

XII. ENQUIRY INTO THE ECONOMIC CONDITION OF INDIA.

*[Memorial submitted to the Secretary of State for India
in January 1902. It was prepared by the Indian
Famine Union, and is included in this volume as
Mr. Dutt was one of the signatories]*

MY LORD,

We, the undersigned, being interested in the welfare of India, and grieved on account of the sufferings of the Indian people from recurring famines, desire to approach you with reference to an investigation of the causes of these famines and the promotion of all practical means of prevention.

We recognise the energy and success with which the Government of India have through several visitations of famine performed their stupendous task of feeding millions of starving sufferers scattered over vast areas, and we believe that the various Famine Commissions, by careful scrutiny of past results, are gradually bringing our system of famine relief to the highest point of efficiency. The methods of famine relief do not therefore appear to us to press for enquiry. But there remains the question of famine prevention. Here all possible help is needed to collect facts and mature practical suggestions. And we believe that such as we can offer will be welcomed by the hard-worked officials in India, whose time is fully occupied by the current duties of administration.

Many means have been suggested for strengthening the position of the Indian agriculturist and rendering him more capable of resisting the effects of drought, such as the more rapid extension of irrigation, agricultural banks, village and other industries, re-afforestation, migration, grain storage, export duties on grain, technical education, arbitration courts, besides administrative reforms, such as timely remissions of land revenue during periods of famine, and the limitation of land alienation. These various remedies appear to us to deserve careful enquiry, and we doubt not that, as each comes under investigation, your Lordship will favour us with information from the India Office showing what has been done by the Government in the directions indicated up to the present time. But we are most strongly impressed with the conviction that the problem of checking famine in India cannot be usefully considered without further special knowledge of the different circumstances of its extended territories and of their inhabitants. What is beneficial in one area may be useless and even mischievous elsewhere. An exact diagnosis of the patient must precede the application of remedies. Our request therefore is that the Government will be pleased to cause a detailed enquiry to be made into the economic condition of a limited number of selected villages in each of the provinces which have been afflicted by famine. It is suggested that in each province the local administration should select typical villages, and appoint suitable persons, including officials and non-officials, Europeans and Indians, to make a

complete enquiry into their condition, ascertaining the exact financial position of each cultivator, with the history and causes of his difficulties. When the economic record of these villages is complete, approved experiments in their management might be entrusted to administrators of proved capacity and discretion. Different groups of villages will doubtless be found to require different treatment; and the remedies, administrative and legislative, found efficacious in the typical villages, could be afterwards cautiously extended to the groups existing under similar economic conditions.

We ask with the more confidence for the detailed local enquiries above indicated because we find that precedents exist in which the Government of India have based remedial agrarian legislation upon the results of such enquiries. As important instances we would refer to the labours of the Dekkhan Riots Commission, which led to the Dekkhan Ryots Relief Act of 1879; and to the Punjab Alienation of Land Act, 1900, which was based upon a village-by-village and holding-by-holding enquiry carried out in 1895-6 by Mr Thorburn in typical tracts in the Western Punjab. This enquiry, which was both minute and comprehensive, extending to 742 villages, was completed within six months, and involved an extra expense of only £300.

We are, of course, aware that valuable information regarding the economic condition of the agriculturists has been collected by the Government from time to time, especially by means of the enquiries initiated in 1881 and in 1887, and we hope for much enlightenment

from a study of the information thus made accessible. But we desire to point out that, although this information is most valuable for purposes of comparison, it is based on enquiries having no direct connection with famine questions; it belongs to a period before the great famines of 1897 and 1900 had seriously affected the condition of so large a portion of the agricultural population; and it was not generally based, as we believe, on such local enquiries as we suggest. It appears to us, therefore, that fresh enquiries of the kind asked for are urgently necessary, in order to determine the economic condition of the cultivators with reference to their present power of resisting the attacks of famine.

In conclusion, we desire to state that this movement is of a purely scientific character, that it is unconnected with party politics, and that our wish is to support the Indian Government in its efforts to deal with a great national calamity.

For the *Indian Famine Union*,

LEONARD H COURTNEY, *Chairman*.

W. WEDDERBURN

S S THORBURN

M M BHOWNAGREE

} *Joint Hon.*
} *Secretaries.*

The Hon Secretaries have been authorised to add the following names to this Memorial:

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The Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster

The Archbishop of Armagh

The Marquis of Ripon.

The Earl of Aberdeen.

The Earl of Dunmore.

The Lord Hobhouse.

The Lord Kinnaird.

- The Bishop of Carlisle.
 The Bishop of Liverpool.
 The Lord Leigh.
 The Lord Radstock.
 The Lord Stanley of Alderley.
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 Mrs. H. Bradlaugh Bonner.
 Chairman, Cambridgeshire
 County Council.
 Chairman, Merionethshire
 County Council.
 The Mayor of Gloucester.
 The Chairman, Bradford
 Chamber of Commerce.
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XIII. SPEECH AT MADRAS.

*[Delivered in the rooms of the Mahajana Sabha,
on February 4, 1902]*

Gentlemen,—I received your telegram a few days ago at Colombo, kindly inviting me and my gifted fellow-passenger, sister Nivedita to speak at a Public Meeting on our arrival at Madras. I felt an unspeakable joy that you should have thus accorded your hearty greetings to a lady who is now one of us, who lives our life, shares our joys and sorrows, partakes our trials and troubles, and labours with us in the cause of our motherland. I also felt gratitude at the honour you had done me personally by giving me this welcome after my prolonged absence. At the same time, I will not conceal from you that your request filled me with grave misgivings. After a somewhat severe course of work in England, I had looked forward to rest and cessation from labours on my return to India, and to a quiet life among those who are nearest and dearest to me. Nothing was farther from my mind than the idea of appearing before the public during my stay in India; and you will believe me when I tell you, that I opened your telegram at Colombo with some degree of terror. Nevertheless, your invitation was so kind that it was difficult to decline; and when you added the worthier name of sister Nivedita to mine in

your telegram, you skilfully closed the gates behind me, and made a retreat on my part impossible. At the same time you also lightened my task ; for in appearing before you on the platform to-day, I feel that I am like the door-keeper of the Sanskrit Drama, who comes on the stage, opens the palace door, introduces the princess, and then retires. I will take care, therefore, not to detain you long ; for I am sure you will all be as anxious as I am to listen to her who follows me. She appears before you not as the partisan of any particular sect or creed, but as belonging to all India, cherishing a noble pride in India's past, labouring with a loving heart for India's future. Therefore, you will recognise in her, as I recognise in her, a beloved countrywoman devoted to the cause of India, and you will listen to her, as I shall listen to her, as to a sister working for all of us in this her adopted country

NO SIGN OF PROGRESS.

Gentlemen, I cannot adequately express to you my feelings on an occasion like this, when we meet after an absence of years. We have been divided by seas and oceans, but have not been divided in our aims and endeavours. The same cause has enlisted our sympathies, and the same objects have inspired our efforts. Therefore, although I have been absent from you for five years,—except during the winter months of 1899-1900,—my thoughts have been your thoughts, my endeavours have been your endeavours, and my aspirations have been your aspirations, all this time.

India has seen little change during these five years. A century has ended and a new century has begun, but we have seen no sign of progress,—rather the reverse. There is no sadder chapter in the economic history of India than the story of these five years, commencing with the famine of 1897, and proceeding on to the famine which has not yet ended. Never in India's history were the mass of the people more resourceless, more crippled as manufacturers, more indebted as agriculturists. Never were greater misfortunes and deaths crowded together within so brief a space. Never did a civilised, fertile, and industrious country present a scene of more widespread poverty and desolation.

But, gentlemen, when we have narrated the story of famines and pestilence, we have not told the whole story of our misfortunes during these five years. Unfortunately, the administration of these years has not made for progress. It is unnecessary for me on an occasion like this to recall to your minds those repressive acts of Government which have engaged your attention so long, and which are still fresh in your memories. I doubt very much if there is any thoughtful and responsible man in India who can look back on these repressive measures to-day with gratification and pride. A feeling of sadness and of despair comes over us as we think of these measures. But, gentlemen, we should never yield to such despair. I for one, have never believed, and will never believe, in this dark future for India. The British Government, in spite of its occasional

lapses into repressive and retrograde measures, cannot permanently accept a policy which is so fatal to the good of the people and so fatal to the Empire.

SELF-GOVERNMENT.

More than this, the future of India depends on us, and on us alone. I am old enough to be able to look back thirty or forty years, when a few solitary voices in a few remote places, disconnected with each other, asked for some feeble concessions for the people. I have lived to see the whole of the educated people of India united by one common aim, striving for one common object, demanding that priceless boon of Self-Government which no civilised Government can for ever deny to a civilised nation. I have heard the same note sounded in Madras and in Bombay, in Calcutta and in Lucknow; I have seen the best, the foremost, the most moderate and thoughtful men in India banded together to obtain for their countrymen a real share in the administration of their own concerns. You cannot travel in any part or province of India, you cannot visit any town or village in India, where the engrossing idea of the most influential and best educated men is not the idea of progress and Self Government. And this idea which pervades tens of thousands to-day is spreading to hundreds of thousands and to millions. Do you think this fact has no significance? Do you think that the spread of this feeling, this idea, this ambition, among the entire body of our educated men,—which has taken place within our own memory,—means nothing? Why, gentlemen, I see in this one

fact the strongest promise for the future, the strongest guarantee for administrative reform and political advancement. It is this slow, silent, steady, irresistible advance which makes nations,—not particular Acts of legislation or measures of administration. The most liberal Acts would be useless and valueless and even hurtful if we had no strength, no faith, no capacity of progress. The most retrograde Acts will fail to impede us, if we have trust and faith in ourselves, if we are true to our country and our cause.

EXHORTATION TO HIS COUNTRYMEN.

Therefore, my friends, and countrymen, my first and last word to you is this : Let us have faith in ourselves ! Our future depends on us ; our fate is in our own hands ; our destiny rests on our labours ! Do not, for one moment, despond, for despondency in such a cause is a sin. Do not be intemperate and violent, for hysteric spasms are the signs of weakness, not of strength. Strong in our determination, calm in our conviction, let us speak temperately, clearly, and unmistakably ; and let us work steadily and silently, swerving neither to the right nor to the left from the path of our duty to our country.

Gentlemen, we have candid friends who are always telling us that our agitation is useless and futile ; that our activity does more harm than good ; that our endeavours had better be abandoned. But the path which they thus point out to us is not the path of progress, but the path of death ! The remedy which

these physicians prescribe is that the patient, in order to be cured, should commit suicide ! If you ever study the 'Economic History of India during the last 150 years, you will clearly comprehend how much we have lost in every way by our inactivity in the past. And if you have watched carefully the course of recent events, you will understand how much of our economic disasters at the present time is due to the exclusion of the people from all share in the management of their own concerns.

GOVERNMENT BY CO-OPERATION.

There never has been, and there never can be, any good Government in any great and civilised country without the help and the co-operation of the people themselves. And to advise us to refrain from all endeavours to secure self-Government for India, is to perpetuate that economic distress and suffering and misery which unhappily distinguishes India at the present day among all great and civilised country in the earth. No gentlemen, our duty demands it, the good of our country requires it, and the prosperity of British Rule depends on it, that we should have some real share in the administration of our own concerns.

OUR DESTINY IS IN OUR HANDS.

For, myself, I would rather that we should endeavour and fail, than not endeavour at all. It is national life to pursue great and worthy objects ; it is national death to stand still and stagnate. But with us, at the present moment, it is not a question of failure ; it is a question

of certain triumph in the end. We may be beaten back, once and again ; we may labour a whole life-time without attaining our end ; but, rest assured, the endeavour will not be made in vain. Our sons will press forward when we sink in the struggle ; the cause of our country will prosper when our ashes are cold ; and before half a century is over, before a quarter of this new century is over, the people of India will have secured a real and valuable share in the administration of their own affairs,—like all the great and civilised nations of the earth. Let us have faith in ourselves, let us be true to ourselves, and our political future is assured, our destiny is in our own hands.

THE LAND ASSESSMENT RESOLUTION.

Gentlemen, I thank you again for the welcome you have accorded to us on our arrival in India. In the few words I have addressed to you I have purposely refrained from alluding to the important Resolution which the Government of India have recorded on the subject of the Indian land revenue. I feel greatly honoured by the reference which has been made to my humble work in this very important Resolution ; and the courtesy with which His Excellency's Government has dealt with my suggestions almost disarms criticism. The paper was placed in my hands only this morning, and I have not read even a tenth part of the Resolution yet, and you will pardon me therefore if I am wholly unable on the present occasion to express any opinion on this most important subject. I shall conclude by reiterating my

thanks to the Government of India for the earnest attention which they have bestowed on this subject which is all important in reference to the economic condition of the people of India.

XIV. FIRST REPLY TO LORD CURZON'S LAND RESOLUTION.

[Appeared in the "Pioneer" March 12, 1902]

SIR—A SERIES of Letters on the land tax in the different provinces of India were addressed by the present writer to Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India, in the course of 1900, and were subsequently published under the title of "Open Letters to Lord Curzon on Famines and Land Assessments in India." The views expressed in my Letters were also the views of many distinguished Englishmen who had retired after long and meritorious work in India; and a joint Memorial was submitted towards the close of 1900 to the Secretary of State for India. Among the signatories were the Right Hon'ble Sir Richard Garth, late Chief Justice of Bengal, Sir John Jardine, late Judge of the High Court of Bombay, Mr. R. K. Puckle, C. S. I., late Director of Revenue Settlement in Madras, Mr. H. J. Reynolds, C. S. I., late Revenue Secretary of Bengal, Mr. A. Rogers, late Member of Council in Bombay, and Mr. J. H. Garstin, late Member of Council in Madras. I betray no confidence in informing you that the draft of the Memorial was made by the most experienced revenue officer among us, Mr. Puckle, and that his draft was adopted with some slight modifications after several conferences.

The Secretary of State forwarded this Memorial to.

the Government of India for consideration, and Lord Curzon's very able Resolution on the subject has just appeared.

Lord Curzon has approached the subject with a statesmanlike conviction of its vast and national importance. He has obtained reports from the Local Governments of the different Provinces; he has recognised the question as transcending the sphere of party or sectional controversy; and he has dealt with his critics with that courtesy which is a part of him. A few extracts from the opening paragraphs of the Resolution will indicate the spirit in which the Viceroy has approached the subject :—

“The Government of India welcomed the opportunity thus afforded to them of instituting renewed enquiries into a matter that has, for more than a century, been the subject of anxious discussion. The well-being of the agricultural community in India, constituting as it does so overwhelming a proportion of the entire population of the Indian Continent, and contributing so large a quota to the Indian revenues, cannot fail to be to the Government a matter of the most intimate concern; nor can it be denied that upon the incidence of the land revenue collections must the prosperity of those classes in a great measure depend. The question may be recognised, therefore, as one of the highest national importance, transcending the sphere of party or sectional controversy, and demanding at once the most exhaustive scrutiny and the most liberal treatment.”

If prevention of the inevitable consequences of

drought be an ideal incapable of attainment, mitigation is manifestly an object worthy of the closest attention, of the Government. It cannot but be their desire that assessments should be equitable in character and moderate in incidence, and there should be left to the proprietor or to the cultivator of the soil—as the case may be—that margin of profit that will enable him to save in ordinary seasons, and to meet the strain of, exceptional misfortune.”

In these passages, the Government of India have fully recognised the cardinal principle which I have urged so often in recent years that, in an agricultural country like India, the prosperity and well being of the nation greatly depend on the incidence of the land revenue being moderate and equitable; and that land assessments should be so made as to leave to the proprietor or the cultivator of the soil a margin of profit which will enable him to save in ordinary years to meet the strain of exceptional bad harvests. I could not wish for a more emphatic confirmation of the opinions which I have so frequently advanced; and I gratefully acknowledge that there is no difference, in principle, between the views I have urged and the views so authoritatively laid down in this Government Resolution. And if I still press for land reforms in India, it is because the prevailing practice in India is *not* in conformity with this principle; the incidence of land revenue is *not* moderate and equitable; and a sufficient margin is *not* left to landlords and cultivators to meet the strain of occasional bad harvests,

The Permanent Settlement.—The question of permanent settlements does not arise in this discussion. Believing as I do, that a permanent settlement of the land revenues would be in the highest degree beneficial to the people, and would add to their wealth, prosperity, and staying power, I nevertheless refrained from urging such a settlement in my Open Letters, because the India Office had rejected the proposal so late as 1883. And the retired officers who submitted their Memorial to the Secretary of State did not ask for a permanent settlement. We asked for such concessions as were probable, and were consistent with the present land policy of the India Office and the Indian Government. Nevertheless, Lord Curzon has, in his Resolution, dwelt at considerable length on the question of permanent settlements, and the following extracts from his Resolution will explain His Excellency's views:—

"The Government of India indeed know of no ground whatever for the contention that Bengal has been saved from famine by the permanent settlement, a contention which appears to them to be disproved by history, and they are not, therefore, disposed to attach much value to predictions as to the benefits that might have ensued had a similar settlement been extended elsewhere."

"As regards the condition of cultivators in Bengal, who are the tenants of the land owners instituted as a class in the last century by the British Government, there is still less ground for the contention that their position, owing to the permanent settlements, has been converted into one of exceptional comfort and prosperity. It is

precisely because this was not the case, and because, so far from being generously treated by the zemindars, the Bengal cultivator was rack-rented, impoverished, and oppressed, that the Government of India felt compelled to intervene on his behalf, and by the series of legislative measures that commenced with the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1859 and culminated in the Act of 1885, to place him in the position of greater security which he now enjoys. To confound this legislation with the permanent settlement, and to ascribe even in part to the latter the benefits which it had conspicuously failed to confer, and which would never have accrued but for the former, is strangely to misread history."

In other words, Lord Curzon holds *firstly*, that the permanent settlement of Bengal has not prevented the worst effects of famines; and *secondly*, that the prosperous condition of the Bengal cultivator is due, not to the permanent settlement, but to the land legislation of 1859 and 1885. An examination of the facts of the case does not support His Excellency's views.

Bengal in 1770 was visited by the worst famine that has ever afflicted India, and one-third of the population of that rich and fertile province, estimated at ten millions or more, was swept away within twelve months. Bengal was permanently settled in 1793; and since that date famines have been rare in Bengal, and *there has been no famine within the permanently settled tracts causing any loss of life*. The agricultural people are generally prosperous and resourceful; and with some help from the Government they have tided over the worst calamities without

the most lamentable result of famines,—a ghastly tale of deaths. They very reverse of this has been the case in every other province of India not permanently settled. The agricultural people are so resourceless and impoverished, that the most liberal relief measures have failed to save lives; and the uniform story of deaths by the million has been told in every famine year. These are facts that tell their own tale. Within a period of over a hundred years there has been no famine in permanently settled Bengal causing loss of life; while loss of life has been lamentable and frequent in every other province of India in spite of all relief operations. The contention, therefore, that the permanent settlement has saved Bengal from the worst results of famines is not disproved,* but proved by history, as completely and unanswerably as any economic fact can be proved.

But it has been urged in the second place that the comparative prosperity of the Bengal cultivators is due not to the permanent settlement but to later legislation, *i. e.* to the Rent Act passed between 1859 and 1885. I myself rendered some humble assistance in the framing of the Rent Act of 1885, and my services on the occasion were kindly acknowledged in the *Calcutta Gazette* by the then Revenue Secretary of Bengal, Mr. Antony MacDonnell, now Sir Antony MacDonnell, the most distinguished Indian administrator of the present generation. I shall be the last person, therefore, to deny that the Rent Acts of Bengal were needed for the protection of cultivators, or that they completed the good work done by the permanent settlement. But to maintain that the

permanent settlement did no good until the Rent Acts were passed is to discredit the testimony of the ablest officers and the most distinguished statesmen who lived and worked in India during three generations. Their recorded opinions have been quoted on my work on the *Economic History of British India*, which is expected to appear next month, and need not be fully recapitulated here. There were men among them like Colebrooke, who had served in India for over forty years, who had known Bengal before the permanent settlement and after, and who declared in 1808 (long before the Rent Acts were passed) that "the reviving prosperity of the country, its increased wealth and rapid improvements are unquestionably due to the permanent settlement." There were thoughtful observers like Bishop Heber who wrote in 1826 (long before the Rent Acts) that "in Bengal where independent of its exuberant fertility there is a permanent settlement, famine is unknown." Lord William Bentinck, as Governor of Madras, recommended a permanent Ryotwari settlement; and Sir Thomas Munro insisted on this all through his life, and stated before the House of Commons that there was no difference between the Zemindari settlement of Bengal and the Ryotwari settlement of Madras as regards permanency. One Governor-General, the Marquis of Wellesley, was so convinced of the benefits of the permanent settlement that he pledged the word of the British Government, in 1803 and 1805, by Legislative Acts and Proclamations, to extend it to Northern India. His successor Lord Minto recorded his opinion in 1813 that "to ameliorate generally the

conditions of the natives, it is our firm conviction that no arrangement or measure will tend so speedily and effectually to the accomplishment of those important objects as the establishment of a permanent settlement." Lord Minto's successor, the Marquis of Hastings, once more urged in 1820, that "it is, then, our unanimous opinion that the system of a permanent settlement of the land revenue, either upon the principle of a fixed *jumma*, or of an assessment determinable by a fixed and invariable rate, ought to be extended to the ceded and conquered Provinces." The Directors of the East India Company rejected the proposals of the three successive Governor-Generals, and broke the pledge given by Legislative Acts and Proclamations, not because the permanent settlement in Bengal had borne no fruit, but because a trading Company would sacrifice nothing of their own prospective profits and dividends for the happiness of the people of India. The Company was abolished in 1858; the first Bengal Rent Act was passed by Lord Canning in 1859; and the same Viceroy urged once more the extension of a permanent settlement to all provinces of India for the prevention of such famines as he had witnessed in Northern India in 1860. Sir Charles Wood, then Secretary of State for India, (afterwards Lord Halifax) accepted the proposal and described it as "a measure dictated by sound policy, and calculated to accelerate the development of the resources of India, and to ensure in the highest degree, the welfare and contentment of all classes of Her Majesty's subjects in that country." Sir John Lawrence, (afterwards Lord

Lawrence) wrote in the same year, "I recommend a perpetual settlement, because I am persuaded that however much the country has of late years improved, its resources will be still more rapidly developed by the limitation of the Government demand." And Sir Stafford Northcote, Secretary of State for India, approved of the proposal in 1867 "in consideration of the great importance of connecting the interests of the proprietors of the land with the stability of the British Government."

Such were the opinions of three generations of distinguished administrators and able statesmen in India, — of men who built up the Empire, and valued the contentment and happiness of the people. But unfortunately, the desire to promote the welfare of the people did not ultimately shape the action of the Government; the desire to conciliate the people lost its force when the empire became stable; the desire to continuously add to the land revenue prevailed; and the proposal of extending the permanent settlement into all provinces of India was rejected by the India Office in 1883.

Since then the Indian Government have tried to persuade themselves, and to persuade others, that the permanent settlement is a useless and a hurtful institution. English landed proprietors, who themselves enjoy and appreciate the benefits of a permanent settlement in England under Pitt's Act of 1798, learn to repeat, when they arrive in India, that what is good for themselves is not good for the people of India. Young men, fresh from schools, when they come out as

administrators to India, learn to sneer at the opinions of Cornwallis and Sir Thomas Munro, of Wellesley and Lord Hastings, of Canning and Lawrence, of Lord Halifax and Sir Stafford Northcote, as the "school of thought" of an earlier period which is now out of date and out of fashion. And the people of India are asked to believe, with all the eloquence of official persuasion, that the grapes which are now placed beyond their reach are sour, and that they will thrive best under a continuous increase of the State demand from the soil. All this is very intelligible, however sad. But the impartial student of history will occasionally turn from the made-to-order opinions of modern times to the freer discussions of past generations; to the opinions of men who watched the operation of the permanent settlement from the earliest period, judged its merit from the highest stand point, viz. that of the happiness of the people of India, and recommended its extension with greater freedom than has been enjoyed by any Viceroy since 1883.

Remedies proposed in the memorial of 1900.—But as has been stated before, the question of a permanent settlement does not arise in the present discussion. The extension of the permanent settlement to other provinces of India was not urged in my Open Letters to Lord Curzon; and it was not recommended in the Memorial submitted to the Secretary of State for India in 1900. The Memorialists made some exceedingly moderate proposals for placing reasonable limits on the land tax, limits which are consistent with the present land policy.

of the India Office and the Indian Government. The proposals were : (1) Half net produce rule for cultivators paying the land-tax direct. (2) Half rental rule for landlords paying the land tax. (3) Thirty years settlement rule. (4) Limitation of enhancements from cultivators to the ground of increase in prices. (5) Limitation of cesses to 10 per cent. of the land revenue

With your permission I propose to examine on a future occasion how far Lord Curzon has found it possible to accept these proposals, and on what points His Excellency has not found it possible to adopt them.

XV. SECOND REPLY TO LORD CURZON'S LAND RESOLUTION.

[*Appeared in the "Pioneer," March 28, 1902*]

SIR—In my last letter which appeared in your issue of the 12th March, I made mention of the five rules which were suggested in the memorial of 1900, to limit the land tax within reasonable and intelligible limits. I propose in the present letter briefly to examine how these rules have been dealt with in the Government Resolution.

(1) *Half net produce from cultivators*—The first rule suggested by the memorialists was worded thus : "Where the land revenue is paid directly by the cultivators, as in most parts of Madras and Bombay, the Government demand should be limited to 50 per cent of the value of the net produce after a liberal deduction for cultivation expenses has been made, and should not ordinarily exceed one-fifth of the gross produce even in those parts of the country where in theory one-half the net is assumed to approximate to one-third the gross produce."

The first part of the rule, limiting the Government demand to one-half the net produce, is based on Sir Charles Wood's despatch of 1864, and is accepted, in theory, by the Madras Government "It is now forty years," says Lord Curzon's Resolution, "since the alternative standard of half the net produce was

introduced in Madras." The Memorialists, therefore, suggested no new rule, but only recommended that the accepted rule should be fairly and universally worked wherever the land tax was paid by the cultivators direct. In Bombay, no endeavours are made to limit the land tax to one-half the net produce; in Madras the calculations are often so made that, according to the testimony of many revenue officers, the land tax approximates sometimes to the whole of the net produce. What the Memorialists urged was that the rule, accepted in theory, should be strictly and universally carried out in practice; and that the cultivator should be saved, in every single case, from an assessment exceeding one-half the net produce of his field. His Excellency the Viceroy must feel, as strongly as we do, that such protection is needed by each individual cultivator; but nevertheless the Government Resolution provides no such protection, and leaves the incidence of the land tax on the peasant proprietors of Madras and Bombay as uncertain as before.

The second part of the rule quoted was meant as a further limit, and provides that the land tax, estimated at half the net produce, should not exceed the maximum of one-fifth the gross produce. Lord Curzon has declined to adopt this limit also, and deals with the proposal in these words: "The gross produce standard recommended by the Memorialists would, if systematically applied, lead to an increase of assessment all round. The Report from the Central Provinces shows that the proportion to produce of the gross rental ranges from one-sixth to

one-fourteenth, and that the enforcement of any such standard would double the liabilities of the raiyats. The Bengal Report gives statistical reasons for believing that rents are generally much below one-fifth of the gross produce, and indicates that raiyats on Government temporarily settled estates are, judged by this standard, better off than under proprietors with a permanent settlement. The Madras reply says that 'if Government took one-fifth of the real gross produce from its raiyats, it would fully double its present land revenue. The Governor-General in Council is unable to accept a proposal which could only have consequences the very opposite of those which are anticipated by its authors.'

The reference to the tenants of private landlords in Bengal and the Central Provinces is out of place, because the rule framed by the Memorialists was intended for tracts "where the land revenue is paid directly by the cultivators, as in most parts of Madras and Bombay." Tenants of private landlords are protected by the Rent Acts of the different provinces, and the more complete the protection, the more thorough will be the support which those Acts will receive from all true well-wishers of Indian cultivators. In the rule now under consideration the Memorialists explicitly confined themselves to the cases of the cultivators who paid the land tax direct to Government, and it is a matter of regret that the rule framed by them has been completely misapprehended by Government. For the Memorialists did not suggest one-fifth the gross produce as the standard of land tax; they suggested it as the maximum which should never

be exceeded. As far back as 1883, one-fourth the gross produce was suggested as the maximum rent payable by Bengal raiyats to their private landlords, and in reducing this proportion to one-fifth Sir Antony MacDonnell, then Revenue Secretary of Bengal, recorded the following remarks: "It was never pretended that all landlords were justified in claiming one-fourth of the produce as rent, or that the proportion should be looked on otherwise than as the farthest limit which under circumstances most favourable to the landlord his claims might reach. . . The result of the information collected by these officers was to induce the Lieutenant Governor to advocate the substitution of one fifth for one-fourth of the gross produce in the Tenancy Bill now before the Legislative Council of India." The Memorialists had this rule before them when they framed a similar rule for tenants paying direct to Government; and in suggesting the maximum of one fifth the produce, they did not pretend that "the proportion should be looked on otherwise than as the farthest limit which under circumstances most favourable" to the Government, its claim might reach.

As a matter of fact, Government very often exceeds this limit. It was in evidence before the Famine Commission of 1880 that the land tax in some Talukas in Madras was as high as 31 per cent of the gross produce; and the Madras Board of Revenue now explains that this high rate referred to a small area, and that "a truer idea is given by the figures 12 to 28 per cent." It was in evidence before the Famine Commission of 1900 that

the land tax in some districts of Gujerat was 20 per cent. of the gross produce ; and it is obvious, therefore, that this full rate must have been exceeded in many particular villages and Talukas in those districts. The object of the Memorialists was to prevent such excessive assessments in any single case. Their intention was that the land tax, necessarily varying according to the different qualities of the soil, should in no case exceed 20 per cent. of the gross produce. They hoped that the maximum limit proposed by Sir Antony MacDonnell for the tenants of the Bengal zemindars would be fixed by the Government for rayats paying the land tax to the State direct. The Government has misapprehended this suggested rule ; has described the evil consequences of another rule which the Memorialists did not propose ; and has declined to place any maximum limit on the land tax payable by cultivators. I deplore this decision. It was eagerly hoped that the revelations made by the Famine Commissions of 1880 and 1901 would induce Lord Curzon to place some clear, workable, intelligible maximum limit on the State demand from the present proprietors of India. Not only is it necessary that Revenue and Settlement Officers should be moderate in their demands, but it is also necessary—in India more than in any other country in the world,—that the cultivators should know and understand clearly what the State demands, and what they are entitled to keep. Uncertainty in the State demand paralyses agriculture. And this fatal uncertainty will hang on the agricultural industry of India until some future ruler, in closer touch with the people and

with a firmer determination to protect them at all costs, will declare to them in language which they can understand, how much the Government claims from the produce of their fields, and how much is assured to them, untouched by the Settlement and the Revenue Officer.

(2) *Half the rental from landlords*—The second rule suggested by the Memorialists was thus worded; "Where the land revenue is paid by landlords, the principle adopted in the Saharanpur rules of 1855, whereby the revenue demand is limited to one-half of the actual rent or assets of such landlords, should be universally applied." Rule XXXVI of the Saharanpur Rule laid down that "the Government have determined so far to modify the rule laid down in para 52 of the Directions to Settlement Officers as to limit the demand of State to 50 per cent or one-half of the average net assets" Revenue Officers have from time to time sought to place on these clear words an interpretation which they do not bear on the face of them, and have sought to realise as land revenue one-half of the prospective and potential rental of estates. Mr J. B. Fuller, who was Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of the Central Provinces in 1887 described such procedure (in his letter of the 18th May, 1887) as an attempt "to evade the operation of the half-assets rule" By his singular ability and talents, as well as by his unsurpassed experience in settlement work, Mr J. B. Fuller has deservedly won the high rank which he now occupies. But alas! one of the first duties of his high office has been an attempt to justify in 1902 what he himself described in 1887 as an evasion of a Government

rule by Government officers. As Secretary to the Government of India, he signs Lord Curzon's Resolution, and he writes that "the construction placed on the word assets at the time, and for many years later, permitted the Settlement Officer to look beyond the actual cash rental, and to take into consideration prospective increases of income." I would not like to compare these words too closely with what Mr. Fuller wrote in 1887. It is pleasanter to know that the old practice, whether an evasion of rules or a misapprehension of them, has now been abandoned. Lord Curzon proceeds to say :—

"In the North-Western and other zemindari provinces prospective assets have been excluded from consideration. . . In the resettlement of Oudh, now on the point of completion, the average falls below 47 per cent. . . Already as pointed out in the Report from the Central Provinces three of the districts in the whole of the Provinces have recently been reassessed . . at less than 50 per cent. of the rental . . In Orissa the gradual reduction of the government proportion has been even more striking. In 1822 it was authoritatively declared to be 83·3 of the assets, in 1833 it was lowered to 70·75 per cent., in 1840 to 65 per cent. with a permissive reduction to 60 per cent., while in the resettlement just concluded it has been brought down to 54 per cent."

I can scarcely flatter myself that His Excellency meant the last words as a compliment to me personally : but I may say, in passing, that the last resettlement of Orissa went on under my supervision in 1896 ; and that my recommendations were before the Government when the

settlement was finally concluded in 1897. Generally speaking, the Government of India recognises the rule proposed in the Memorial without formally laying it down. "While the standard of 50 per cent. has nowhere been laid down as a fixed and immutable prescription, there has been and there is, a growing tendency throughout temporarily settled zemindari districts to approximate to it." The Memorialists may feel satisfied that this virtually proclaims the abandonment of the practice of assessing estates on prospective rentals, or at over half the rental; and they are grateful for this to Lord Curzon.

(3) *Settlements for thirty years*—The third rule suggested by the Memorialists was thus worded: "That no revision of the land tax of any province or part thereof should be made within thirty years of the expiration of any former revision." The name of Lord William Bentinck is honoured in India for doing away with short settlements and introducing settlements for thirty years. The great settlement of Northern India, effected between 1833 and 1849 was for thirty years. The first great settlement of Bombay, effected in 1837 was for thirty years. Settlements made in Madras have been for thirty years during over half a century. The Orissa settlement of 1837 was for thirty years, and when the period expired in 1867, Lord Lawrence, then Viceroy of India, continued the old settlement for another thirty years instead of harassing the people with a fresh settlement in the year of the Orissa famine. The advantages of long settlements are obvious. In spite of all precau-

tions, every re-settlement is a harassment of the people ; short settlements take away all motives for improvement ; long settlements give some assurance and encouragement to the people, and promote enterprise in the landed classes. These facts were forgotten or ignored in the last years of the 19th century ; and in 1895, Lord George Hamilton ruled that while thirty years should continue to be the ordinary term of settlement in Madras, Bombay, and the N. W. Provinces, twenty years should be the general rule for the Punjab and the Central Provinces. Against this ungenerous departure from a healthy rule I raised my voice in my Open Letter to Lord Curzon on the Central Provinces ; and it is against this departure that the rule proposed by the Memorialists is meant to be a protest. The Government Resolution defends this departure in the following words ; "Where the land is fully cultivated, rents fall, and agricultural production not liable to violent oscillations, it is sufficient if the demands of Government are re-adjusted once in thirty years, *i. e.* once in the lifetime of each generation. Where the opposite conditions prevail, where there are much waste land, low rents and a fluctuating cultivation, or again where there is a rapid development of resources owing to the construction of roads, railways, or canals, to an increase of population or to a rise in prices, the postponement of resettlement for so long a period is both injurious to the people who are unequal to the strain of a sharp enhancement, and unjust to the general tax-payer who is temporarily deprived of the additional revenue to which he has legitimate claim."

A moment's examination will show that this defence of Lord George Hamilton's action of 1895 is unsound. The Punjab and the Central Provinces were not less fully cultivated and not less developed in 1895, after half a century of British rule, than the Bombay Province was in 1837, after twenty years of British rule, or the N. W. Provinces were in 1833, after thirty years of British rule. It is possible that the Government of India sees this ; for the closing sentence of Lord Curzon's Resolution on this subject is hopeful. His Excellency writes : "Whether these considerations justifying a shorter term of settlement than thirty years apply with sufficient force to the Punjab and the Central Provinces at the present time, and if they do apply at the present time, whether the force of their application will diminish with the passage of time, are weighty questions to which careful attention will be given by the Government of India upon suitable occasions." The last words inspire me with hope ; and if Lord Curzon succeeds, before laying down his office, to extend the thirty years' rule to the Punjab and the Central Provinces, His Excellency will have satisfied the Memorialists, and earned the gratitude of millions of cultivators in those Provinces.

(4) *Limitation of enhancements from cultivators* — The fourth rule proposed by the Memorialists was thus worded : "Where the land-revenue is paid by the cultivators direct to the Government, there should be no increase in the assessment except in cases where the land has increased in value (1) in consequence of im-

provements in irrigation works carried out at the expense of the Government, or (2) on account of a rise in the value of produce based on the average prices of the thirty years next preceding such revision "

The object of the Memorialists was to define the grounds on which the land tax paid direct by cultivators would be enhanced. As between private landlords and their tenants the Rent Acts of Bengal lay down clearly and definitely the grounds of enhancement, and Courts of Justice will allow no enhancement of rent except on those specific grounds. As between the State and the peasant proprietors no such definite grounds of enhancement of the land tax are laid down, and no appeal to Courts of Justice is allowed. The result is that the cultivators paying the land tax live in a state of perpetual uncertainty, they do not know on what grounds the State will claim an enhancement at the next settlement, they do not comprehend to what extent the enhancement will be made. As I am writing these lines, I find from the reply of a Member of the Madras Council that in the recent Malabar settlement, the assessment was raised 85 per cent. at Palghat, 55 per cent. at Calicut, 84 per cent. at Kurumbranad, and 105 per cent. at Walavanad. Such enhancements, made on grounds which the cultivators never fully comprehend, must deaden agricultural enterprise, and keep the cultivating population in a state of chronic poverty.

As far back as 1882, the Marquis of Ripon endeavoured to remove this uncertainty, and made a rule, with the concurrence of the Madras Government, that

in districts which had been surveyed and settled, there should be no increase in the land revenue, except on the equitable ground of a rise in prices. Lord Ripon left India in December, 1884, and in January, 1885, the India Office cancelled his rule and plunged the tenantry of India once more into a state of uncertainty. It was the object of the Memorialists to remove this deadening uncertainty ; to place the tenants of the State in the same position in which the tenants of private landlords have been placed ; and to let them know the clear and definite grounds on which the State claimed an enhancement of the revenue at resettlements. They therefore framed a rule similar to Lord Ripon's rule, and they hoped and believed that Lord Curzon would see the necessity of extending to the cultivators, paying revenue to the State, something of that protection which has been extended by law to cultivators, paying rents to private landlords. Lord Curzon's decision on this point is disappointing.

"To deny the right of the State" writes Lord Curzon "to a share in any increase in values except those which could be inferred from the general table of price statistics, in itself a most fallacious and partial test, would be to surrender to a number of individuals an increment which they had not themselves earned."

This decision is disappointing. Increase in values is indicated by the table of prices. Lord Ripon's rule suggested, and the rule framed by the Memorialists also suggested, that the Government should obtain an enhancement of revenue when there was such increase in prices. And

they reasonably urged that the Government should claim no increase when prices had not increased. All the real advantages which the cultivator secures from new roads or lines of railway are shown in a rise in prices. I was a District Officer in Midnapur ten years ago, when there was no railway line in the District. I am writing the present letter from the same place, which is the now connected by rail with Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras. And prices have increased owing to this connection. A high official who has been here all these years informs me that rice was selling at 16 seers the rupee ten years ago, and is now selling at 12½ seers the rupee. When such increase takes place in temporarily settled tracts, it is a legitimate ground for enhancement of revenue at the next settlement. When no such increase has taken place, the cultivators have derived no advantages; and to claim an increase of revenue at a settlement is to drive them deeper into debt and poverty. And not to define, clearly and intelligibly, the grounds on which the State is entitled to an increase of revenue from lands, is the most efficacious method that human ingenuity could devise for keeping them eternally in the gloom of uncertainty and the slough of despond.

(5) *Limitation of Cesses.*—The fifth and last rule proposed by the Memorialists was worded thus: "That a limit be fixed in each Province, beyond which it may not be permissible to surcharge the land tax with local cesses. We are of opinion that the Bengal rate of 6½ per cent. is a fair one; and that in no cases should the rate exceed ten per cent."

In my Open Letter to Lord Curzon on the Central Provinces, I made the mistake of stating that local cases amounting to $12\frac{1}{2}$ per cent were assessed on the rental. The Government Resolution on the Nagpur Settlement, published a year ago, corrected my mistake, and pointed out that the cesses amounting to $12\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. were assessed on the revenue, and therefore came to about $6\frac{1}{4}$ per cent. on the rental. The Memorialists had the facts and figures for Bengal Madras, Bombay and other provinces before them, but their rule is somewhat obscurely worded. What they meant was that in a permanently settled province like Bengal, where the cesses are imposed on the rental, the rate of $6\frac{1}{4}$ per cent. on the rental is fair, and that in temporarily settled provinces, like Bombay, Madras and the N.-W. Provinces, the cesses, calculated on the land revenue, should not exceed ten per cent of the land revenue. The decision of the Government in this subject is stated in the following words, and gives us some grounds for hope:—

“The general conclusion of the Government of India is that there is no reason for thinking that local taxation if properly distributed is on the whole either onerous or excessive. But there are grounds for suspecting that the distribution is often unfair. . . The question presents itself whether it is not better, as opportunities occur, to mitigate imposts which are made to press upon the cultivating classes more severely than the law intended. The Government of India would be glad to see their way to offer such relief.”

I have now travelled over the entire ground covered

by the Memorial, and have shewn how the five proposals made therein have been dealt with by the Government. Lord Curzon has approached the subject with a statesmanlike conviction of its importance. He has virtually affirmed the principle, which we urged, that in temporarily settled estates held by landlords, the Government revenue should generally be limited to one-half the *actual* rental. He has given us hopes that the rule of thirty years settlement, which we urged, will be extended to the Punjab and the Central Provinces. And he has also given us hopes that the pressure of local cesses will be mitigated. If to all this His Excellency had added some clear and workable limits to the Government demand in Ryotwari tracts, and defined some intelligible and equitable grounds for enhancement of revenue in such tracts, the Government Resolution would have given to millions of cultivators the assurance and the protection they need so much. The subject is one of national importance, and not one for sectional controversy. Personally, I have never written or spoken on the subject, and I will never write or speak on the subject, merely to carry on an idle debate or to prolong a needless controversy. I have felt, and I feel, that the happiness and well-being of an agricultural nation largely depend on some clear, definite, intelligible, and workable limits being placed on the land tax in Ryotwari tracts, as limits have been placed on Zemindari tracts by the Saharanpur rules. And the land question in India will not be solved, and India will know no rest, till this is done.

XVI. THIRD REPLY TO LORD CURZON'S LAND RESOLUTION.

[*Appeared in the "Hindu" March 29, 1902*]

ON landing at Madras, last month, I saw for the first time the Viceroy's famous Resolution on the Indian Land Revenue, published in January last. And while I sincerely appreciated the courtesy which distinguished that document, I was unable to agree in many of the conclusions to which His Excellency had arrived. The ground covered by the Resolution, however, was so vast that I found it impossible to touch on all the points within the limits of my previous letters. I propose in the present letter to deal with some remarkable statements which have found a place in the Resolution, and with some remedial measures which Lord Curzon had announced.

Famines and the Land Revenue—The Governor-General in Council is unable to accept the theory that: "Were the assessments diminished, famine would be less frequent, or that at least when they do occur, they would cause infinitely less suffering." And yet if we take entire provinces and large tracts of country into consideration, this theory is proved beyond a question. Permanently settled Bengal is lightly taxed, and has known no famine attended with loss of life since 1793. Madras and Bombay under the Ryotwari system bear a heavier and more uncertain land-tax,

and the worst famines during the last quarter of the century have been in Madras and Bombay. The Central Provinces had its assessment enormously increased at the last Settlement, and suffered from a desolating famine within a few years. In Northern India the cruel land assessments of the early years of the 19th century were reduced by Bentinck and Dalhousie, and famines within the present generation have been less fatal than those of 1837 and 1860. No statesman outside India questions the theory that moderate taxation helps the people, and heavy taxation impoverishes them. We all hope that Lord Curzon will take his place as a statesman in England after he retires from India; and if he does not accept a peerage, he will seek the votes of some constituency to enter the Parliament again. Will His Excellency promise his constituents that he will keep up a heavy rate of taxation, because, according to his Indian theory, heavy taxes do not interfere with the prosperity of the people? It would be interesting to watch the result of the Election.

But let us confine ourselves to India. If moderating the taxes and rents does not improve the condition and the staying power of the people, what was the object of the long line of statesmen from the time of Munro and Elphinstone in pressing for moderation? Why did Lord William Bentinck reduce the land revenue to two-thirds the rental, and Lord Dalhousie reduce it further to one-half the rental, if such reduction was a needless and foolish sacrifice of the Government revenue? Why did Lord Canning place restrictions on enhancements by

private landlords in Bengal, and why has that policy been followed by Rent Acts in every province of India, if it is a useless loss to landlords and does not benefit the tenants? British legislation has striven since 1859 to place equitable and intelligible limits on the power of private landlords to enhance rents; and yet the moment we propose such limits on the power of the State in provinces where the State is virtually the landlord, a cry is raised in the official world, and even the Viceroy permits the statement to find a place in his Resolution that to diminish assessments would not promote the prosperity, and the staying power of the people.

Money-lenders and the land revenue. Another fallacy which has found place in the Resolution is this: "Neither in the past nor in the present circumstances of the country can any warrant be found for the belief that the revenue so relinquished by Government would constitute a famine relief fund in the hands of the people. Experience has shewn that excessive leniency of the kind in question reacts prejudicially upon the industry of the agricultural classes, while it encourages the transfer of soil to moneylenders and middlemen."

The experience of every revenue officer in Bengal directly contradicts this theory. Within my memory,—within the last 43 years since the first Rent Act was passed in Bengal,—the indebtedness of the Bengal cultivators and the power of the moneylenders have decreased in consequence of the provisions against the undue enhancement of rents; and this has been so even in Behar since the passing of the last Rent Act. It is

excessive assessment and rigorous collection, not leniency, which drive the cultivators to serfdom under moneylenders, and this is proved by the report of the last Famine Commission.

In 1876 a cyclone and storm-wave destroyed the crops of many districts in Eastern Bengal, and I was sent as a Sub-Divisional officer to an island which had suffered the most. I knew that the people had no food, and I was prepared to open relief operations when needed, without acting in haste. What was my surprise when I found that the people needed no relief and asked for none ! The cultivators had paid light rents for years before, and had invested all their savings in silver jewellery for their women, and in other valuable articles. In the year of disaster they sold their silver things, bought shiploads of imported rice, and helped themselves till the next harvest. A small number of orphans and helpless old men who had lost their relations by the cyclone were relieved ; the mass of the people supported themselves through the crisis. What was this silver jewellery of the cultivators but "a famine relief fund in the hands of the people?" And if the State treats its ryots in Madras and Bombay as leniently as the private landlords treat their cultivators in Eastern Bengal, the ryots of Madras and Bombay would naturally have "a famine relief fund" in their own hands, in some shape or other, for years of drought and distress. For the ryots of Bombay and Madras are not less thrifty and provident, but notoriously more so, than the cultivators of Eastern Bengal. But the State virtually repeats the words of the landlords of the old school :—"Squeeze

the tenants well in order to prevent them, poor things, from getting into bad ways!"

Native Rule and the Land Revenue. Another fallacy which has found place in Lord Curzon's Resolution is that the defects of the present Land Revenue system of India are inherited from the old Native Rule. "The Government of India," says the Resolution, "would not desire to claim for the Land Revenue system of British India an exactitude or freedom from blemish to which it cannot pretend. Historically, it owes its immediate origin to practices inherited from the most decadent period of Native Rule."

The decadent period of Native Rule has many sins to answer for; but in respect of over-assessment of the soil, the East India Company were the worst sinners. This is abundantly manifest from the Blue Books and official records of the early years of the 19th century which I have summarized in my *Economic History of British India*, and need not recapitulate here. It is in evidence that the Company's servants swept aside Village Communities, Jaigirdars, and Polygars, in order to come in direct touch with the cultivators, and they raised a land revenue such as was never known in India before. In Bengal the actual collection during the last three years of the Nawab's administration varied between six and nine million Rupees; in the first year after the Company obtained the Dewani, they screwed up the revenue to nearly 15 million Rupees; and in less than thirty years they made it 27 millions, by 1793. In Bombay the revenue of the territories acquired from

the last Peshwa in 1817 was increased within a few years from 8 millions to 15 millions of Rupees. In Madras, the Company's servants were actually taking about half the produce of the field as *Land Tax* at the very time when, according to the testimony of Dr. Francis Buchanan, private landlords in Bengal were taking less than one-fourth the produce as *Rent*. And in Northern India, the land revenue of the Districts ceded by the Nawab of Oudh in 1801 was raised from 13½ million Rupees to 17 million Rupees in three years.

This policy of continuously screwing up the land revenue to a higher figure than was ever known in India before under any Native Rule, was steadily pursued by the Company's servants under the sanction of the Company's Directors ; and all thoughtful and moderate Englishmen of the time deplored the policy. Verelst, Governor of Bengal, replied in 1768 to the Director's fresh demands for increase by stating that : "It is totally beyond the power of your administration to make any material addition to your rents." Warren Hastings reported in 1772 that : "Notwithstanding the loss of at least one-third of the inhabitants of that province (Bengal) and the consequent decrease of the cultivation, the nett collections of the year 1771 exceeded even those of 1768." Colebrooke, writing in 1808, protested against "grasping at the highest revenue and wringing from our peasants the utmost rent." The Madras Board of Revenue raised its voice in 1818 against "binding the ryot by force to the plough, compelling him to till land acknowledged to the overassessed, dragging him

back if he absconded, * * taking from him all that could be obtained." Bishop Heber, writing in 1826 said : "The peasantry in the Company's Provinces are, on the whole, worse off, poorer, and more dispirited than the subjects of the Native Princes ;" and that "no Native Prince demands the rent which we do." Lieutenant Colonel Briggs, writing in 1830 said that : "A Land Tax like that which now exists in India, professing to absorb the whole of the landlord's rent, was never known under any Government in Europe or Asia." Robert M. Bird, the Father of Land Settlement of Northern India, said before the House of Commons in 1832, that : "In Madras and other places* * the revenue was fixed too high at the beginning, and impoverishes the people." And the Hon'ble Mr. Shore, writing in 1837 said : "Every successive province, as it has fallen into our possession, has been made a field for higher exaction ; and it has always been our boast how greatly we have raised our revenue above that which the Native Rulers were able to extort."

Protection needed in Madras and Bombay. Much has been done to remedy these abuses since the early years of the Company's Rule. Bengal was saved by the Permanent Settlement. Northern India obtained some relief from Lord W. Bentinck's two-third-rental rule, and subsequently from Lord Dalhousie's half-rental rule. The cultivators of Bengal obtained protection from Lord Canning's Rent Act of 1859, and the tenants of private landlords in the different provinces of India have obtained similar protection from the Rent Acts of the different

provinces. But it is a remarkable and a lamentable fact that the Government has not granted to the peasant proprietors of Madras and Bombay the protection which it has granted to the tenants of private landlords under these Rent Acts. The Bengal ryot knows and understands the clear and definite grounds on which his Zemindar may claim an enhancement. The Bombay and Madras ryot does not know and does not understand the grounds on which the State will claim an enhancement at the next revised settlement. The Bengal ryot can reckon beforehand the limits of the Zemindar's claims. The Madras and Bombay ryot cannot calculate beforehand what the Settlement Officer's claims will be. The Bengal ryot can appeal to Civil Courts against unjust claims on the part of his landlord. The Madras and Bombay ryot is allowed no appeal to any independent tribunal against the mistakes of the Settlement or Revenue officer. Certainty and definiteness in the rental make the Bengal ryot confident in his own rights and prompt him to save. Uncertainty and indefiniteness in the State-demand at each revised settlement demoralize the Madras and Bombay ryot and take away from the motive to save. We had hoped that Lord Curzon would on the present occasion introduce some definite rules and limits on the enhancement of revenue in Madras and Bombay, (as Lord Ripon did in 1882), so as to grant to the Madras and Bombay ryot the protection and the assurance which the Bengal ryot enjoys. Lord Curzon has allowed the opportunity to pass, and has not granted the needed protection.

The land question in India will know no satisfactory solution until some future ruler, more in touch with the people, and more truly realizing the position of the cultivating population, will grant to the Madras and Bombay ryot that assurance and protection which the Bengal ryot enjoys, and without which agricultural prosperity is impossible in any country in the world.

Protection granted by Lord Curzon. Three remedial measures are proposed by Lord Curzon. They are (1) progressive and gradual imposition of large enhancements; (2) greater elasticity in the revenue collection; (3) reduction of assessments in case of local deterioration. These remedies are excellent, so far as they go, but they do not go far enough. They will obviate temporary hardship, but will not promote the prosperity of an agricultural nation. Large enhancements should certainly be progressively imposed when made;—but they should *not* be made at all except on these clear grounds and under those strict rules which the Government has provided in the case of private landlords. In the recent Malabar Settlement, the assessment has been raised 85 per cent. at Palghat, 55 per cent. at Calicut, 84 per cent. at Kurumbranad, and 105 per cent. at Walavanad. Private landlords in Bengal stand amazed at these enormous enhancements, and ask themselves under which of the prescribed grounds in the Bengal Rent Act they could induce Courts of Justice to grant them such enhancements of the rental from their ryots! And it is quite clear that if such enhancements are permissible in Madras and

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Bombay, on the opinion of the Settlement Officer, the condition of cultivators can never be other than one of perpetual poverty and wretchedness. Greater elasticity in revenue *collection* is also necessary in hard times, but the revenue *assessment* should be light to enable cultivators to save in good years. To screw up the land-tax to the "full" amount, and then to allow remissions when harvests fail, is to keep cultivators always on the brink of famines and starvation. Lastly, the reduction of assessments in case of local deterioration is of course necessary, or the country will be depopulated ; but will no reduction be made except to prevent depopulation ?

The remedial measures proposed by Lord Curzon indicate the desperate condition of cultivators in Southern India, and the desperate cases in which the Government proposes to relieve them. Wiser statesmanship should go further, and should permanently improve the condition of the cultivators, should give them clear, definite and intelligible rights, and should provide them with a complete protection against enhancement except on clearly defined legal grounds. This is what Lord Canning's Act of 1859 and subsequent Rent Acts have done for the Bengal cultivator. This is what Lord Curzon's Resolution has failed to do for the Madras and Bombay cultivator.

XVII. FOURTH REPLY TO LORD CURZON'S LAND RESOLUTION.

[*Appeared in the Pioneer, April 7, 1902.*]

* * I THANK you for giving me this opportunity of explaining, as briefly as I could, the land policy of the Indian Government, and the reforms suggested by the Memorialists of 1900. After a century and a half of blundering, that policy has crystalised itself into one simple rule :— *The land revenue, where not permanently settled, shall not exceed one half the rental*. This maxim was laid down by the Saharanpur rule of 1855 for Northern India ; and it was laid down by the despatch of 1864 for Southern India. Half the rental is a heavy land-tax to pay, for in England, during the hundred years before Pitt's Permanent Settlement of 1798, the people paid a land tax of 1s to 4s in the pound, or 5 to 20 per cent on the rental. But nevertheless, something will be gained if this half-rental rule is strictly and honestly adhered to in future. In Northern India the principle was departed from by a misinterpretation or evasion of the rule ; but we are thankful to Lord Curzon for clearly and definitely affirming the right principle again by stating "that assessments have ceased to be made upon prospective assets." If the land agitation of the past five years had borne no other fruit than this, still the agitation had not been in vain. In Madras, however, the half rental rule, or the half-net-produce rule, has been loosely worked, and in

some districts or villages or fields, virtually the whole of the economic rent is absorbed by the land revenue. And in Bombay, no endeavour is made to limit the land tax to half the net produce. If Lord Curzon had insisted on this rule being strictly adhered to in Southern India, and had provided cultivators with some efficacious and workable remedy against the land assessment exceeding half the net produce in the case of every particular Ryot, a great and troublesome question would have been solved, and the cultivators of India would have received that protection which they sorely need, and which they are entitled to under the British Rule.

These are the principles which I have urged during five years. My voice is weak against the voice of the Viceroy of India, supported by the Local Governments and by an influential British press in England and in India. Nevertheless I am sustained in my endeavour by the thought that I am working for the right cause in pleading for moderation in land assessments, and asking for clear, definite, intelligible limits to the State demand, which will enable every humble cultivator to know beforehand what the claims of the Government will be at the next resettlement, and what he is entitled to keep out of the produce of his field for his wife and children. I feel assured that when the heat and turmoil of this controversy are over, all fair minded men will see that such definite limits are needed for the protection and prosperity of an agricultural nation. And Lord Curzon himself, when he retires from this country to take an honoured place in the British Cabinet, will feel more

gratification in the thought of what he has done to moderate, define, and limit the State demand in Northern India, than in the recollection of what he has *not* done to protect the cultivators of Southern India.

But let us look forward to a more remote future. Fifty years hence, the famines of the 19th century, the loss of Indian Industries, the blunders in Land Assessments, and the impoverishment of an agricultural nation, will not be a recreating subject of contemplation to our sons and grandsons, when we are dead and gone. Future administrators and legislators will bless every action now taken, and every word now spoken, to moderate taxation, to protect the peasantry from indefinite claims and to promote the industries of the people. And when the British Empire itself will pass away in the fulness of time may it leave some memories of the earlier blunders rectified, of oppressive taxation moderated and lightened, of industries revived, of agriculture freed from excessive and uncertain State demands and of a frugal and industrious nation made prosperous and happy after a century of distress and famines.

