



## ABSCONDING COOLIES.

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## ABSCONDING COOLIES.

The District Judge was occupied for several hours, yesterday, regarding the absconding of seven Tamil coolies from Midlands Estate, otherwise known as Ayer Kuning Estate, situate, three miles out of Klang, F.M.S.

These coolies, five men and two women, were arrested here on Saturday last on an estate belonging to Messrs Guthrie and Company.

Mr De Mello, who represented the absconding coolies, formally objected to the arrest of accused; the warrant upon which they were arrested, had been signed by a magistrate at Klang, but should also have been endorsed by a local magistrate, before the arrest was effected. This course had not been followed.

The District Judge said he was prepared to endorse the warrant, there and then; it was arranged, therefore, that the coolies should be formally released, and re-arrested in court.

Mr De Mello told the court how these coolies had been brought down from India, by a mandore, under false pretences, they, together with others, being told that they would be paid \$15 per month, and food found for them, free. As a matter of fact, they had never been paid more than \$3 per month, with an allowance of five gantongs of rice; and even this \$3 had been cut down to \$1 per month, several months ago, with the result that the coolies, in a body, complained to the manager of the estate, who told them that until the war was over they would not be paid any more, and if





they did not like the conditions, they could leave the estate.

This was several months ago. Finally, not being able to live upon what they were getting, many of the coolies decided to leave the estate to look for work elsewhere. They had really given notice to leave six months previously. They were not indentured coolies, but coolies paid by the month. They had made repeated complaints to the estate manager, all to no avail, and, Mr De Mello submitted, it was a trivial offence with which they had been charged, and it would be extremely hard and oppressive upon these coolies to be sent back to an estate where they could not make a living. Counsel cited a judgment of Mr Justice Sproule bearing upon this point. Moreover, he pointed out that in other instances where an estate in the F. M. S. had applied for absconding coolies to be sent back to the F. M. S., the manager of the estate had appeared in person, whereas in the present instance the Tamil storekeeper, a man who had absolutely nothing to do with the labour on the estate, had been sent to represent the estate, which, to say the least of it, looked very suspicious.

The District Judge said that in view of the judgment given by Mr Justice Sproule he did not feel justified in ordering these coolies to be sent back to the estate in Klang. They would be discharged.

