

EAST INDIA (MADRAS LAND REVENUE).

RETURN to an Address of the Honourable The House of Commons,
dated 31 July 1899;—for,

“RECENT CORRESPONDENCE between the SECRETARY OF STATE FOR INDIA and the
MADRAS GOVERNMENT, concerning Sales of Land for Arrears of Revenue and
alleged Shortcomings in the Madras Land Revenue Arrangements.”

India Office,
8 August 1899. }

ARTHUR GODLEY,
Under Secretary of State.

(*Sir William Wedderburn.*)

Ordered, by The House of Commons, to be Printed,
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RECENT CORRESPONDENCE between the SECRETARY OF STATE FOR INDIA and the MADRAS GOVERNMENT concerning Sales of Land for Arrears of Revenue and alleged Shortcomings in the Madras Land Revenue Arrangements.

No. 1.

DESPATCH FROM THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR INDIA TO THE GOVERNMENT OF MADRAS.

No. 5, Revenue. Dated India Office, 9th March 1893.

I forward, for the information of your Excellency's Government, copy of a letter from Mr. A. Rogers, concerning certain points in the land revenue administration of Madras, together with copy of the reply I caused to be sent to him.

2. Mr. Rogers remarks upon (1) the large number of ryots' holdings that are sold for arrears of revenue, and (2) on the smallness of the increase of the land revenue in Madras. And he draws conclusions unfavourable to the revenue administration of your Presidency.

3. As to the first point, I find that the expediency of reducing the number of sales for arrears of land revenue has engaged the attention of your Government and of the Madras Revenue Board for several years. The number of defaulters whose property, real and personal, was sold for arrears of land revenue has fallen steadily from 130,714 in the year 1883-84 to 11,339 in the year 1890-91. Even the latter figure, however, indicates a use of coercive processes which it is desirable to reduce further if possible. I find that in the Bombay Presidency the total number of forfeitures and sales of occupancies for arrears of revenue was only 1,052. The number of ryotwaree holdings in Madras is nearly five millions, while the number in Bombay is nearly one million, and sales are thus nearly twice as numerous in proportion to the number of holdings as they are in Bombay.

4. As to the second point, I consider that the increase of the land revenue in Madras during the past 40 years has been as large as can fairly be expected. The land revenue of the Presidency in 1853-54 is given (page 144 of the Madras Manual of Administration) at 334 lakhs. Since that time land paying 8 to 10 lakhs of revenue has been transferred to Bombay; the great famine of 1876-77 seriously arrested progress, and the land of Madras has during recent years yielded from 65 to 70 lakhs a year in local cesses. The land revenue of Madras now, in good seasons, yields 500 lakhs a year, besides cesses. Of the land revenue total about 65 lakhs are permanently settled. And the temporarily settled lands of the Presidency appear to be now yielding, in the shape of land revenue and cesses, nearly twice the amount they produced 40 years ago.

5. While, therefore, I am unable to agree altogether in Mr. Rogers' criticisms, or to accept all his conclusions, I shall be glad to have the opinion of your Government, whether some further improvement may not be introduced in the method of dealing with land revenue defaulters and their holdings.

I have, &c.

(Signed)

KIMBERLEY.

Enclosure 1 in No. 1.

From A. ROGERS, Esq., late Bombay Civil Service, to the UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE, India Office, dated 12th January 1893.

In pursuance of the inquiries into the condition of the Land Revenue Administration of India that have enabled me to publish the history of that of Bombay, of which Her Majesty's Government have been good enough to take ten copies, I have now turned my attention to the Madras Presidency, and have found a state of affairs which I deem it my duty to bring without delay to the notice of the Secretary of State in Council.

In the last three years for which the detailed revenue accounts have reached the India Office, viz., 1887-88 to 1889-90, inclusive, the occupancy rights in nearly 87,000 acres have been sold by auction by the Revenue officers in default of payment of current revenue demands (exclusive of arrears) by 64,415 tenants, to the amount of Rs. 8,50,113. In addition to this there has been sold personal property of the value of Rs. 2,76,611 at auction.

Now, when it is considered that this, in a rayatvari country, means the deprivation of over 64,000 homes of their chief, if not their only, means of subsistence, the serious evils that must lie at the root of the land revenue administration of the Presidency may be fairly assumed.

These figures relate to actual sales of personal and real property, but the extent to which coercive processes, as they are called, have had to be resorted to for the collection of revenue is exemplified by the fact that notices of attachment of property had to be issued to the extraordinary number of 937,955 defaulters in the same three years.

In order to probe the matter still further, I have examined the returns to ascertain by whom the lands were purchased, and find that of the 97,114 acres sold as much as 39,849 had to be bought in for Government for want of bidders, although a very large proportion of the area was of the more valuable description of wet, or irrigated, land. I hope I may be wrong in thinking that among the personal property sold there must have been a good many of the ryots' agricultural cattle.

Taking the land revenue for 10 years, from 1853-54 to 1862-63, I find that the average for the whole Presidency was Rs. 3,85,12,765. For the 10 years, from 1873-74 to 1882-83, it was Rs. 4,37,32,815. That is to say, in a whole generation of 30 years of profound peace, notwithstanding the large increase of population that must have taken place, there was an increase of land revenue of about 52 lakhs of rupees, or say 500,000%, which is certainly far below what it would have been if the system of land revenue administration had been a good one.

The Madras returns do not give the amount of arable waste land in each Collectorate, which would enable a judgment to be formed of the result of the revised assessments introduced from time to time. The whole of these facts, however, point to a faulty revenue system, which, if Her Majesty's Government desire, I shall be happy to test by the light of many years' experience in the rayatvari country of Bombay, and lay before them.

Enclosure 2 in No. 1.

From the UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE FOR INDIA to A. ROGERS, Esq., dated India Office, 9th March 1893.

I am directed to acknowledge with thanks your letter dated the 12th January, conveying remarks upon certain matters connected with the

land revenue administration of the Madras Presidency. Your letter has been laid before the Secretary of State in Council.

I have, &c.,
(Signed) A. GODLEY.

No. 2.

LETTER FROM A. ROGERS, ESQ., LATE BOMBAY C. S., TO THE UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE, INDIA OFFICE, DATED 3RD FEBRUARY 1893.

I have the honour to forward, in continuation of my letter of the 12th ultimo,* bringing to notice the state of matters in the Madras Presidency with regard to the coercive processes that appear to be necessary in the collection of the Land Revenue, a memorandum showing in detail the method of settlement in the Presidency, and comparing it with the Bombay system.

If I were not convinced from long experience of settlements in Bombay that the Madras system lay at the root of the evils I have endeavoured to expose, I think the following figures, taken from the Land Revenue Settlement Report for 1887-88 (page 25), and those for the two subsequent years, the latest procurable, would be sufficient to prove my point.

In the 11 years from 1879-80 to 1889-90 there were sold by auction for the collection of Land Revenue the occupancy rights in 1,899,865 acres of land held by 841,013 defaulters, in addition to personal property of the value of Rs. 29,65,081.

Of the 1,899,865 acres, 1,171,143 had to be bought in on the part of Government for want of bidders, that is to say, very nearly 60 per cent. of the land supposed to be fairly and equitably assessed could not find purchasers, and only the balance of 752,932 acres was sold. It is true that the area of land sold for arrears has steadily diminished down to the amount shown in my previous letter, but, looking to the very imperfect system of assessment now commented upon, it would seem that this must be due to the gradual elimination of all land that cannot find men to cultivate it in consequence of the unfairness of its assessment. The evils of the Mahratta farming system have been pointed out in my history of the Bombay Land Revenue, but I doubt if that system at its worst could have shown such a spectacle as that of nearly 850,000 ryots in the course of 11 years sold out of about 1,900,000 acres of land.

Enclosure in No. 2.

Extracts from the Madras Manual of Administration, 1885.

In Madras the field surveys take the form of a complete cadastral, combined with a topographical survey. The next step consists in the inspection of villages and the classification of villages and soils. Inspection extends to the whole tract of country immediately under settlement, and the Settlement Officer visits as large a proportion as possible of the villages contained in it, so as to make himself acquainted with the general features of the tract and the condition of each village. In Madras the extent of the tract settled sometimes comprises a whole subdivision of a district, with an area of 1,000 square miles.

* Enclosure in No. 1, page 3.

Remarks.—The only classification of villages for settlement possible under a proper system is one of arrangement in classes with reference to climate and proximity to markets for the disposal of produce. If their existing condition is looked to, and those that are apparently prosperous are rated higher than others, and *vice versá*, the system acts as a deterrent to industry and the expenditure of capital on agricultural improvements, and an incentive to sloth and slovenly cultivation. This was one of the objections taken in Bombay to a similar departure from right principle in the North-West Provinces Settlements. The two points noted above must, of course, be considered by the settling officer, as well as the greater or smaller value of fields according to nearness to or distance from village site and water, in fixing the rates of individual villages; but all other points connected with value according to natural fertility should be provided for in the classification of soils.

In the classification of soils in Southern India, natural soils alone are looked to in the first instance, and manure is considered subsequently.

Remarks.—The theory as to natural soils alone being looked to in the first instance, with manure being subsequently considered, is apparently at variance with the practice, for in the description of the fourth "order" of soils given below, viz., the "alluvial and permanently improved," it is stated that that "order" provides for rich islands of extraordinary fertility, and for gardens and other soils permanently improved. Now there is no such thing as soil permanently improved by manure, for the effect of the highest artificial manure, such as no native of India uses, must be but temporary, and, were there such soils in existence, to tax them more heavily would be to lay a direct impost on private enterprise. It is another matter to rate a field close to a village site higher than one at a distance on account of the facility for procuring manure possessed by the occupant of the former, and has nothing to do with the proper classification according to natural fertility.

By the time that the stage of assessment is entered upon, the Settlement Officer has before him a number of general statistics collected during the survey, inspection, and classification of each village, and especially a scale showing the relative value of fields. The revenue rate per acre is thence determined. The Madras method of doing this is as follows:—

From time immemorial the "field" has been the unit of landed estate, and the public demand on the ryot is the sum of the assessments on his several fields, the assessment on the field being the money value of the Government share of its produce. To assess a field it is necessary to know either, on the one hand, the quantity of its produce without reference to its area, or, on the other hand, its area and the quantity of the produce of a given part of it, or of an equal portion of other fields of similar quality and condition. A settlement based on the former of these methods would be interminable, and necessity compels the adoption of the latter. The determination of areas being the province of the Survey Department, that of produce alone is that of the Settlement Department.

Remarks.—Here the Bombay system joins direct issue with that of Madras, and maintains that it is not only necessary to know or estimate the actual grain produce of a field, but that the attempt to arrive at any reliable estimate of the average produce per acre in any considerable tract of country is illusory and misleading. This was substantially the system originally adopted in Bombay by Mr. Pringle (as described at pages 101 to 107, Vol. II., of the lately published History of the Bombay Land Revenue), which was proved to be so faulty that the Bombay Government finally came to the conclusion that the whole must be set aside, and, being satisfied that it could not even be made the basis of any revision, directed that the whole operation should be commenced *de novo*. What system was substituted for it in Bombay will be described hereafter, but attention may here be profitably called to the inherent impracticability of any such scheme as that still in force in Madras, notwithstanding its known failure in Bombay.

The most superficial observer passing over a few acres of standing crops in any part of the world cannot fail to see the great differences there are in those crops, notwithstanding the apparently identical geological and climatic circumstances. Anyone walking over the same ground when bare of crops could see at a glance sufficient to account for such differences in the marks of runlets of water caused by the natural flow of the drainage, and variety in colour of soil, which would be accentuated if he examined its texture on the surface, or digging a little deeper found a substratum, more or less near to that surface, of stone, or impervious clay, or sand, or other unfertile substance. If in a space of a few acres there are such differences to be seen, those to be found in thousands of square miles of country, in which geological and climatic circumstances would vary immensely, must be altogether beyond calculation. Notwithstanding this, the Madras system of assessment is to this day based on the supposed average produce of soils, complicated, after deduction of from one-fourth to one-sixth to allow for vicissitudes of seasons, by conversion of that produce into money at an average of prices of the principal varieties of grain for a period of 20 years, and by deduction from the money value thus arrived at of the average expense of cultivation per acre, such as the cost of agricultural cattle and of their keep, seed, hire of labour—permanent and temporary—implements, manure, and transplanting. Some of these, such as the cost of cattle and farm tools, have even to be subdivided and spread over more than one year.

The mere enumeration of the elaborate processes of calculation gone through on experiments on crops to the number of 2,000 or 3,000 in a district is sufficient to convince anyone not under the influence of the magic of figures of the impracticable nature of the system of thus assessing the proper rents of individual fields, which are taken at half the residue, called the net produce, after the deductions noted above. In order to decide to what category for assessment each field belongs, classifiers, checked by head classifiers and supervisors, examine it, and record it as one of three or five sorts, of one of two or three classes, of one of five series or orders of land.

Each series is divided into classes, the exceptional into two, the others into three each; the class of a soil is determined by the quantity of clay it contains, meaning by clay that impalpable matter which is formed by the combination of the primitive earths with organic matter in a state of decay. The three soil classes are clay, loam, and sand. Clay soils of each series are those containing more than 66 per cent. of clay; loaming soils are those with one-third to two-thirds of clay and the rest sand; sandy soils are those with more than two-thirds sand. In selecting samples, the soil is turned up to the depth of 6 or 8 inches, and the proportions of sand and clay, when doubtful, are tested by dissolution in water. The classes, again, are subdivided into sorts, the sorts being determined on the same consideration as the class. From the first, Government has deprecated any attempt at making an accurately scientific classification of soils. . . . The classes adopted are few, and based on tangible differences of soil. For the most part, eye, finger, and thumb are the classifier's only guides, and the nearest approach to a scientific method that is allowed him is when, in cases of doubt, he tests for clay by simple methods, which give its bulk or weight, but do not indicate its chemical composition.

Remarks.—The five orders are (1) the regar, or black cotton; (2) the red feruginous; (3) the arenaceous; (4) the alluvial and permanently improved; and (5) the calcareous. On the other side of the page are the methods of classification adopted. The classes are said to be few, and based on tangible differences. The former can hardly be said to be the case when there may be three or five sorts, multiplied by two or three classes, multiplied by five orders, to be taken into consideration; and it is recorded in the same paper (*see* paragraph 112, page 109, Vol. I. of the Manual) that as many as 35 different money rates are sometimes struck for a single revenue district, ranging from 4 aunas to Rs. 20 per acre. Again, if liberty to decide to what sort a field may belong, a palpably dangerous liberty, is allowed to a lowly paid classifier by testing for clay with water, why should he not equally be

allowed to test by fire, a quasi-chemical method by which the quantity of organic matter in a sample of earth would be more accurately ascertained than by that of solution in water? (This is, of course, a *reductio ad absurdum* of the system.) What, again, becomes of the element of depth, most important in determining the fertility of a soil, especially in a rocky country, where, in one part of a field, rock may be close to the surface, and in other parts the earth may be several feet deep? Should not, also, a sloping surface, which causes the rain to wash away the fertilizing particles of the so-called clay, to be taken into consideration in fixing class and sort? Is such a serious deterioration in soil as that caused by impregnation with salt from salt springs, or occasional overflow of the tide, not looked to?

This leads to a consideration of the method adopted in Bombay to arrive at the relative values of fields by the classification of their soils. According to the principles originally laid down in 1840, and acted on up to the present time, the most naturally fertile soil in a district is ascertained by local inquiries, and, that being taken as the best, or 16 annas to the rupee, faults taken from their productive qualities, such as want of depth, a mixture of sand or stones, a sloping surface, want of cohesion amongst the constituent particles of the soil, the mixture of soil impervious to water, liability to be swept over by running water, excess of moisture from surface springs, and impregnation with salt, are given proportionately to the degree of such deteriorating influences so as to reduce the classification by one or more classes. Of these there are nine, found to be a sufficient number, for all practical purposes, to lower the classification to 14 or 12, or more annas down as low as 2 annas. All faults found to exist in any field are shown on its sketch map drawn in the classer's book by conventional signs. On the sketch map must also be shown the segments into which the field is divided by him to ascertain depth of soil, deduction on account of unarable portions (such as on account of rock or of a road crossing it), and for other classification purposes, so that the supervising officer, in most cases a European assistant superintendent, can at any time test for himself the accuracy of the reasons given for the classer's relative value in annas assigned to the field. In Madras the classifier only records against a field, "3rd sort, 2nd class, regar," or some similar entry, a vague method, which renders any trickery of which he may have been guilty very difficult of detection by his supervising officer. That this may well be the case is apparent from the remark at page 107 of the Manual, that when it is known that the ryot's field is of such a sort geologically and agriculturally (what the latter term signifies it is difficult to understand), and that for his neighbourhood the assumed amount of net produce of that sort is so much, he knows how much he has to pay to Government, for Government ask in every case half of the value of the net produce. A method such as this must open a wide door for fraud, for, if the ryot knows beforehand what he will have to pay for a certain description of land, he and the classer will not be long in coming to terms as to the nature of the entries to be made with regard to his field, and the slight existing chance of detection will be run. In Bombay, no man can tell beforehand what the rent of certain land will be, for the maximum rate is not fixed until all classification has been completed, and even after this none but the settling officer can tell whether it will be lowered or raised on account of greater or less distance from village site or water, or on account of the maximum of the whole village being raised or lowered for climatic or market considerations. There is, of course, a risk of collusion under both systems, but this explanation demonstrates how infinitely smaller it is under that of Bombay. It will be seen from what has been stated above that the separate assessment of fields is graduated down from a maximum rate from the highest to the lowest qualities of soil, according to a regular classification, in annas or classes determined by faults causing fertility to diminish in consequence of qualities existing or wanting which are perceptible to the eye, a matter that can be tested by a subsequent examination. The idea that the amount of clay (as technically defined above) can be ascertained by dissolving earth in a test tube—such is the method reported to be adopted—is chemically inaccurate, for there are many chemical ingredients, both

fertilizing and deteriorating, that are soluble in water, and that would accordingly elude detection by this test, to let alone the absurdity of expecting classifiers to estimate with any accuracy the amount of any residuum that might be left in a test tube in the case of the hundreds of fields in a village.

A revenue system based on field assessment seems to demand naturally and necessarily the separate classification of each individual field, and this is the sanctioned method of the department; it is, at the same time, laid down that though the details of classification extend to each field, the wider comparative view of the operations should never be lost sight of, as it is most desirable that the land should be viewed in a comprehensive way by the classifier. As a method of work, Government have disapproved of the plan, but encourage blocking as a sequel to field classification, and as, in fact, an office arrangement made for the purpose of check and revision. Under this system it is evident that the average run of soils must determine the classification of a block, and that isolated fields and tracts of better or worse quality than the average of the block must gain or lose by inclusion within it.

Remarks.—How far this system of arranging land in blocks is permitted to affect the assessment of individual fields is not apparent from the description quoted from the Manual. The concluding remarks are, however, sufficient of themselves to condemn the system, if it has been and is allowed to influence that assessment in any way, for it follows of necessity that the assessment is unfair, and this may account for the unwillingness shown by people to bid for lands put up to auction by the Collectors of late years, as proved by the annual revenue reports.

In fixing rates of assessment, objection is raised in Madras to former collections being looked to. This objection can only apply to an attempt to assess individual fields according to what may have been levied from them in the past, and in that case it is right, inasmuch as if records were in any case in existence showing grain rents levied from fields under the old division of produce system, they would be untrustworthy for various reasons, and especially because the old recorded areas would be merely estimated and not actually measured. But for the purpose of determining the general level of assessment likely to lead to a successful settlement, no more reliable data than returns of former levies of revenue (and area as far as procurable) could be made use of. No more certain criteria exist of the general success or failure of previous revenue systems than such returns, which prove by increase or decrease of cultivated area, and consequent advance or falling off of land revenue, the suitability or otherwise of the general level of the assessment to the condition of the people and the circumstances of the times. Taken into consideration with prospects of rising or falling prices of agricultural produce, with the opening up of new and deterioration of old markets, improvement in the means of communication, and other circumstances tending to show the general condition of the agricultural population, such returns of previous assessments, taken over a sufficiently large area and for a series of years, are an infallible guide to what the level of assessment should be in future. They have invariably been so taken in the Bombay Revenue Survey settlements, of which the success is undoubted. Compared with the complicated Madras process, already described, of endeavouring to ascertain the gross and net produce of land, the system to a man of ordinary judgment is simplicity itself, and may be confidently recommended for adoption in that Presidency, where the very slow advance in land revenue, notwithstanding a generally dense agricultural population, is a clear proof of the unsuitableness of the present method of assessment. It must be remembered that inequality of assessment, to which the system has been shown to be particularly liable, is almost as fertile a source of the non-success of a settlement as an excessive rate of assessment. The fact of large areas of land, nearly 40,000 acres in the years 1887-88 to 1889-90, not being taken up by private purchasers when offered for sale by the revenue authorities goes far towards proving that the former is one of the faults of the existing assessments.

In addition to all this, it must be evident that the Madras assessments, amounting to the full rent, and not being a tax on that rent, as those of Bombay professedly are, land will not acquire that marketable value which it is proved in many ways the settled lands in Bombay have acquired.

There can thus be no doubt that the whole system of assessment in the Madras Presidency requires a complete investigation. Such an investigation, considering that there are believed to be about 3,000,000 acres of arable land still available, which might under a better system be brought into cultivation, and add largely to the land revenue, would be undertaken with a fair prospect of results satisfactory both to the State and its subjects.

No. 3.

DESPATCH FROM THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR INDIA TO THE GOVERNMENT OF MADRAS.

No. 8 (Revenue). Dated India Office, 7th May 1896.

Extract.

I have considered in Council your Excellency's Letter, No. 1 (Revenue), dated the 14th March 1896, with enclosures, containing replies to Lord Kimberley's Inquiry, whether some further improvement could not be made in the method of dealing with land revenue defaulters in your Presidency.

It appears that, for some years after the great famine of 1877, large areas of land were sold for arrears of revenue. In districts where many ryots had disappeared or left their holdings, this course may have been unavoidable. The attention of the Revenue Board and the Madras Government was given to the subject, with the result that sales in default were greatly reduced, thus:—

Year.	Area sold for Arrears.	Number of Defaulters whose Property moveable and immoveable was sold.
1879-80 - - -	Acres. 581,994	166,632
1891-92 - - -	20,273	11,118
1892-93 - - -	30,296	12,400

The Revenue Board regard with satisfaction this reduction of sales for revenue arrears; they state that the condition of affairs, which is now being remedied, was "caused by inefficiency and neglect of duty on the part of the officers of Government"; and they consider that "even the present reduced figures of arrears and sales are capable of improvement."

Your Government observe that the dates for the payment of land revenue instalments have recently been revised, so as to suit the convenience of the ryots, and that further revision of those dates is under consideration; and you report that when the instalments are properly fixed, the most efficacious remedy will lie in the punctual collection of each instalment as it falls due.

I gather that you concur in Lord Kimberley's view, which I share, that a very large number of sales for arrears of revenue is not a satisfactory feature in the land revenue administration of an Indian province. I shall be glad to learn that further improvement has, as anticipated by the

Revenue Board, taken place in this matter; and I observe with regret that the number of such sales has increased again since the lowest point was reached in the year 1891-92.

It is not creditable to the past revenue administration of the Revenue Board that they should find themselves compelled to say that regrettable features in the administration of the land revenue were due to inefficiency and neglect of duty on the part of the officers of Government. Some part of the blame, for any maladministration that may have occurred, must rest upon the Revenue Board and the Government, whose business it was to keep the revenue officers to their duty. I trust that in future this view of the matter may be borne in mind.

I cannot conclude this Despatch without adverting to the inordinate delay which has occurred in sending the letter of your Government to which I am now replying. It would appear from Mr. Secretary Gibson's letter of the 17th ultimo, that the letter in question was written shortly after the receipt of the proceedings of the Revenue Board, or some 16 months before it was actually despatched. Such a delay in a matter of considerable importance would seem to indicate the necessity of inquiry as to the method in which the correspondence of your Government is carried on.

EAST INDIA (MADRAS LAND REVENUE).

RETURN

To an Address of the Honorable the House of Commons,
dated 31 July 1899;—

for,

“RECENT CORRESPONDENCE between the SECRETARY OF STATE FOR INDIA and the MADRAS GOVERNMENT concerning Sales of Land for Artoars of Revenue and alleged Shortcomings in the Madras Land Revenue Arrangements.”

(Sir William Wedderburn.)

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