



they serve themselves—that nothing contributes so largely to the wealth of the landlord as the prosperity of his tenantry, and that nothing so surely hastens his ruin as grinding the faces of the poor.

I cannot afford to pursue the subject further in this place. Indeed, I had intended to confine myself entirely to the record of events ; and having briefly given the history of the incubation of the Permanent Settlement, to speak of its present results only so far as they are exemplified by ascertained facts. What I have shown, or proposed to show, is this :

1. That the Revenue System, which we found in operation on the assumption of the Dewanee, was not conducive to the happiness of the people.

2. That our initial experiments of brief leases and fluctuating assessments were advantageous neither to the Government nor to the people.

3. That all the ablest revenue-officers in the country were in favor of a Zemindaree Settlement, and that the Court of Directors and the ablest statesmen in England held the same opinion.

4. That these officers had been for a great number of years collecting information whereupon to base this settlement—and that the Court of Directors were of opinion that sufficient information had been collected.

5. That Lord Cornwallis came out to India instructed to complete this settlement—that he was not, in any way, the author or originator of it—and that he sought for further information before carrying it into effect.

6. That three years after his arrival in India he promulgated the terms of the settlement—a decennial Zemindaree settlement—with an intimation, that with the consent of the Court of Directors, it would be rendered a permanent one.

7. That three years after this promulgation the Court of Directors and the King's Ministers consented to the





perpetuation of the settlement; and that nearly seven years after his arrival in India Lord Cornwallis made the Permanent Zemindaree Settlement of Bengal the law of the land.

8. That the first effect of the regulations was to bring, under the operation of the Sale Law, a large number of estates to the hammer, and greatly to impoverish several influential Zemindars.

9. That a new Act—Act VII. of 1799, which relaxed the extreme strictness of the Sale Law, and gave the Zemindar increased power over the defaulting Ryot, greatly improved the condition of the former, and diminished the number of sales.

10. That by successive enactments the relations of the Zemindar and Ryot were further improved; and that at the present time the quantity of land sold for arrears of revenue is very small in proportion to the area under assessment.

11. That the assessment is in itself a moderate assessment, and does not press severely upon the industrial energies of the people.

12. That from the very first the provinces have prospered under the Permanent Settlement—that large tracts of waste land have been reclaimed—that capital has accumulated—and that the country has been exempted from the periodical famines which had so grievously afflicted them before.

Lastly, that the peasantry of Bengal, in so far as their happiness is affected by the Revenue Regulations, cannot be said to be more miserable than the peasantry of other parts of the world.\*

\* Since this chapter was originally printed, I have read in the *Morning Chronicle* a very able and interesting letter on "The Laboring Classes in

India and the United Kingdom," which I have inserted, among other papers, at the end of the present edition.



### CHAPTER III.

Our First Territory in Madras—The Northern Circars—Old Revenue System—The Committee of Circuit Permanent Assessment—The Baramahl—Read and Munro—The Ceded Districts—The Ryotwar System—Village Settlements—Their Discontinuance—Return to the Ryotwar System—Its Results.

WHILST in the latter years of the last century the servants of the Company in Bengal were endeavoring to frame a system of land-revenue advantageous alike to the Government and the people, a similar experiment was being carried on under the Presidency of Madras. We had possessed ourselves of territory in that part of the Mogul Empire at about the same period that first saw us assuming, on the banks of the Hooghly, the new dignity of territorial lords. A portion of the country known as the "Northern Circars"\* was granted to the British by the Mogul, at the request of Lord Clive, in 1765. This is the country which lies on the northern extremity of the present Madras Presidency between the seaboard and the Orissan hills.

On our first acquisition of these territories the Company's servants did very much what they were doing in Bengal. They knew nothing about landed tenures and

\* The Northern Circars formed part of the ancient kingdom of Ooria and Telinga. The territory which passed into our hands, and which consisted of Chicacole, Rajahmundry, Ellore, and Condapelly, had been granted by Salabut Jung to the French East India

Company; but on the capture of Masulapatam by the British in 1759, they reverted to the government of the Nizam. They were made over to us in 1765, and in 1788 Guntoor, upon which we had a *post obit*, was added to our possessions.





revenue settlements. They could carry the revenue to account, when it was collected; but they did not know how to collect it. So they let the native administration take its course—they entered into engagements with one or two large capitalists, for the payment of a certain amount of annual revenue or rent, and left them to collect it from farmers and under-tenants and others, and did not much concern themselves about the manner of its collection.

This arrangement, however, was but of brief continuance. In 1769, the native administration was abolished, and the management of the Circars was placed in the hands of the Company's servants—of certain provincial chiefs and councils, who had no administrative knowledge or experience of any kind, and could not talk the native languages with more fluency or correctness than a cadet in the first year of his inexperience, or a Chief Justice at the end of his career. But the condition of affairs before their interference had been so irredeemably bad, that they could not introduce greater disorder into the administration, or greater misery among the people. There were two kinds of landed tenures then recognised. There were Zemindarry lands—lands held by certain chiefs as their hereditary estates, paying tribute to the Government of the day; and there were "Havelly" lands, or "portions of territory not in the hands of Zemindars, but in those of the Government, and in which it was, therefore, optional to adopt any system of management for collecting the land-revenue from the Ryots."\* The land was for the most part leased out to speculators, grasping Dubashes and others, who had as little regard for the welfare of the cultivators as the worst of the Zemindars. On both descriptions of lands the Ryots were defrauded and oppressed. The Zemindars, or contrac-

\* *Fifth Report.*





tors sub-rented the lands. The middle-man had to make his profits, and so it happened that little more than a fifth or sixth of the produce could be retained by the actual cultivator.

On the Circars passing into our hands, the Company's servants were glad to make any arrangement which would save them the necessity of a detailed management of unfamiliar business, so they allowed the Zemindars and large renters to appropriate the revenues on condition of their paying certain stipulated amounts to Government. The provincial chiefs, ignorant of the language, and inexperienced as revenue-collectors, were obliged to conduct all inquiries through their native underlings, or rather to leave them to do all the business for themselves. Little or no progress was made towards good government, and, probably, none for some time would have been made, but that the state of affairs in the Northern Circars fixed the attention of the home authorities; and in those days the Court of Directors greatly surpassed their Indian servants in enlightenment and benevolence. They were eager to see a better system of administration introduced into their Madras territories, and they ordered that a Special Commission, or, as it was denominated, a Committee of Circuit—to be composed of certain members of the Madras Council—should proceed into the districts and institute rigid inquiries into their general condition, with a view to the definition of the rights and the protection of the interests of all classes. The instructions of the Court of Directors were conceived in a liberal and enlightened spirit, and clearly and emphatically expressed. But the Committee of Circuit was a failure. The Provincial Courts thwarted its operations. The Zemindars would render the Commissioners no assistance, but rather endeavoured to throw dust in their eyes. They could not speak the native lan-





guages, and all their information reached them through the lying medium of men who were interested in concealing or distorting the truth.

So it happened that though the Committee of Circuit continued its operations from year's end to year's end, no fixed system was introduced. Annual leases were granted in the first instance—then settlements for three or five years. The "Havelly" lands were let, in most cases, on the system of Village Settlements, but they were very imperfectly made. And altogether the humane intentions of the Home Government were most inadequately fulfilled. But the tendency of all our administrative efforts at this time was towards gradual improvement. In 1786, a Board of Revenue, after the Bengal fashion, was established at Madras; but it was in continual collision with the Provincial Councils, which obstructed the working of its machinery, whilst they did no good by themselves. So Lord Hobart, who was then Governor of Madras, abolished the Provincial Councils, and appointed collectors in their stead. But the collectors, like the other functionaries of whom I have spoken, had small acquaintance with the native languages, and were compelled to leave the minutiae of revenue detail to their Dewans and Dubashes, and other native underlings, who thrived upon the ignorance of their masters.

But the Permanent Zemindaree Settlement had been by this time introduced into Bengal; and it had many advocates in high places both at home and abroad. The Madras Board of Revenue had been studying the minutes of Shore and Cornwallis; and the Court of Directors had written out, that "being thoroughly sensible of the propriety and expediency of the late revenue and judicial regulations established in Bengal, they directed the Madras Government to consider the expediency of adopting similar plans for the Northern





Circars, including the Jaghire and the Ceded Districts." This was written in 1795, but at this time the Board were hardly prepared to recommend the perpetuation of the settlement; they required time for the collection of further information; and it was not until 1799 that they reported to the Supreme Government that they were possessed of materials for a permanent Zemindarry settlement. Lord Wellesley, who had by this time succeeded to the Governor-Generalship of India, earnestly supported the plan of his predecessor, and recommended its extension to Madras. The Court of Directors supported the recommendation, and early in 1801 wrote to the Government of Madras that "they had determined to concur in the instructions of the Governor-General for proceeding at once to the permanent assessment of the lands on the coast." A special Commission was accordingly appointed to carry out these instructions, and between the years 1802 and 1804 the northern districts of Madras were permanently assessed.\*

Thus were the principles of the Permanent Zemindarry Settlement applied to that tract of country, under the Madras Presidency, which first passed into our hands. The country, too, around Madras, known as "the Jagheer," which had been obtained from the Newab of Arcot, partly in 1750, and partly in 1763, in return for services rendered to that state, was at the same time subjected to the same process.† But whilst all these measures for the settlement of the ancient territories of

\* The manner of the assessment, in respect of the division of estates, is thus indicated in the Fifth Report. "The lands already in the hands of Zemindars were confirmed to them in perpetuity on the prescribed conditions. The assessment on each Zemindarry necessarily varied according to the local extent. In some it considerably exceeded a lakh of star pagodas; in others it was under 1000 star pagodas. The Havelly lands having been parcelled out into estates of a convenient size,

yielding from 1000 to 5000 star pagodas annual rent, but in some instances more, were sold at public auction, subject to the terms of the Permanent Zemindarry tenure." A pagoda is about 3½ rupees, or 7 shillings.

† "The Permanent Settlement of the Jaghire took place in 1802, the lands having been divided into sixty-one estates, bearing an assessment of from 2000 to 5000 star pagodas, and sold to individuals in the same manner as the 'Havellys' of the Northern Circars.





the Company at Fort St. George were in progress, we were adding new territories to that Presidency, and the question of land-assessment came up again for discussion and decision, in connexion with new countries ceded to us far down in the Southern Peninsula. In 1792, the first war with Tippoo placed a considerable tract of country, which had before owned the Sultan of Mysore for its master, in the hands of the Company. A treaty was signed, which delivered over to the British the Baramahl (or Salem) and the provinces of Din-dighal and Malabar. The second war with Tippoo, which overthrew the only power in Southern India which dared to resist or molest us, added to our territories Canara and Soondah; and in 1801 all the possessions of the Newab of Arcot in the Carnatic were made over to us by that prince. We had now new problems of revenue to solve, new districts to settle.

The Court of Directors, when unfolding their opinions regarding the application of the permanent system to the Madras territories, had pointed out the peculiarities of our new acquisitions in the Carnatic, and had suggested that, as they were not so far advanced in civilisation as the Bengal provinces, they might not be ripe for the reception of the benefits and blessings intended for them—that indeed “any attempt to introduce a regular system of order or just sentiments respecting the value of permanent rights, would be idle and nugatory till their minds were to a certain extent prepared to feel the importance of these benefits.” The success which had attended our efforts to establish a fixed system in the Northern Circars had not been sufficient to encourage us to extend the experiment to the new lands obtained by cession and conquest in the Southern Peninsula. We

The data on which the land-tax, payable by the Zemindars to Government, was calculated and determined, were the actual state of the resources and

certain accounts of the produce and gross collections in preceding years.”—  
[Fifth Report.]



found, too, that a different description of landed tenures had existed under the native governments; and we had always endeavoured to assimilate our system of revenue collection to that which had presumedly obtained before our assumption of the fiscal management of the country. Moreover, on the cession of these tracts of Tippoo's old country, the duty of settling the ceded districts had been entrusted to a class of men very different from those who had carried out the settlement of Bengal and the Northern Circars. It was entrusted—not to the Company's civil servants, but to a little band of soldiers, who brought to this new work more zeal than knowledge, more honesty than experience, and who, whatever may be the opinion entertained of the result of their labors—whether it be determined that they carried out “a system which ensures, at the same time, the just dues of the Government and the just rights, not of a new-made Zemindar, but of an industrious peasantry,”\* or one which has “resulted in the impoverishment of the country, the people, and the Government itself”†—still deserve all honor for the benevolence of their intentions, the singleness of their aims, and the unwearying perseverance with which they prosecuted their labors.

At the head of the Commission first appointed in 1792 was Captain Read, an officer who had been for some time employed on the staff of the Madras army, and who had exhibited great aptitude for business as well as an intimate acquaintance with the language and manners of the people.‡ With him were associated three junior

\* *Calcutta Review*, vol. xvii. Article: “The Land Revenue of Madras”—a very valuable and interesting paper, compiled principally from manuscript records. I am indebted to it for many of the details contained in this chapter.

† *H. St.G. Tucker*.

‡ The following is Munro's account of the man at whose feet he sat as a revenue student: “Read is no ordinary character. He might, in Mysore, have amassed as much money as he chose,

and by fair means too; but he was so far from taking advantage of his situation for this purpose, that he even gave up his bazaar and many other perquisites of his military command, and received nothing but his prize-money and commission, which altogether, I believe, amounted to about 6000*l*. Whatever I might have done, had I been left to myself, I could get no pickings under such a master, whose conduct is invariably regulated by private honor and the





officers, Macleod, Graham, and Munro—a name which has become inextricably associated with all our ideas of the land-revenue of Madras. “Our only system,” said Munro, “is plain hard labor.” “We have only to guard the Ryots from oppression, and they will create the revenue for us.” But in these days, when so much has been written about different systems of Land-revenue, the working of all of which involves no inconsiderable amount of “plain hard labor,” it is necessary to adopt a more specific style of description. The system was that which is now (under fuller development) known as the “Ryotwar system.” It recognised the Government as proprietor of the soil, and undertook to determine the rights of every man who paid a single rupee to the Sircar. It was a settlement to be made directly with the Ryots themselves; and its object was to protect the interests of the actual cultivators of the soil.

It was, however, in the first instance only an experiment. What Read and his associates did, at this time, was not to determine a system, or to settle the future mode of assessment, but to collect information and to ascertain rights, with a view to ulterior measures. How they proceeded has been detailed by Munro himself. “Captain Read,” he wrote in 1794, “in order to be enabled to turn his attention to general arrangements, has divided the ceded countries, among his assistants,

public interest. These, and unwearied zeal in whatever he undertakes, constitute the great features of his character. The enthusiasm in the pursuit of national objects, which seizes others by fits and starts, is in him constant and uniform. These qualities, joined to an intimate knowledge of the language and manners of the people, and a happy talent for the investigation of everything connected with revenue, eminently qualify him for the station which he now fills with so much credit to himself and benefit to the people.”—[*Gleig's Life of Sir Thomas Munro.*] The writer in the *Calcutta Review*, quoted above,

says: “If any further testimony were necessary to the indefatigable zeal and pure unaffected philanthropy of this excellent man, the whole of the public records and the traditions of the district afford it in ample abundance; and there is something peculiarly interesting in comparing in these local records, the speculative views, the imperfect sentences, and even the imperfect spelling of this pioneer in Indian Revenue, with the clear and decisive views, the transparent style, and the strong practical decision of the pupil then rising into fame.”





"into three divisions.\* These are again subdivided  
"into 'Tehsildarrees,' few of which are under ten or  
"above thirty thousand pagodas.† The Tehsildars,  
"who have charge of them, are mere receivers of  
"the Revenue, for they cannot either raise or lower  
"the rent of a single individual. They are not per-  
"mitted to give any decision, unless on matters of the  
"most trifling nature—to refer all disputes respecting  
"property to a Court of Arbitration, to order the  
"members of such Courts to assemble, to receive the  
"kists (instalments) from the head farmers of the  
"villages, and the accounts from the village ac-  
"countants, and to transmit them to the collector of  
"the division, is the whole of their duty. Every  
"Tehsildarree is farmed out in villages to the 'gours,'  
"or head farmers, who, having the management of  
"the details of cultivation, may be considered as  
"renters of the country, though they are in fact  
"answerable only for the amount of their own par-  
"ticular lands, for the whole inhabitants are jointly  
"answerable for the Revenue of the village, which is  
"seldom less than ten pagodas, or more than one  
"thousand. Every man, who pays a single rupee to  
"Government, has the rent of his land fixed by the  
"division collector, for which he has a roll, signed by  
"him, specifying the nature and quantity of it, and the  
"periods of payment. As the gour can demand no  
"more than the stipulated rent, he can, of course,  
"gain nothing by the Ryots, and as every man enjoys  
"the profits of his own lands, it is for these reasons  
"that the whole are made jointly responsible for the  
"deficiency."‡

Such, as described by Munro, were some of the main  
"features of the system as our Government found it,§

\* Munro, Macleod, and Graham.

† That is to say, the amount of the revenue raised from each was seldom under 10, or above 30,000 pagodas.

‡ Captain Munro to Captain Allen, June 8, 1794.—*Gleig's Life of Munro*.

§ "Hyder's system of finance was much the same as under all other native





and as it was now to be experimentally continued. But the young officer clearly saw that there was a vital defect in it, which it was incumbent on the new Government to remedy. "The exertions of industry," he wrote, "have always been restrained by the demands of Government keeping pace with their profits, and often outrunning them."\* It was in obviolation of this very evil that the Bengal administrators had introduced the Permanent System into the Soubahdarry; and Munro gave his evidence, indirectly but emphatically, in favor of that system, when he wrote: "The ceded countries have, however, many natural advantages, and are capable of great improvements. The first step for the attainment of this object must be the settlement of the lease at a moderate rent, for all attempts to better their situation will be in vain as long as the land-tax is not only high, but arbitrary." It would have been well if, a few years afterwards, this truth had been held more distinctly in remembrance.

This, indeed, was the principle that Read enunciated, and on which he desired that the settlement should be based. "Correspondent with my original design," he wrote, "you will find my grand objects are these: The securing the Revenue its dues, to the industrious their fair advantages, and to all the inhabitants every accommodation consistent with good policy." There was obviously at that time some leaning in his mind towards the Permanent System so much favored in

governments; he rented the country in large districts to Aumildars, who were pretty regular in their payments, because the terms were favorable; but, besides collecting the public revenues, they amassed large sums for themselves. . . . Tippoo began his reign with changing every civil and military arrangement of his father, and he changed his almost every year, and always on these occasions framed new codes of Regulations to send to different pro-

vinces. His last was much the same as we have now in the Ceded Provinces."—[*Capt. Munro to Capt. Allen, June 8, 1794.*—*Gleig's Life of Munro.*]

\* "The tanks are few," he added, "and having been neglected ever since Hyder made himself master of Mysore, are in so ruinous a condition, that it will require a considerable sum to save the present produce of the land beneath them from being lost altogether."—[*Ibid.*]





high places, both in India and in England; but he was a man much given to speculation, and he was little disposed to pronounce a decisive judgment in emphatic support of one kind of assessment or another. He called upon his assistants to expound their views, and they all responded to the call. Munro sent in a lengthy and elaborate paper, which has never yet been given to the world, reviewing the whole question of Ryotwaree Settlement, and pronouncing a strong opinion in its favor. The plan—he wrote in conclusion, summing up the practical suggestion, each one of which is powerfully elaborated in the body of the letter—"The plan," he wrote, "which it appears to me would be best calculated to secure to the people the fruits of their industry, and to Government a permanent Revenue, is comprised under the following heads:—1. A reduction of 15 per cent. to be made on the lease settlement. 2. The country to be rented immediately of Government by small farms as at present, every one receiving just as much land as he demands. 3. Settlements to be annual; that is to say, every man to be permitted to give up or take whatever land he pleases every year. 4. Every man to have a part, or the whole of his lands on lease who wishes it: and in order to encourage the application for leases, all lands held under annual tenures to be taken from the occupants and given to such other farmers as may demand them in lease, or their paying to Government, as purchase-money, one year's rent for any particular field, or one half year's for the whole farm. 5. Villages and districts to be responsible for all individual failures. 6. All lands included in the lease should remain invariably at the rent then fixed after the proposed reduction of 15 per cent. 7. All lands, not included in the lease, should be rented at the average of the village to





“ which they belong. 8. Lands included in the lease,  
“ being given up and allowed to lay waste, for any  
“ number of years, should, when again occupied, pay,  
“ the very first year, the full rent as before. 9. All  
“ castes, whether natives or aliens, to pay the same  
“ rent for the land. 10. No additional rent ever to be  
“ demanded for improvements—the farmer, who by  
“ digging a well, or building a tank, converts dry land  
“ into garden or rice-fields, to pay no more than the  
“ original rent of the ground. 11. No reduction of  
“ the established rent ever to be allowed, except  
“ where the cochineal plant, mulberry, &c., are culti-  
“ vated.”\*

This was the plan conceived by Munro, when an assistant to Colonel Read, in the Baramahl—but although, in those days as now, there was a good deal of lengthy writing, there was no lack of working too; and the materials for the settlement were being collected apace. “The Baramahl has now been completely surveyed, and the rents of it fixed,” wrote Munro, in September, 1798. “They are on an average nearly what they were under Tippoo. The inhabitants paid the same then as now; but the deficiency of his receipts arose from the speculations of a host of revenue-officers. The rent here, as I believe in every other part of India, is too high.”† The rent was certainly too high in Madras, for Colonel Read ascertained and reported, that whilst in Bengal the rent paid to Government amounted to forty-seven pagodas the square mile, in Madras it was not less than *seventy*. “The increase to the public revenues,” wrote Graham to his chief, “has been obtained in consequence of Government having added thereto that portion of the

\* *MS. Records, quoted in the Calcutta Review*. It is to be regretted that the author of this able and interesting paper has not, in all instances, given

the dates of the original documents which he quotes.

† *Gleig's Life of Sir Thomas Munro*.



produce which is the life of future exertions in husbandry, and, as a compensation for a variety of disasters peculiar to the country, ought undoubtedly to go to the former. Upon this view of the subject, although it may be deemed unusual official language, yet I hesitate not to regret every pagoda that has been thus added to the jumma, because I am sensible of its evil tendency, and because I have ever been taught to believe that the affairs of Government flourish in proportion to the prosperity of its servants.\* The assessment, too, varied greatly in the different divisions. The average assessment per acre was, on the dry lands, in the Southern Division, two rupees; in the Centre, one and a half; and in the Northern, one. On the wet lands, it was in the Southern Division, eleven; in the Centre, six and a half; and in the Northern, five and a half rupees.† The average rent may be set down at little more than three shillings an acre on the common soils; and the average contribution of each farmer was about seventy shillings a year.‡

Whilst the revenue settlement of the lands ceded to the British, after the war of 1792, was still in an experimental state, the field of investigation was greatly enlarged by the results of the second war with Tippoo. Our possessions in Southern India were extended by the conquest of Mysore in 1799. Read and Munro both joined the grand army. After the fall of Seringapatam, the former resigned his office, as chief collector of the Baramahl; and Munro, who ought to have succeeded him, was sent to settle the revenue of

\* *Records quoted in Calcutta Review.*

† *Calcutta Review.*

‡ "The average rent of cultivated land in this country is not more than three shillings an acre. Waste lands pay nothing. . . . The average rent of the whole body of farmers is not more than ten pagodas each. . . . This extreme poverty is the principal cause

of the lowness of the rent, and not any fault of the soil; for at least three-fourths of the lands in cultivation are capable of producing cotton, sugar, and indigo; but though the Ryots have little money, I imagine that they suffer less real distress than the peasantry of Europe."—[Munro to his Father, May, 1796.—*Gleig's Life.*]





Canara. The appointment was unwelcome—the duties were irksome to him—but he was soon removed to another and more extended sphere of action. In 1800, the country, which on the partition of Tippoo's domains had been made over to the Nizam, was ceded by him to the British; and on the districts passing into our hands, Munro was made chief collector, or superintendent, with a staff of civil assistants to conduct the detail duties under his eye.\*

It was during the seven years that followed the cession of these districts that Munro perfected himself in the science, in which he had graduated under Read. And whatever may be thought of the theories which he advocated, all men will admit that, in practice, he was the model of an Indian administrator. He was one of the first who, in that part of the country, carried to the work of revenue-settlement a thorough acquaintance with the language and manners of the people. He was, in the happy language of Mr. Webbe, an *undubashed* officer—one who moved about familiarly among the rude villagers without an interpreter at his elbow, and who not only knew and understood all classes, but had a heart to sympathise with them. They looked up to him with veneration; called him their father; and whatever might be their condition, knew that he would respect their rights. From year's end to year's end he toiled on unremittingly, scorning delight and living laborious days, but, in the weariness and waste of a life of continued labor and isolation, in an unhealthy climate, preserved in all his early freshness and warmth, by the good home

\* That excellent man, Mr. Webbe, the chief secretary of Madras, of whom Wellington said that he was one of the ablest men he ever knew, wrote to Munro, "The assistants may be Mr. Cochrane, Clive's head-assistant, who is master of Persian and Hindostanee;

Mr. Thackeray, who has received the reward for the Gentoo language; Mr. Stodart, who has been for a long time assistant to one of our northern collectors; and some other *undubashed* Persian if I can find him."





feeling which was perpetually bubbling up within him. His strong natural sagacity was remarkable. He read character at a glance. But he had more valuable qualities even than these. It was the conscientiousness of the man which raised him to high station. No man—not even the great captain, who was the friend and correspondent of “dear Munro,” and who wrote him pleasant letters about his first victory at Assye—had a stronger sense of the paramount claims of duty. The character and career of such a man should be held in affectionate remembrance by every young soldier in the Indian army. There is not one of them whose unaided talent, industry, and integrity, may not raise him to the same high eminence as was attained by the young Scot, who began his career without a pagoda in his pocket, a blanket to cover him at night, or a pillow whereon to lay his head. His schoolfellows said of him that, as a boy, he carried everything before him, by “his coolness, his courage, and his unequalled endurance.” The same characteristics, in the moral, no less than in the physical signification of the words, made the fortune of the man. And there is not a cadet who joins in the general salute, on the examination day at Addiscombe, for whom the due exercise of the same high qualities may not win the same high reward.

For seven years Munro labored diligently and unceasingly in the Ceded Districts. He has given us, in his own clear, forcible words, an account of the labors of a collector, and of the general system of collection in the Ryotwaree country, which sparkles up, fresh and bright, amidst a somewhat dreary waste of “Revenue Selections,” and makes the whole process of assessment intelligible to the dullest understanding. “The collector,” he wrote, “sets out on his circuit in “September or October, when the early crops begin to be





“reaped, and the late ones to be down. On arriving in a district he assembles all the Ryots of the four or five nearest villages. The first business is, to learn how far the cultivation of the present year is more or less than that of the last. This is soon done, by the help of the Tehsildars' and Curnums' accounts, compared with the reports of the Potails and Ryots. Where there is a decrease it is commonly owing to deaths, emigrations, or loss of cattle. Where there is an increase, it is usually derived from new settlers, or additional lands being occupied by the old ones. In the case of decrease, the rent of the lands thrown up is deducted from the settlement of last year; in that of increase, the rent of the land newly occupied is added; and in both cases the rent of the remaining lands remains the same as before. The rent of the land newly occupied is determined by the accounts of what it was in former times; or, if such accounts cannot be procured, by the opinions of the most intelligent Ryots: but the full rent of waste land is not exacted until it has been in cultivation from two to seven years. The number of years, and the gradational rise in each year, depend upon the nature of the land and the custom of the village. They are known to all parties; and all doubts are removed by their being detailed in a proclamation, or cowle namah, under the collector's seal, circulated to every village.

“If the cultivation is the same as last year's, and no failures occur among the Ryots, the rents remain unaltered. If the crops are bad, and it appears that some of the poor Ryots must have a remission, the loss, or a part of it, is assessed upon the lands of the rest, where it can be done without causing any material inconvenience. This assessment never exceeds ten or twelve per cent., and is much oftener relin-



“quished than carried into effect. In cases where it  
“can be easily borne, it is frequently agreed to with-  
“out difficulty; and if opposition is made, it is gene-  
“rally soon got over, by the mediation of the Ryots  
“of the neighbouring villages present. These discuss  
“the point in question with the Ryots of the objecting  
“village, tell them that it is the custom of the country,  
“use such other arguments as may be applicable to the  
“subject, and never fail in persuading them to accede to  
“the demand, unless it is really too high, in which event  
“it is lowered.

“Wherever individuals or villages object to their rent,  
“it is always the most expeditious and satisfactory way  
“of settling the dispute, to refer it to the Ryots of other  
“villages, who do more on such occasions in half an  
“hour than a collector and his cutcherry in a whole  
“year.”

All this, however, was merely experimental. The  
question of the eventual settlement of these districts  
remained still in abeyance. But experience had  
strengthened Munro's convictions; and the plan  
which he had recommended, as the disciple of Read,  
in the Baramahl, was now, with some modifications,  
more authoritatively enunciated by the chief collector  
of the Ceded Districts. Writing, in August, 1807, to  
the Board of Revenue, Munro thus particularised the  
terms of his proposed Ryotwaree Settlement—“The  
“following articles contain the principles on which  
“the settlement should be formed:—1st. The settle-  
“ment should be Ryotwaree. 2nd. The amount of  
“the settlement shall increase and decrease annually,  
“according to the extent of the land in cultivation.  
“3rd. A reduction of 25 per cent. on all land shall  
“be made in the survey rate of assessment. 4th. An  
“additional reduction in the assessment of 8 per cent.,  
“or 33 per cent. in all, shall be allowed on all lands





“watered by wells, or by water raised by machinery  
“from rivers and nullahs, provided the cultivators  
“keep the wells or embankments (dirroas) in repair  
“at their own expense. A similar reduction shall  
“be allowed on the lands watered by small tanks,  
“wherever the cultivators agree to bear the expense  
“of repairs. 5th. Every Ryot shall be at liberty, at  
“the end of every year, either to throw up a part  
“of his land, or to occupy more, according to his  
“circumstances; but whether he throw up or occupy,  
“shall not be permitted to select, but shall take or  
“reject proportional shares of the good and bad toge-  
“ther. 6th. Every Ryot, as long as he pays the rent  
“of his land, shall be considered as the complete  
“owner of the soil, and shall be at liberty to let it to  
“a tenant, without any hesitation as to rent, and to  
“sell it as he pleases. 7th. No remission shall be  
“made, on ordinary occasions, for bad crops or other  
“accidents. Should failures occur, which cannot be  
“made good from the property or land of the de-  
“faulters, the village in which they happen shall be  
“liable for them, to the extent of 10 per cent. addi-  
“tional on the rent of the remaining Ryots, but no  
“further. 8th. All unoccupied land shall remain in  
“the hands of Government, and the rent of whatever  
“part of it may be hereafter cultivated, shall be added  
“to the public revenue. 9th. All taxes on houses,  
“shops, and professions, all duties, licences, &c., shall  
“belong exclusively to Government. The Ryot on  
“whose land houses or shops may be built, shall not  
“be entitled to receive a higher rent from them than  
“the equivalent of the survey rent of the ground  
“which they occupy. 10th. The repairs of all tanks,  
“which are not rendered private property by an extra  
“remission, or *duswundum enam*, shall be made at the  
“expense of Government. 11th. Tuckavy (advances)



“ shall be gradually discontinued. 12th. Potails, Cur-  
“ nums, and all other village servants, shall remain as  
“ heretofore, under the collector. 13th. Private credi-  
“ tors, who may distrain the property of Ryots, shall  
“ discharge the rent which may be due from such Ryots  
“ to Government, and shall give security for it before  
“ they begin the distraint.”

But this Ryotwaree system, to which Munro clung with the tenacity of a man of strong convictions, was doomed to see many remarkable vicissitudes before it achieved an ultimate triumph. In the first instance, he who had graduated as a revenue-officer in the Baramahl, and there first propounded his scheme of assessment, was condemned to see that tract of country given up to the Permanent Zemindarry system. Imperative orders were forwarded from the higher authorities to carry out the Bengal plan of perpetual assessment. In the years 1803-4-5 these lands were divided into Zemindarries, or allotments, of different sizes, and sold upon terms fixed in accordance with the original settlement. “ The extent of the available resources of each Zemindaree was shown from the original surveys, under the heads of cultivated, fallow, and cultivable lands.”\* But these surveys had been somewhat loosely conducted. There was an entire want of uniformity in them, except in one particular—that all the lands were more or less over-assessed. Upon the introduction of the Permanent Zemindarry system this became miserably apparent. The new settlement, of course, was a failure—not because the system was bad in itself, but because it was applied to districts not prepared for its reception. It failed, indeed, because the early Ryotwaree men had greatly over-assessed the lands, and no system could have borne up against such an exorbitant valuation.

\* *Calcutta Review.*





In 1807, Munro returned to England. Whatever may be thought of Ryotwaree or Zemindaree settlement, it is certain that during his long residence in the Ceded Districts he conferred substantial advantages on the people. It was said of him by the head of the Madras Government, that "under his administration the inhabitants, from disunited hordes of lawless freebooters, had become as far advanced in civilisation, submission to the laws, and obedience to the magistrates, as any of the subjects under the Madras Government; that every one seem satisfied with his situation, and that the regret of the people was universal on the departure of the principal collector."\* He had been thinking of Cleveland, who had "established the Company's Raj in the hearts of the hill-people of Bhaugulpore"†—whose name, after the lapse of half a century, is still held in affectionate remembrance by the people of that country, and to whom even now the Court of Directors often refer, with approbation, in encouragement of others of their servants whom they desire "to do likewise."‡

Of the general results of Munro's Ryotwaree settlement two or three years after his departure from India, the Committee of the House of Commons, in their Fifth Report, expressed a most favorable opinion.§ But he had scarcely turned his back upon

\* *Minute of President of Fort St. George, Oct. 26, 1807.*

† Writing from Canara of the distrust of the villagers, he said: "Perseverance on my part, however, brought over some deserters, and by talking to them as your friend Cleveland would probably have done, they brought over more, and I am now getting on as well as I can expect."—[*Munro to Cockburn. — Gleig's Life.*]

‡ See letters of the Court, quoted in subsequent chapters, on the Civilisation of the Bheels and the Hill Tribes of Orissa—Part IV.

§ "It appears to the Committee, from

the examinations which they have made into the effects of the Ryotwar principle of settlement, throughout the modern possessions of the Company under the Madras Presidency, that it has greatly improved the situation of the cultivator by limiting the bounds of the public assessment and adjusting the actual demand on each person according to his ability to satisfy it. . . . So favorable a change in their condition has necessarily excited a confidence among the Ryots in the equity and justice of the Company's government," &c., &c.—[*Fifth Report of the House of Commons, 1810.*]





Madras, when instructions were received by the Government of that presidency, which compelled them to abandon the principle for which Munro had contended. The system of individual responsibility, which brought each separate cultivator into immediate communication with Government, was now to be given up; and the old system of joint responsibility, or the assessment of villages, was, under certain modified rules, to be restored.

This was a system of leases granted, for a certain number of years,\* to the chief cultivator of each village, who was to farm the revenue, or wherever it was practicable to the whole body of the Ryots collectively. "It differed from the Ryotwar chiefly in the assessment being fixed on the entire aggregate lands of the village, not on each distinct and separate field; in its being concluded with all the Ryots collectively, not with each individually; and in its giving up to the Ryots not only the revenue to be derived from the arable lands, but that also to be obtained by after exertion from the waste also. In fact, in leaving, in consideration of a contract to pay a given sum as public revenue, the entire internal administration of affairs to the village community."†

"The object in view," continue the same high authorities, "was to adapt the revenue administration to the ancient institutions and ancient usages of the country, to which the Hindoos are proverbially attached; to suit the system to the people, and not to attempt to bend the people to the system." And there were practically many advantages in such an arrangement, not the least of which was that stated by Mr. Place, that "no difficulty occurs in fixing the value of all the lands together of one village, but it would be

\* First for three, then for ten years. *January 5, 1818. — Madras Revenue*

† *Minute of Madras Board of Revenue, Selections.*





nearly impossible to assign to every small allotment its portion so exactly, and with such due regard to fertility of soil, and other circumstances, that some should not benefit and others suffer." At all events, it did not to the same degree, if at all, place the people bound hand and foot at the mercy of unscrupulous Tehsildars.

I cannot afford to dwell, as I could wish, upon the discussions which arose respecting the advantages and disadvantages of this village system. I am greatly disposed to think that the Madras Board of Revenue, who contended strongly in its favor, had the best of the argument. But they had not the best of the struggle which then ensued. The higher authorities were against them. Munro's visit to England had probably not been without its effect upon the opinions of the Court of Directors and the Board of Control; and towards the close of 1817 instructions were received at Madras for the abolition of the village system, and the confirmation in all practicable cases of the plan of Ryotwar Settlement, with individual holders. It was alleged that the village system had been tried and had failed. The highest revenue authorities declared that it had not been subjected to a fair trial, and that it had not failed. They alleged, too, that the home authorities had decided hastily on insufficient evidence. "The judgment," they wrote, "which has been pronounced in England against the village system, is founded on a very partial and unfavorable view of its results; for it does not appear that the authorities at home had, at the time when that judgment was passed, any information before them respecting any other portion of it than its commencement, the triennial settlement."\* And they urged

\* *Minute of Madras Board of Revenue, January 5, 1818.*



that the result of that settlement was no test of the success or failure of the system, inasmuch as that the lands had been subjected to an over-assessment, "founded upon the fallacious data of the Ryotwar collections." "In fact, it was nearly everywhere," they said, "a mere rack-rent."

But the Ryotwar system was in favor at home, and orders were sent out for its re-introduction, in all possible cases, under certain modifications prescribed by the Court. At this period, the different districts of the Madras Presidency were subject to three different systems. In Ganjam, Vizigapatam, Rajahmundry, Masulapatam, Guntoor, Salem, Chingleput, the Cuddalore district, and the Western, Southern, and Chittoor Pollams, the Permanent Zemindarry system prevailed. In Malabar, Canara, Coimbatore, Madura, and Dindigul, the Ryotwar system was in force. Into the Ceded Districts, Nellore, the two divisions of Arcot, Palnaud, Trichinopoly, Tinivelly, and Tanjore, the village system had been introduced. For a quarter of a century now under the Madras Government a series of experiments in land-revenue had been going on. One system had been displaced to make way for another; each had been tried in turn, and it was alleged that in turn each system had failed. They had all failed, more or less, because the lands had been over-assessed. They had none of them been fairly tried under a light assessment.

But there were evils peculiar to the old Ryotwar system, which its own advocates acknowledged, and which now, from the new modified system, were to be erased. Indeed, under the force of circumstance and the mutations of time, they had pretty well erased themselves. The introduction, in 1802, to the Madras Presidency, of the Cornwallis regulations, which "en-





grafted on the Indian codes the principles of British justice," rendered the arbitrary and illegal acts\* which were perpetrated for the enforcement of the Ryotwar system no longer practicable. "The new Regulations," it was well said, "declared revenue to be subordinate to justice, while the Ryotwar system had rendered justice entirely subordinate to revenue." "The new laws," it was added, "by their general principles, and not by any specific enactment, took from the native revenue-officers the power to 'punish and confine,' which they had exercised to coerce the Ryot to cultivate, and annually to take from him all that he was able to pay.† Under the improved

\* What these arbitrary and illegal acts were, may be gathered from the following, which the Madras Board declare to be "no exaggerated description:"—"Ignorant of the true resources of the newly-acquired countries as of the precise nature of their landed tenures, we find a small band of foreign conquerors no sooner obtaining possession of a vast extent of territory, peopled by various nations, differing from each other in language, customs, and habits, than they attempt what would be deemed a herculean task, or rather a visionary project, even in the most civilised countries of Europe, of which every statistical information is possessed, and of which the Government are one with the people—viz., to fix a land-rent, not on each province, district, or country, not on each estate or farm, but on every separate field within their dominions. In pursuit of this supposed improvement, we find them unintentionally dissolving the ancient ties, "the ancient usages" which united the republic of each Hindoo village, and by a kind of agrarian law, newly assessing and parcelling out the lands which from time immemorial had belonged to the village community collectively, not only among the individual members of the privileged order (the Meerassidars and Cadeems), but even among their inferior tenantry (the Pyacarries); we observe them ignorantly denying, and by their denial abolishing private property in the land; resuming what belonged to a public

body (the Grama manium), and conferring in lieu of it a stipend in money on one individual; professing to limit their demand on each field, but in fact, by establishing for such limit an unattainable maximum, assessing the Ryot at discretion; and, like the Mussulman Government which preceded them, binding the Ryot by force to the plough, compelling him to till land acknowledged to be over-assessed, dragging him back to it if he absconded, deferring their demand upon him until his crop came to maturity, then taking from him all that could be obtained, and leaving to him nothing but his bullocks and his seed grain—day, perhaps obliged to supply him even with these in order to renew his melancholy task of cultivating, not for himself, but for them."

† *Madras Board of Revenue.*—And how this was done may be gathered from the continuation of the passage describing the good effects of the Cornwallis Regulations:—"The Tehsildar was stripped of the *ketticole* or hand torture, the stone placed on the head under a burning sun, the stocks, and other of his former insignia of office, by the display and occasional use of which he had been enabled to saddle the Ryots with the rents of such lands as he deemed proper. The lictor deprived of his fasces was no longer terrible to the people." This is a worthy illustration of the progress of British justice. We wonder now how anything of the kind could ever have existed.





Ryotwar system this mighty oppression was now to be formally repudiated and renounced. All compulsion or restraint on the free labor of the Ryot was to cease under the new system, and the native revenue-officers were to be especially warned against the assumption and exercise of improper power. Freedom of labor was declared by the Court of Directors to be the basis of the new settlement, and the Madras Board of Revenue enforced upon the collectors the paramount duty of restraining their native underlings, and protecting the liberties of the people. Under the new system, too, proprietary rights were to be recognised, which had not been recognised before ; and, above all, the heavy assessment, which had pressed so severely on the industrial energies of the Ryots, was to be considerably reduced. The orders of Government were "to fix such a rate of assessment" as was calculated to "give encouragement to agricultural industry, and thereby promote the general prosperity of the country."

All the necessary preliminaries having been gone through—the village leases having expired—many of the new Zemindarries, or "Mootahs,"\* having lapsed, or been bought in, the improved Ryotwar system was declared to be established in Madras ; and Munro himself, who had been appointed to the chief place in the Government, took his seat just in time to give the finishing stroke to the act of final restoration. In the spring of 1820, the Ryotwar system was formally enthroned at Madras.

It would appear, on an impartial review of all the circumstances I have here briefly recited, that many of the defects of the original Ryotwar system, as founded at the close of the last century by Colonel

\* That is, the allotments into which introduction of the Permanent Settlement.—See *ante*, page 220.  
the Baramahl lands were divided, on the





Read, and since developed and maintained by Sir Thomas Munro, have been to a great extent remedied or removed under the system which is now in force. The old system was generally better than that which we found on assuming the government of the ceded districts. Read and his assistants may have made many mistakes, and the subordinate revenue-officers, doubtless, committed many excesses. But, compared with the oppression to which the people had been subjected under the Mysore princes, the defective administration which resulted from our infant experiments must have sat lightly on the people. That these experiments, though carried on in good faith, and with the most benevolent intentions, by very honest and very able men, were extremely faulty in principle and unsuccessful in result, is not to be denied. It was wholly impossible, not merely for a little knot of soldiers, fresh from their military duties, but for thrice the number of experienced revenue-officers—the “crack collectors” of the present day—to have adequately superintended the assessment of the immense number of small holdings into which each village was parcelled. Every field was to be assessed; and these multiplied assessments were necessarily left to the “Tehsildars,” or native revenue-officers—an extremely corrupt and licentious set of men, who plundered the people without stint, and oppressed them without remorse. The assessments made, under the circumstances, were extremely unequal; but excessiveness was their general character. These excessive assessments were the curse of the country. They brought everything to ruin. First one system was tried—then another. But over-assessment brought them all to the ground. It can not be said, that under the Permanent Zemindarry settlement, Bengal is over-assessed.



Such would seem to have been the causes of the failure of all our initial efforts during the first quarter of a century of experiment. But it is only just that we should separate what may be called accidental circumstances of this kind from the inherent defects of the system. Over-assessment, it may be said, is one thing—the Ryotwar system is another. But I am not sure that it may not be fairly answered, that although over-assessment is not an inherent defect of the system, it is the result of one of its defects. If the land is not fairly assessed, it is pretty certain to be over-assessed. There is little fear of the valuation falling short of the mark. Now, the principal feature of the Ryotwar system is the multiplication of holdings; and the greater the number of rights to be adjusted, the greater the chance of their not being fairly adjusted. In this point of view, the over-assessment, from which so much evil arose, was a result of the system. But it was so far accidental, that it was remediable. It was not necessarily inseparable from the system. It might be eradicated by an equitable revision. The assessments may be rendered less burdensome, and it is to be hoped that the people will soon reap the benefit of the change.

The grievance of enforced tenancy—of the compulsory occupation of undesired lands—under which the Ryots were for some time compelled to suffer, was a pure abomination. The practice was never openly recognised, and it is to be hoped that the European officers were never cognisant of it. It arose out of a state of things peculiar to the Ryotwar settlement; for the great division of responsibilities—the minute parcelling of the territory—necessarily caused a run upon the good lands, and exposed Government to the risk of having all the indifferent soil thrown upon their hands. When it was resolved that this cruel, most





outrageous system should be openly suppressed, the chief revenue authorities, though eager for its suppression, could not help admitting this practical evil, and acknowledging that the result of the reform would be injurious to our finances. But they declared that it was thenceforth "to be clearly understood that the revenue is to continue, as at present, subordinate to justice." It needed that nothing more should be said to give the death-blow to every argument in favor of the old Ryotwar settlement, than that it could not exist coterminously with an improved system of justice.

Another inherent defect in the system of annual settlements was, that it gave the tenant no proprietary interest in his improvements—that under such an arrangement every man, who by his own industry or enterprise had increased the productiveness of the soil under his cultivation, was liable at the end of the year to pay the penalty of his exertions in the increased assessment of his lands. But an evil, at once so unjust to the cultivator, and so disadvantageous to the great Government landlord, was not likely to be perpetuated by administrators who, as time advanced, took progressively more sound and more liberal views alike of their interests and their duties. I believe that under the modified Ryotwar system of 1820, some efforts have been made to remedy this evil, and to give the cultivator a proper interest in his improvements. In 1834, a series of questions was proposed by Lord William Bentinck to some of the principal revenue-officers of Madras, relative to the working of the Ryotwar system. Among these questions was the following: "If a Ryot improves a field that has always been in his occupancy, by making a well, or by other extraordinary application of capital, is his assessment increased, and if increased, is the increase either not immediately taken, or so moderate as to give him an





ample return for his expenditure?" To this question the principal collector of Coimbatore replied: "If a Ryot makes a well on his 'punjah' land that has always been in his occupancy, in order to convert it into garden land, he receives a cowle or lease, on favorable terms, to give him ample return for his expenditure; this cowle extends to a period of five years; punjah rent is paid for the first two years; half garden rent for the third year; three-quarters rent for the fourth; and in the fifth year he pays a full garden rent, being about quadruple of the original rent of the punjah field, of whatever class it may be." So it would seem from this, that if a man improved his holding so as to convert it from a field into a garden, his rent was quadrupled at the end of five years. This was the practice in Coimbatore. But the principal collector of Salem, in answer to the same question, said: "In the Salem district no increase of assessment follows improvement effected at the expense of the cultivator."\* I believe it may be generally stated, that although the cultivator has more interest in the improvement of his lands than he had under the old Ryotwar settlement, it would be far better if he had still more.

In reply to a question, put by Lord William Bentinck, relative to the amount of land not under cultivation, the Salem collector replied that in his district one half of the culturable land was uncultivated.† The reply of the Coimbatore collector was much more favorable. He repeated that there was about 22 per

\* *Replies to the Governor-General.*—Lord William Bentinck's queries respecting the Ryotwar system of Revenue Administration in the Presidency of Fort St. George, by the principal Collectors of Coimbatore and Salem.—These papers were printed for official use; but I do not know whether they have ever been published.

† The writer in the *Calcutta Review* already quoted, whose statistics principally relate to the Salem district, says that some of the best lands there are lying waste, on account of over-assessment. No one will venture to take lands the cultivation of which must be unproductive of profit, if not productive of loss.





cent. of waste land in his district. These local variations may sometimes be accounted for by a reference to the state of the country when it first passed under our rule, but they are commonly regulated by the amount of the assessment. And looking at the general state of the districts under the Ryotwar settlement, it would seem not to have been favorable to the progress of cultivation. In 1821, Munro acknowledged that there was no means of bringing more land under cultivation, and so increasing the revenue, except by reducing the assessment. And twenty years afterwards Lord Elphinstone enunciated the same truth. But although in all parts of the Bengal Presidency under the Zemindarry and Village Settlements cultivation has greatly increased, the most recent authorities on the subject of the Ryotwar settlements admit that we are "still collecting the revenue inherited from the most oppressive of native governments."\*

Still, in spite of the over-assessment, the revenue is collected with considerable punctuality. The unrealised amounts are not large, though much larger than they were. "The Ryotwar system," wrote the Salem collector, in 1834, "having now been in operation here for many years, and the Ryots being aware of the exact sum they have each to pay, and of the time in which it must be paid, are in general pretty regular in their instalments." This authority gives a tabular statement of ten years, from which it appears that the net-settlement in the first was 1,690,240 rupees, and in the last 1,410,624 rupees, but that whereas the per-centage of irrecoverable balance in the first year was 7 annas, 6 pie (or less than  $\frac{1}{2}$ ) per cent., in the last it was 2 rupees, 3 annas (or  $2\frac{3}{16}$ ) per cent. In Coimbatore we have a similar account of

\* *Calcutta Review*, June, 1852.





diminished receipts and increased balances. The net-revenue had diminished in the last ten years; and the per-centage of the balance has risen from 2 annas, 6 pie (or about  $\frac{1}{7}$ ) per cent., to 2 rupees, 10 annas (or more than  $2\frac{1}{2}$ ) per cent. To what extent this may be attributable to the increased forbearance of the revenue-officers, I do not know; but it would be just to take it into reasonable account. The legitimate means of coercion are principally distraint and attachment. But sometimes the native revenue-officers resorted to illegitimate means of extracting blood from a stone. The heads of the villages, too, are said to have "occasional recourse privately to various unauthorised modes of stimulating the tardy payer; such as confining, placing him in the sun, obliging him to stand on one leg, or to sit with his head confined between his knees, till the constrained position becomes painful." But all such violent modes of coercion are merely the remains of native barbarism—relics of old customs favored by the mild Hindoo under the native governments. The European functionary has ever set his face steadfastly against them, and has not been slow to punish, on conviction, such cruelties as these. Even imprisonment is seldom or never resorted to in these days. "No defaulters have been confined in gaol of late years," said the collector of Coimbatore in 1834; "in cases of mere default this measure is not deemed essential."

Looking impartially at all these things, I think it must be admitted that, although the Ryotwar settlement was undertaken, not hastily or heedlessly, but after due consideration, and with a sincere desire to benefit the people, the results do not indicate the success of the experiment. But unsuccessful experiments are no uncommon things in the history of human administrations. There is nothing more remarkable, as





there is nothing more mortifying than the fact, that many of the best efforts which have been made for the advancement of the happiness of mankind have resulted only in the extension and perpetuation of human suffering. It would be easy to multiply instances illustrative of this. But I conceive it to be one of those admitted facts which need only to be asserted.\*

I turn now to another great revenue experiment, the results of which, as far as they have yet been ascertained, are only cheering evidences of the forethought and wisdom which have designed and fashioned it—I turn to that great experiment known as the settlement of the North-Western Provinces.†

\* "It is mortifying to the pride of human wisdom to consider how much evil has resulted from the best and least exceptionable of its boasted institutions—and how those establishments which have been most carefully devised for the repression of guilt or the relief of misery, have become themselves the fruitful and pestilent sources both of guilt and misery in a frightful and disgusting degree. Laws, without which society could not exist, become, by their very multiplication and refinement, a snare and a burden to those they were intended to protect, and let in upon us the hateful and most intolerable plagues of pettifogging chicanery and legal persecution. Institutions for the relief and prevention of poverty have the effect of multiplying it tenfold—hospitals for the cure of diseases be-

come centres of infection. The very police which is necessary to make our cities habitable, give birth to the odious vermin of informers, thief-catchers, and suborners of treachery—and our prisons, which are meant chiefly to reform the guilty and secure the suspected, are converted into schools of the most atrocious corruption, and dens of the most inhuman torture."—[*Lord Jeffery.*]

† I regret very much that in writing this chapter, I had not the assistance of Mr. Dykes' interesting volume, "*Salem—an Indian Collectorate*," which appeared about the same time as the first edition of this work. It may be studied with very great advantage by all who would make themselves acquainted with the working of the Madras revenue-system.





## CHAPTER IV.

The Settlement of the North-West Provinces—First Acquisition of the Country—Primal Measures of our Revenue-Officers—Their Insufficiency—Injustice to the Old Proprietors—Frauds of Native Officials—Government Measures—Commissioners Appointed—Partial Remedies—Further Enactments—Mr. R. Bird—The New Settlement—Its Agents—Its Character—Its Results.

WHEN the armies of Lake and Wellesley broke the Mahratta power on the banks of the Jumna and the plains of Berar, and the north-western provinces of Hindostan became subject to the white men, who ruled in the Carnatic, the Deccan, and Bengal, and had established themselves in the priestly city of Benares, the settlement of the revenue of the ceded and conquered districts became a matter of primal concernment. Somehow or other the thing was to be done; and it was to be done quickly. The country was conquered, and now it was to be forced to give up its treasures to the conqueror. Those treasures were no longer to be found in a state of glittering condensation, hidden in the bowels of grotesque idols, in gorgeous Pagan fanes, or buried in the palaces of prostrate princes. The wealth of our new possessions was spread over a vast surface. It was to be found only in the soil; and being so found, there arose a question regarding the mode of acquisition and appropriation—a question not quite so easy as that presented for the solution of Mahmoud of Ghuznee, when the treasures of the conquered country dazzled the eyes and stirred the heart of the invader.

The territory first ceded was a portion of the great





province of Oude. Lord Wellesley was Governor-General of India. His two brothers, Arthur and Henry Wellesley, had followed the fortunes of their vice-regal relative, and were now within reach of his directing hand. The soldier was laying broad and deep the foundation of his military renown. But provision had to be made for the civilian. Mr. Henry Wellesley was in a more equivocal position than the major-general, who was about to lead a division of the British army against the Mahrattas of Berar. He was not a Company's servant. He had not graduated as an Indian administrator. He was simply what in the case of common men would be called an adventurer—a hanger-on. Lord Wellesley now made him lieutenant-governor of the ceded districts in Oude.\*

It would be difficult to conceive a more onerous and more delicate duty than that which was entrusted to him. It was his to superintend the entire administration, fiscal and judicial, of a new and extensive tract of country, inhabited by a race of people officially declared to be "unaccustomed to any regular system of order or law, and habituated to commit the utmost excesses of violence and oppression." It demanded a thorough knowledge of the country and the people, but that which was not possessed at all by Mr. Wellesley, was possessed to some small extent by his coadjutors. A board of commissioners was associated with him; and under them were set to work the required array of judges, and magistrates, and collectors, with their Regulations in their hands. The misrule, which preceded our assumption of dominion, and the disorder which we found in every department, were so vast, that it would have been a miracle if any great amount of success had attended

\* I do not wish to convey the impression that this was merely a job, for there may have been sound policy, at that time, in placing the brother of the Governor-General at the head of the provisional administration of the

new provinces. Such an arrangement may have given something of character and dignity to the new movement not to be derived from any other personal source.





our initial operations. A triennial settlement was undertaken, mainly with the landholders, on the expiration of the current financial year; and a Permanent Settlement was promised, after two more experiments similar to the first, of three and four years' duration.

But soon to these ceded Oude districts were added those which we had gained, by right of conquest, from the Mahratta chieftains—a large and noble tract of country between the Jumna and the Ganges. The Bengal Regulations, already applied to the Oude districts, were now to be presented to our newly-acquired North-Western Provinces. There was, after the current year, to be a three years' settlement, and then a four years' settlement, and then a settlement in perpetuity. So strongly impressed was Lord Wellesley with a conviction of the advantages of the Permanent System, and so eager was he to promise those advantages to the North-Western Zemindars, that he omitted in the Regulations, which he promulgated to make the permanency of the settlement, conditional on the confirmation of the Court of Directors.\* The omission was subsequently repaired by his successor. A new Regulation announced to the landholders that the permanency of the settlement was to depend upon the will of the authorities at home.

The system of land-revenue which obtained at this time was based upon the old establishment of village communities. These institutions existed but in an imperfect, fragmentary state; and when the officers of the British Government began hastily and loosely to establish some intelligible system of revenue collection, or at all events to make out clearly the parties to whom the State were to look for the apportioned amount of revenue, they groped about painfully in the dark. All sorts of claimants arose, with titles good, bad, and in-

\* In 1803 and 1805. The provisional Government was dissolved at the beginning of the former year. Mr. Wellesley settled his accounts and returned to England.





different, and flocked to the Collector's Court at the chief station, urging their proprietary rights. Embarrassed by these conflicting claims, the Collector placed himself in the hands of the "Canoongo," or native Registrar, and decided according to his dictum upon the claims that were laid before him. There was little or no inquiry, and the decision was wrong. The amount of revenue had then to be fixed; and here again the authority of the village functionary was generally followed, and the valuation was generally wrong.

The difficulty of the task was very great, and it would have been strange if our first efforts had been more successful. One thing alone was certain at this time—that the amount of information possessed by the revenue-officers in the Ceded and Conquered Provinces was not sufficient to enable the Government, with any hope of doing justice to its subjects, to introduce a permanent system of assessment in that country. When, therefore, under the government of Lord Minto, who had taken up the revenue opinions with the high office held by Cornwallis and Wellesley, and had notified to the Zemindars and other proprietors (by Regulation X., 1807) that the assessment under the existing settlement would remain fixed for ever, if the arrangement should receive the sanction of the Court of Directors, a Special Commission was deputed to the Ceded and Conquered Country to give effect to this declaration, it is not strange that they should have hesitated to commit the State irrevocably to a measure which its executive officers were not prepared to recommend, and the country was not prepared to receive. A settlement, fixed in perpetuity at that time, could only be based upon error, the results of which would be laden with injury to the State and injustice to the people.

The Commissioners of whom I speak were Mr. H.





St. George Tucker and Mr. R. W. Cox. Setting out on a tour of inquiry early in the cold season of 1807, they visited all the different collectorates, and diligently sought the opinions of all the different collectors. They had the strongest possible faith in the principles of the Permanent System, but the further they proceeded the more obvious it became, that such a measure as the declaration of a perpetual assessment would then be premature and dangerous.\*

The collectors were nearly all of this opinion. They recommended short settlements, further inquiries, and detailed surveys. It was clear to them, and it was clear to the Commissioners, that the Ceded and Conquered Provinces did not at all resemble Bengal. "When we reflect," wrote the latter, "that the miseries of famine have perhaps been averted in Bengal by the lamented patriot who gave the Permanent Settlement to that country, we feel the utmost repugnance at the idea of opposing its extension to our new possessions. But Bengal is different in many particulars. The land is more easily cultivated, and is fertilised by a periodical inundation; water is easily procured; wells, reservoirs, and aqueducts are unnecessary; and a large capital is seldom required for agricultural purposes. The inferior landholders, and even the peasantry, can carry on the cultivation of their lands without those aids which must be furnished to secure

\* Mr. Tucker, in after years, often spoke of this Commission; and I am enabled, therefore, clearly to state, on his own authority, the course which he pursued at this time, and the opinions which he entertained. "I was appointed in 1807," he wrote, "to carry into execution a measure which successive administrations had considered to be essential to the prosperity of the country. Although concurring most unreservedly in the opinion that it was wise and salutary, and that it contained a vital principle which must in due season work out all the good anticipated,

I ventured to counsel delay, upon the ground that we were not at the moment in a state of preparation to consummate so great an undertaking; but it never occurred to my mind that the principle of the measure was to be abandoned, or that the landholders who had received from us the most solemn pledge given in the most authentic form, were to be denied for ever the promised benefit, and that in the end they were to be cast aside as a mere incumbrance upon the earth. That pledge can never be effaced, although it remains unfulfilled." —[MS. Records.]





the prosperity of the Western Provinces. But, above all, we were in every respect better prepared in Bengal to undertake a measure, which, at a future period, we shall gladly see extended to the rest of our possessions.”\*

The reluctance of the Commissioners, though not altogether acceptable in Calcutta,† found favor in Leadenhall-street. The Court of Directors approved of these recommendations, and wrote out earnest letters to Bengal, cautioning the local Government against committing them to any system of unalterable assessment. “Before undertaking so arduous a task as that of irrevocably settling in perpetuity the lands of a province, and fixing the demand of Government upon those lands in perpetuity, we have always considered a patient and laborious scrutiny of individual rights, a careful investigation of local peculiarities, together with a minute and detailed survey of the extent, cultivation, and productive powers of the territory, as indispensable. . . . Supposing that in Bengal our expectations had been realised to their full extent, it would not follow that a plan of settlement which had succeeded in a country, of which we had been from twenty or thirty years in possession, was equally applicable to provinces which have lately devolved under authority.”‡ And a few months later they wrote still more decidedly on the subject—“The object of this present despatch is to caution you in the most pointed manner against pledging us to the extension of the Bengal fixed assessment to our newly-acquired territo-

\* *Report of Messrs. Cox and Tucker, April 13th, 1808—Revenue Selections.*—This elaborate and very able report was written by Mr. Tucker. It is not only full of valuable information, but it contains the expression of sound statesmanlike views on many questions of general policy.

† Mr. Colebrooke recorded a long minute on the subject, in which he said

—“There is room for regret that the gentlemen to whom the execution of the measure was committed should have put into deliberation not the best means for carrying it into effect, but the expediency of the measure itself which they were selected to execute.”

‡ *Court's Letter to Bengal, February 1, 1811.*





ies. We are aware of your resolution not to declare any settlement permanent till it has obtained our sanction and approbation. It is not, however, without anxiety that we have learned from your late despatches that a triennial lease has been concluded in the Upper Provinces, which expires, we believe, in the course of April, 1812, whereby the assessment in the third year of the lease has been declared by you to be permanent, provided that we shall confirm the terms of settlement, because this arrangement may have excited an expectation on the part of the natives which we are not by any means prepared to satisfy.”\*

Thus was the question of the permanent assessment of the Ceded and Conquered Provinces settled, at all events for a time.† In the mean while short leases were granted, from three to five years, to proprietors, or pseudo-proprietors of different kinds, to Zemindars, to independent Talookdars, and other claimants; but even during those short periods it was often necessary to re-adjust the amount of assessment. All this created much discontent. Many, unjustly deprived of their proprietary rights, clamored for redress, and were told to appeal to the civil courts. This, in effect, was a mockery and a delusion. The perplexity was only increased. The errors of the revenue were often perpetuated by the judicial department; and the suitor involved in new embarrassments more painful than the old. “Decrees,” it is said, “were constantly passed so irreconcilable with truth and justice, that it was absolutely impossible to execute them.”

The mode of collecting the revenue tended equally to the perpetuation of injustice. The collectors en-

\* *Court's Letter*, Nov. 27, 1811.

† The question was from time to time revived at the India House, and some very able members of the Court, including Mr. Edmonstone and Mr.

Tucker, advocated the introduction of the Permanent Settlement into the North-West Provinces; but the majority of the Court did not entertain the project.





deavoured to guard against default by placing watchmen over the standing crops. If, in spite of this precaution, there was a deficiency of revenue, the property of the registered landholder was distrained, and he himself thrown into prison. Then the estate was put up to sale, and perhaps purchased, at a nominal sum, by some astute native official—often a stranger from the lower provinces.\* But as these large estates, although standing on the Government records in the name of some one recognised proprietor, were in reality often held in coparcenery among a number of sharers, of whom Government had no knowledge, it happened often that the default of a few caused the punishment of many. All were immersed in one indiscriminate ruin. The hereditary cultivators were deprived, hastily and absolutely, of their rights, and compelled to sue for leases under some fortunate, perhaps fraudulent, purchaser, whom they hated and despised.

The processes by which the old landholders were defrauded of their proprietary rights varied, more or less, according to circumstance and to character, but they all belonged to one common family, and had many features of general resemblance. Many personal sketches might be given in illustration of the trickery practised upon unsuspecting proprietors by astute native officials. One, however, will suffice for the purpose; it is a striking one; and I give it almost in the words in which the story was related to me. During the prevalence of the hot winds of 1818, a zealous and intelligent civil officer in the judicial department was abroad in his district, on duty. He was fixing the position of a line of police-stations for the protection of the highways, when he came upon a sequestered village, near the banks of the

\* Nearly one-half of the Cawnpore and Allahabad districts passed into the hands of native officials.





Jumna, and halting upon one of those artificial mounds which in that part of the country mark the sites of ancient villages, was quietly enjoying the noble sunset and the fine prospect around him. Whilst thus engaged, an old and respectable-looking Hindoo crawled out of a neighbouring hut, and approached him. The European official and the native villager soon fell into conversation. There was something in the language of the latter which fixed the attention and excited the interest of the English gentleman, and after a while he asked the native who he was. "Who I *am*, do you ask?" answered the man. "I *am* the owner of that hut which you have just seen me leave. Who I was, would you know? I *was* the chief of all that your eye can take in from this height."\*

The English gentleman asked how this had happened. "Oh!" said the old man, "in the usual manner, by a *neelam*" (auction). And when the sahib pushed his inquiries further, told his story nearly in these words:—"When your rule was first established in these parts, I had never seen an European, and naturally sought for some native authority through whom to make my approaches towards the personage of this new race, who was henceforth to be the ruler of my native province.

"I was advised to apply to a certain Nusser Ali, then the Dewan, and reported to possess great influence with the European collector. To him, accordingly, I repaired. His story was, that the collector was like a tiger, and that I ought, for my own safety, to shun his fearful presence. To enable me to pay my revenue without incurring this risk, he advised me to send every instalment as it became due to him, and promised that he would pay the amount faithfully to the collector.

\* Whether the Hindostanee word meaning conveyed was, that he had been the chief landed proprietor in that part of the country.





"In an evil hour I took his advice, and sent my money regularly to Nusser Ali. And so things went on very well for a year or two, when suddenly I was alarmed by the announcement that a stranger had appeared on my domain, and was enjoining all the cultivators to pay their several dues to him. I sought the stranger out, and asked him how he came to exercise such authority within the limits of my estate. 'Oh!' said he, 'I have bought this estate at auction; and it is mine.' I had never heard the word (*neelam*) before, and I hardly knew what it meant. But I hastened to Cawnpore, and there discovered that the Dewan, to whom I had paid the Government dues, had kept back the amount remitted, so as to throw the estate into arrears; he had then obtained an order for its sale, which, possessed of early information, he had easily managed to prevent, and had finally got it purchased for himself, under a fictitious name.

"The fictitious name stood on the records until the Dewan retired from official life, when his own name was inserted as purchaser by private sale from the man of straw, and thenceforth the estate was openly held as his own."

This is one of many instances which might be cited in illustration of the evils attending our first hasty efforts to "settle" the revenue of the North-Western Provinces. But perhaps the largest amount of injustice inflicted upon the landed proprietors at this time arose out of a confusion of terms. Many a man found that he had lost his old territorial rights simply because the new English rulers had described him by a certain word, the dire import of which he himself by no means clearly understood. The revenue-payers under the first settlement were set down in the Government records, with





few exceptions, as *Moostajirs*, or Farmers. There was another column, headed with the word *Malik*, signifying Proprietor, which was generally a blank in the original books. The landholder little knew the relative importance of the two words—little dreamt that, in the course of a few years, the ominous title under which he was registered would prove fatal to his claims to the continued occupancy of the land. But when the period for which he had first contracted was at an end, he found how “the letter killeth.” The astute native functionaries, who had followed the British revenue-officers from the Lower Provinces, hit the blot in a moment. They saw how they could turn it to account, and devised a scheme whereby a large portion of the land was swept into their own possession. When the original lease granted to the recorded “*Moostajirs*” was at an end, the native functionaries reported that the first contractors were only farmers—that they had no proprietary rights at all—but that certain other men, whose names they mentioned (principally Mussulman names), were the legitimate proprietors, and ought to be so entered in the Government books. The collectors placed too much confidence in these specious stories, and the names of some men of straw—some relatives or dependents of the native officials—crept into the columns of the register, headed with the word *Malik*. The man of straw made way in due time for the real Jacob. And such was the wholesale work of these supplanters, that one man (a Dewan, or chief native functionary under the collector) contrived to possess himself of ninety large villages, “whilst another had become sole proprietor of the whole pergunnah, or subdivision, which at first constituted his official jurisdiction as *Tuhseeldar*.”\*

\* *Mr. Robertson's "Remarks."*





nishment, by the people of the Upper Provinces—"Yours is a strange rule. You flog a man for stealing a brass pot, and reward him for stealing a pergunnah!"\*

Thus were all the estates in the country passing away, one by one, from the hands of the ancient proprietors, who stood, bewildered, confused, dismayed, scarcely knowing by what strange juggle they were suddenly, but almost imperceptibly, deprived of their rights. Many, as their descendants related, died of a broken heart. Others, less capable of silent endurance—high-caste and high-spirited Rajpoots—stung by this authoritative injustice, took the law into their own hands, and boldly asserted their rights—the rights of centuries of possession—in the teeth of the upstart claimant who had been yesterday installed by the fall of the Government hammer, or the juggle of a fraudulent Dewan. Acts of open violence—even midnight murders—were committed under a sense of this intolerable wrong. The eyes of Government were then opened. It had become clear that something must be done.

It must not be supposed, however, that the civil servants of the Company were wholly ignorant of, or indifferent to, the wrongs which were thus pressing upon the very existence of the old proprietors. The eyes, at least of some of them, were opened to this monstrous injustice, and strenuous efforts were made to redress the grievances which stared them so obtrusively in the face. Foremost among these may be mentioned the names of Mr. Henry Newnham and Mr. Thomas Campbell Robertson. In 1813, Mr. Newnham took charge of the collectorate of Cawnpore. He examined into many of these

\* There were three settlements made during our first ten years' possession of the North-Western Provinces (from 1803 to 1813). In the first book, the column headed *Malik* (Proprietor) was almost entirely a blank. In the second, the name of Mahomed Roostum, or some other equally real newly-discovered proprietor, was inserted; and in the third, that of Nusser Ali, ex-Dewan, or some other of the same class, was registered as purchaser from the said fictitious Mahomed Roostum.





cases of fraudulent transfer of property, and reported upon them to the Revenue Board at Furruckabad. The Board, however, had no power to interfere, and the sufferers were referred, for their remedy, to the civil courts. Many suits were then instituted, but the *word*, again, was more potential than the fact. Our judges read the unhappy word "Moostajir," and could not possess themselves of the idea that a Moostajir could be anything but a temporary leaseholder, in the English sense of the term, and so either the case was dismissed, or the plaintiff was nonsuited.

Matters were in this state when, in the early part of 1817, Mr. Robertson assumed the office of Judge at Cawnpore. He had heard little or nothing of the peculiar cases of which I am now writing, and took up the first on the file without any idea of its especial importance. He saw at once the hideous injustice of ousting a man in actual possession, solely on the strength of the word under which his name had been entered in the Government books, and he called for proof of the title under which the supplanting Meer Roostum, who had crept in so insidiously as "Malik," held the litigated estate. No proof, of course, was forthcoming; so the English judge ignored his claims, and decided in favor of the original "Moostajir," who was shown at the same time to have been, from time immemorial, the head man of the village, and as such, the legitimate contractor. When this decision was pronounced, an excited buzz ran through the court-house, and the excitement was caught up by the natives outside the walls. The triumph of the village landholders was great; but unfortunately it was short-lived. The case was referred to the Court of Appeal at Bareilly, and the court cancelled the decision. It was held that any man's title was better than that of the unfortunate contractor who had once been registered as a Moostajir.





Fortunately, Mr. Robertson was not a man to be checked, when on the right path, by such obstructions as this. The court continued to reverse his decisions; but on a special appeal to the Sudder Court of Calcutta, of which Mr. Courtenay Smith was a member, there was some inclination in that highest quarter to side with the Cawnpore judge. The process, however, was too dilatory for Mr. Robertson's eager sense of justice, and he took the irregular course of translating some of the awards of the Court of Appeal, and forwarding them with a letter to Government. This mode of procedure, though unusual, was not unsuccessful. In 1821, a Regulation was passed recognising the injustice which, under cover of the Sale Law, had been done to "poor and ignorant men," and appointing Commissioners to inquire into all the transfers of property which had taken place during the first eight or ten years of our government of the North-Western Provinces, and the general state of the landed tenures.

Little permanent benefit resulted from this. The machinery was not suited to the purpose. It was too stately and formal. An immense quantity of work was thrown upon it; some inquiries were instituted; some unjust decisions were reversed, and many compromises were effected. A partial remedy was applied to individual cases; but the root of the evil was not touched. Indeed, these judicial tribunals were not suited to such a purpose as the adjustment of territorial claims.\* They who had thought most on the subject were of opinion that the required settlement was best to be effected by revenue-officers, moving among the people, conversing freely with them, and altogether extricating themselves from the formal incumbrances of official state.

\* The first commissioners appointed were Mr. W. W. Bird and Mr. H. G. Christian, and as long as the special powers, so created, were in the hands of such men, the regulation worked advantageously; but when they were conferred on all the commissioners of revenue, without regard to their especial fitness, the consequences were most pernicious.





Foremost among these was Mr. Holt Mackenzie, a man of large and liberal views, and of a thoughtful nature, who told the collectors to shoulder their guns, to go out among the people, and bring back information with their game. Views of this kind led to the framing of a regulation—very famous in the history of Indian Land-Revenue—known as Regulation VII. of 1822, which was, doubtless, an advance upon anything that had been before promulgated, but which was not without inherent defects. It was stuffed too full of requirements. It imposed upon a limited agency almost unlimited duties. It emanated from one, indeed, who had not graduated in the revenue department, and who had over-estimated the amount of detail work which our revenue-officers could adequately perform. The principle was sound—the proposed system was excellent—but for want of sufficient means to carry it into effect, it was one of difficult accomplishment. So it happened that the work of revision went on so slowly, that when ten years had elapsed from the time of its initiation, it was calculated that it would take sixty more years to render the work complete.

From all that I have written up to this point the reader will gain no very clear conception of what is the nature of the revenue settlement existing in the North-Western Provinces of India. Up to this point, indeed, there is little but confusion and obscurity in my pages, as there was little but confusion and obscurity in the revenue administration of that part of the country. We found that a great variety of tenures had been recognised by the native governments, prior to the cession of the provinces; and we took what we found without considering whether we were adopting indigenous institutions, or merely the corrupt growth of usurpation and abuse. We were not answerable for the fruits of disorganisation and misrule, which





came ripe to our hands; nor could we obviate the necessary evils of that worst of all transition-states—the transition of a people from one government to another. It would have been strange if, at such a time, there had not been a scramble; it would have been strange if some impostors had not stepped in, if just rights had not been temporarily obscured and fraudulent claims erroneously recognised. Our British administrators, in this epoch, knew just as much as they could reasonably be expected to know. They had a clear conception of a Zemindar, and some idea of a Ryot. All the proclamations and regulations issued at this time, were addressed to “Zemindars, independent Talookdars, and other proprietors.” Doubtless, there were such personages in the Ceded and Conquered Countries, but the “other proprietors” included a far more important class. The collectors, who were pushed up damp from Bengal, knew little or nothing of the village communities, which, from remote generations, had flourished in Upper India. But from year to year, as time advanced, knowledge dawned more clearly upon them. The darkness began to disappear. Our revenue-officers saw with greater and greater distinctness facts instead of fictions before them. They had peopled the provinces in the first instance with the latter, carrying their own preconceived notions of landed tenures and agricultural systems to a country which knew little or nothing of the things which their new rulers had stereotyped in their minds. But in time, the ancient institutions which had been shrouded from them, or which they only saw in a glass darkly, they now saw face to face; and with this knowledge came the conviction of the burden of wrong which our ignorance must have brought upon the land.

The settlement of the North-Western Provinces is





now officially described as a "Putteedaree" Settlement\*—that is, a settlement made with the "Putteedars," or sharers of estates. But in our earlier revenue transactions in the Upper India little or no account was taken of such people as "Putteedars."† They were the proprietors of the several allotments of estates held under the old village system—that system which our administrators in the early part of the present century trod down so remorselessly in their chase of Zemindars and Talookdars, and other great individual proprietors or contractors of the same class. We had, indeed, contrived almost to crush these village communities, and had committed the great cardinal error of governing the people after any other fashion than their own. But with a progressive increase of knowledge came a progressive improvement in the administration of our new provinces, and we began more and more to shape our system in accordance with the institutions and usages of the people. It would be easy to trace through the Regulations of the first quarter of the present century growing indications of this expansion of knowledge—of this ever-increasing desire to lessen the gulf between the rulers and the ruled, and to adapt our forms of government to the real requirements of the country. But it was long before so difficult a subject—one so intricate in itself,

\* Land-Revenue definitions are no easy things to write, so I gladly borrow a description of the Putteedaree Settlement from the "Statistical Papers relating to India," recently prepared at the India House:—"Under the Putteedaree tenure the same estate is parcelled out into allotments, and thenceforward the shares in the net profits are commuted for equivalent portions of land. Each proprietor or shareholder undertakes the agricultural management of his separate allotment, paying through the representative of the proprietary body (the lumkerdar, or, perhaps, the head man of the village) such instalment of the Government revenue

as may have been agreed to among themselves, in distributing the aggregate assessment. In the event of individual default, a joint responsibility attaches to the whole proprietary body; but any proceedings instituted by the Government for the realisation of the deficiency, would be directed, in the first instance, against the defaulting allotment. The characteristic of the Putteedaree tenure is cultivation in severalty with joint responsibility."

† The first Regulation which I can find, manifesting anything like an acquaintance with the Putteedaree system, is Regulation IX. of 1811.





and to the eye of a foreigner rendered doubly indistinct and mysterious by the social exclusiveness of the people—was fully mastered, in all its bearings. The more we learnt, the more clear it became that we had committed a grievous mistake in overlooking the village communities, and the more eager we became to make atonement for the evil we had done.

The new Regulation, of which I have spoken, was a prodigious advance upon all its predecessors. It indicated a larger knowledge and a purer benevolence. It pledged the Government to ascertain, and when ascertained to recognise, the territorial rights of all classes. It was its object "to introduce a general and scientific survey of the country, to mark carefully and to record the boundaries of every village, to register the separate possessions, rights, privileges, and responsibilities of those communities who hold their lands in severalty, and of the several interests of those who hold land in common."\*

The sum payable to Government by every individual shareholder was to be recorded; but every individual shareholder was not to have immediate transactions with Government. The payments of the shareholders were to be made collectively, by the head man of the village, or other representative; and a joint responsibility was recognised. "It was intended," says Mr. Campbell, "to combine the advantages of the Ryotwar system with that of village leases."† It

\* *Raihes' "Notes on the North-Western Provinces of India."*—A very interesting work, which all should consult who desire further information regarding the history of this great settlement, and the nature of landed tenures in the North-West. A clearer conception of the village communities is to be derived from it, than from any other work with which I am acquainted.

† *Modern India*, page 323.—"The most common tenure of all in the North-West," says Mr. Campbell, "is that where a village belongs not to a single individual, but to a single family.

In this case the great proportion of the land is cultivated by tenants; and the sharers have not their shares separately divided off—the tenants are the tenants of all in common. The proprietors generally live in the village, and their own cultivation is taken into account at lower rates. The whole collections are brought together, the revenue paid, and the surplus divided among the proprietors, according to the fractional share possessed by each. When there are many proprietors, one or two are chosen representatives and managers."





afforded ample protection to individuals without clogging the wheels of the administrative machinery with a mass of individual contracts.

Such, briefly stated, was the intent of the new system of revenue administration which was to be introduced into the North-Western Provinces of India. But the great reform, as I have said, did not proceed apace, for want of an efficient agency to reduce it to energetic practice. Ten years passed away, and the progress towards a thorough revision of the settlement was painfully small. It was plain, therefore, that the machinery must be improved.

Lord William Bentinck was at this time Governor-General of India, and he was on a tour through the Upper Provinces. He saw at once that it was necessary to do something to give more effective operation to the provision of the famous Regulation VII. of 1822. Halting at Allahabad, where a Board of Revenue for the North-Western Provinces had been recently established, he took counsel with all the best authorities on the spot, and the result was another famous regulation, known as Regulation IX. of 1833, under which the present settlement has been prosecuted, with so much vigor, to its completion. It embraced all the objects of the previous regulation, with other collateral aims, and it greatly improved the machinery of revision, and enlarged the personal agency to be employed. Special settlement officers were to be appointed, not burdened with other duties; civilians, with all their time and all their energies to bestow upon the great work that opened out before them.

The objects which it was now proposed to embrace were these:

1. The revision of the assessment.
2. The better division of the instalments of revenue payable to Government.