the bank had only been open for three months. A list of the post offices in the district will be found in the Appendix—Statement B.

**Commerce
and trade.**

It is hardly necessary to say that in a sparsely populated district like Nowgong, where there are no towns of any size, and, apart from tea, no industries worth mentioning, commerce and trade are not of great importance.

In addition to tea the principal exports are mustard seed, which is raised in considerable quantities on the *chapolis*, cotton, lac, cocoons, and chillies which come

down from the hills, bamboo mats, thatching grass, wax, and other forest produce. The principal trade routes are the Brahmaputra, the Kalang, and the various water courses in the *chapari*, down which the mustard is boated when the river rises. The Kapili affords an outlet to the trade of the North Cachar Hills which comes to Chaparmukh, and is either transferred to the railway there, or continues by boat *viâ* the Kalang to the Brahmaputra. The chief imports are pulse and other food grains, cotton thread and cloth, umbrellas, sugar, salt, opium, *ghi*, kerosine, and other oils, and hardware. Nearly all the export and import trade is in the hands of the Marwari merchants, locally known as Kaiyas, who are the great shop-keepers and money lenders of the Assam Valley. They purchase their surplus products from the raiyats, and supply them in return with cloth, thread, salt, oil, and, very often opium. There are altogether some 40 shops in Nowgong town and nearly 250 more scattered about the district. The importance of the hill trade is indicated by the fact that, no less than thirty-three of these depots are situated in the Rangkhang mauza. .

In addition to the Kaiya, there are a few Muhammadans from Bengal who have opened shops in Nowgong town where they sell furniture, hardware, and general haberdashery. Some of the smaller village shops are owned by Assamese, but the natives of the district have little or no commercial instinct or capacity, and allow almost the whole of the profits of their trade to be monopolised by foreigners.

In statement C in the Appendix will be found a list of the principal local centres of trade.

Markets and fairs.

Retail trade is largely transacted at markets which are held at different villages on certain days in the week. The articles offered for sale include rice and other grain, fruit and country vegetables, poultry, earthenware and metal vessels, oil, molasses, tobacco, and cotton cloth. These markets are attended by all the people in the neighbourhood and there is a considerable amount of business done.

Statement D in the Appendix contains a list of all the villages in which markets are held. Regular fairs are also held at certain seasons of the year, but are not as a rule very numerous attended, in spite of the fact that they are usually associated with some religious festival. The places at which fairs are held are shewn in Statement E in the Appendix. These gatherings take place in April or May, except in the Raha tahsil where they are held in May or June.

Municipality.

Nowgong town was constituted a municipality under Act V, B. C. of 1876 in 1894, but it is little more than a large village, and the total population found within municipal limits in 1901 was only 4,430. Revenue is raised by a tax on persons amounting to $\frac{7}{8}$ per cent. of income, a tax on Government buildings, and a tax on animals and carts, but all these items taken together only brought in Rs. 2,400 in 1902-03. An annual grant from Government of Rs. 5,000, and realizations from pounds and

markets form more important sources of income. The incidence of taxation per head of population in 1902-03, excluding the amount realized from Government buildings, was only 4 annas 2 pie, which was less than that imposed in any other municipality or union in the Province. The affairs of the town are managed by eleven commissioners of whom nine are natives and seven non-officials. There are fourteen public wells, but rigid Hindus who have no private well, drink the water of the Kalang river, in spite of the fact that it is exposed to every form of pollution, as they object to using wells from which water has been drawn by a man of lower caste. Fortunately this prejudice is gradually dying out. The public buildings and the bungalows of the European residents stand on a fine maidan dotted over with really magnificent trees, and the general effect is rather that of a park than of a town. The roads are kept in good order and adequate arrangements are made for the drainage, conservancy, and lighting of the place. A statement of municipal receipts and expenditure will be found in Table XVII.

In the early days of British Administration there was little money available for public works of any kind, and what there was, was generally expended under the control of the Public Works Department or the District Magistrate. Local Board.

In 1872, the management of the district roads was entrusted to a committee presided over by the Deputy Commissioner. The funds at their disposal were partly obtained from tolls and ferries on local roads and other

miscellaneous sources, but principally from grants made by the Bengal Government from the amalgamated district road fund. In 1874, when Assam was erected into a separate Administration, the Government of India assigned one-seventeenth of the net land revenue for local purposes. The district improvement fund was then started, and the administration of its resources was, as before, entrusted to the Deputy Commissioner assisted by a committee. The actual amount placed at their disposal was not large, and in 1875-76 the total income of the district funds of the Province was only Rs. 1,85,000, which was a small sum in comparison with the twelve and a half lakhs of rupees received by the Local Boards in 1903-04. In 1879, a Regulation was passed providing for the levy of a local rate, and the appointment of a committee in each district to control the expenditure on roads, primary education, and the district post. Three years later the district committees were abolished by executive order, and their place was taken by boards established in each subdivision, which are the local authorities in existence at the present day.

Functions.

The Local Board is entrusted with the maintenance of all roads within its jurisdiction, except a few main lines of communication, the provision and maintenance of local staging bungalows and dispensaries, and the supervision of village sanitation, vaccination, and the district post. It is also in charge of primary education, subject to the general control of the Education Department, and is empowered to make

grants-in-aid to schools of higher grade, subject to certain rules. For these purposes, it has placed at its disposal the rate which is levied under the Assam Local Rates Regulation of 1879, at the rate of one anna per rupee on the annual value of lands as well as the surplus income of pounds and ferries and some minor receipts. This income is supplemented by an annual grant from Provincial Funds. The principal heads of income and expenditure are shown in Table XVI. The annual budgets of the Board are submitted to the Commissioner for sanction. The estimates for all works costing Rs. 500 or over must be submitted to the Public Works Department for approval, and important works, requiring much professional skill, are made over for execution to that department. Less important works are entrusted to the board surveyor.
