

CHAPTER X

IDEAS AND REACTIONS

Raffles' Revenue Instructions.

It is unnecessary here to examine in any great detail Raffles' revenue instructions of February 11, 1814.¹ Levyssohn Norman, who was most critical of the land rent system in general, has given a good summary of them, and they have been translated into Dutch.² The instructions were based upon the principle that the Government would act "directly with each individual cultivator", and would stand forth as "the sole Collector and enjoyer of its own revenues".³ In theory, the revenue administration was to be separated from the judicial branches of Government by the appointment of Collectors. These officers were to supervise the working of the land rent system, and relieve the Residents from any additional burdens which the new system might impose.⁴ In practice, the Residents continued to control the collection and administration of the land rent. Very few Collectors were ever appointed.⁵

Raffles' instructions stated that the land rent was to be collected by the heads of the villages.⁶ There was thus only a theoretical distinction between the village and the *Ryotwari* systems. In the case of the former, lands were *leased* or *rented* to the village headmen, who collected the rent from the cultivators. In the detailed settlement, the village chiefs continued to collect the rent, but they did so not by any right of lease, but on the orders of the Government.⁷ Raffles thought that the new system possessed all the advant-

¹ *Sub.*, pp. 181 et seq.

² Deventer, S. van, *L.S.*, I, pp. 102 et seq.; Anon., *Extract-Vertaling eener Memorie, van Thomas Stamford Raffles... den 11 Februarij 1814*, (1828).

³ *Sub.*, 194.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁵ The names of few Collectors appear in the *Java Almanac* for the years 1814 and 1815. See Norman, H. D. Levyssohn, *op. cit.*, 193.

⁶ *Sub.*, 184.

⁷ Notice, however, Raffles' curious use of the word "lease", *Ibid.*, 197. A copy of the certificates issued to the village headmen under the detailed settlement is printed *Ibid.*, pp. 212—3.

ages of the village settlement, with none of its evils.⁸ The village headmen were to be paid either in cash, or by exempting them from the payment of rent on their own lands.

In order that the detailed system might function properly, the "minutest details"⁹ regarding the lands and their produce were necessary. The Collectors were to gather this information from the "head inhabitants" of the villages in their divisions, or by conducting an investigation themselves.¹⁰ A detailed survey of Java would thereby result.¹¹ On the basis of this information a regular and just settlement of the land rent was to be made, not upon the village chiefs, but upon the individual cultivators.¹² The rents were to be calculated as follows:¹³

	<i>Sawahs</i> produce	<i>Tegals</i> produce
Best quality	$\frac{1}{2}$	$\frac{2}{5}$
Middling quality	$\frac{2}{5}$	$\frac{1}{3}$
Poor quality	$\frac{1}{3}$	$\frac{1}{4}$

In estimating the produce of the various lands, the average of former years was to be taken as the criterion.¹⁴ The produce of the *sawahs* was to be calculated in rice, and that of the *tegals* in maize. The above rates were to be the maximum amounts demanded, but Raffles thought that these would probably not be realized immediately.¹⁵ The cultivators, despite the fact that few of them could read or write, were to be given written statements of the amount of lands they held, and the rent that was to be demanded of them.¹⁶ This was supposed to protect them against the extortions and malpractices of the village chiefs.¹⁷ Rents were to be paid either in kind or in money. Raffles stated that the option had been left to the cultivators because of the scarcity of specie in the island.¹⁸ But this option was only to apply to the cultivators of the *sawahs*, who could,

⁸ Ibid., 197.

⁹ Ibid., 187.

¹⁰ Ibid., 188.

¹¹ Loc. cit.

¹² Ibid., 196.

¹³ Ibid., 198.

¹⁴ Ibid., 190.

¹⁵ Ibid., 198.

¹⁶ Ibid., 197. See Form G, Ibid., pp. 214—5.

¹⁷ Ibid., 197.

¹⁸ Ibid., 199.

if they wished, deliver rice in payment of their rents. The farmers who produced maize from *tegals* were not so fortunate. They had to find money for their crop in order to pay the Government its dues.¹⁹ Thus while admitting the great shortage of specie in the island, Raffles nevertheless demanded it from the very cultivators who could ill afford to risk speculations on their crops.

Levysohn Norman criticized the instructions which Raffles issued for the introduction of the detailed settlement of the land rent in Java, mainly on the grounds that they did not contain one administrative provision for the working of such a sweeping reform.²⁰ There were, in fact, too many provisions for the working of the system, provisions which could only, and perhaps doubtfully, have been applied with the administrative machinery of a modern colonial Government. Not only was this machinery lacking in Raffles' time, but he did not have a dozen civil servants who he could have appointed to the posts of Collectors of the land rent. The detailed system remained a village system in fact.

Bengal's reaction to Raffles' Reforms.

While Raffles was engaged in writing his Minute, he received a private letter from his patron, Lord Minto, who was then preparing for his departure to England. Minto had written before he had received Raffles' Minute of September, or the documents relating to the introduction of the village settlements along the North East coast.²¹ He was, however, in possession of Raffles' June Minute. In his farewell letter,²² Minto reluctantly approved the sale of lands, although he thought that it was too important a measure for a provisional Government to have undertaken without reference. He continued

[A]lthough my views, as you know, lead to the transfer of public territory to the management of individual industry,

¹⁹ Loc. cit.

²⁰ Norman, H. D. Levysohn, op. cit., 192.

²¹ In a Minute recorded on June 18, 1814, (*Java*, Vol. 63) Edmonstone stated that Raffles' despatch of October 5, 1813, (*Bengal Civil Colonial Consultations*, February 15, 1814) which contained the Minute of September 17, 1813, as well as the instructions issued to the Residents at this time, did not reach Bengal until December 10, 1813. There was a further delay in circulating it among the members of the Council.

²² Minto to Raffles, November [22], 1813, Lady Raffles, *Memoir*, 197.

and the creation of a genuine landed interest, with all its immediate benefits and ameliorating tendencies, in the room of the deplorable system of vassalage and dependence under which land is now held in Java; yet I have felt that this change could not be brought about suddenly, partly from the very nature of all extensive changes, partly from the circumstances of the colony, which contains at present neither capital nor capitalists enough to afford a comparison between the value in the market, of land and money, either fair or at all approaching to be fair. I should have inclined, therefore, to small and partial sales of land, if alienation in perpetuity should have been thought advisable at all, proportioned in some degree to the disposable quantity of money in the hands of individuals. But the general course to be recommended I conceive to be short leases, followed by longer, and ultimately by perpetuities.

Minto went on to warn Raffles against the adoption of a permanent settlement. He said this might later be annulled by the authorities in London.

Raffles replied confidently two days after he had put the finishing touches to his Minute of February 11. He told Minto of his surprise when he learned from a copy of the *Fifth Report*, which had just fallen into his hands, that he had hit upon the principles of the *Ryotwari* settlement by accident. "I have throughout", he continued, "considered myself as the agent acting under your Lordship's instructions; and I can assure you that my ambition will be gratified by an assurance that I have not failed in acting up to your original design".²³ This statement alone makes nonsense of Wright's contention that Raffles was acting secretly in not making known his intentions before Minto left Bengal.²⁴ His despatch of October 5, 1813, contained full information on the settlements which were then in progress, and we must admit a fair degree of duplicity in Raffles' character if we question the sincerity of the above passage. The truth of the matter seems to be that although he had visited Bengal, Raffles knew little of the details of the revenue systems of British India, nor of the conflicts between the Madras and Bengal Governments concerning them. He believed that the *Ryotwari* settlement was quite compatible with Minto's original instructions which had never been amplified. Indeed, Minto may well have left them vague because of other considerations.

²³ Raffles to Minto, February 13, 1814, *Ibid.*, 224.

²⁴ Wright, H. R. C., "Muntinghe's Advice to Raffles . . .", *op cit.*, 245.

The Bengal Government under Minto's Governor-Generalship strongly supported a permanent *Zamindari* system of revenue collection, at a time when the Madras settlements were receiving praise at home. But if, as it has been argued, Minto wished to extend the *Zamindari* system to Java, he did not consider that the Regents would necessarily act as *Zamindars*. One cannot read his instructions to Raffles which recommended "a fundamental change in the whole system of landed property and tenure"²⁵ without realizing that he meant that the Regents should be dispensed with in the collection of revenue. Raffles' own instructions to the Mackenzie Commission, which undoubtedly reflected Minto's views, specifically raised the question of the removal of the Regents from effective control over the lands. Thus, although a settlement with a *Zamindari* flavour was hinted at, it is clear that the *Zamindars* were to be found lower down in the native hierarchy.²⁶ One of the strangest features of the whole problem was that Minto did not tell his colleagues on the Bengal Council about the instructions which he had left for Raffles, until he was on the point of leaving Calcutta for London.²⁷ Yet he had placed before them the other documents which related to the establishment of the Java Government when he had returned to India at the end of 1811. Minto also withheld the instructions from the Directors of the Company.²⁸ The most likely explanation to account for this secrecy was that Minto realized that in advocating the removal of the Regents, he would have aroused opposition, particularly in the Council. Although he supported the Bengal system of revenue collection, Minto was by no means uncritical of the *Zamindars*. "The zemindars, or gentlemen of landed property", he wrote to his wife in 1809,²⁹ "have very commonly no other idea of an estate than as a field to plunder in, nor of the influence which property gives, than as a power to extort and pillage amongst the people subject to them". In Java he was not prepared to allow the continuation of such exploitation by the Regents, and so suggested their removal.

When Raffles' reforms were reviewed by the Supreme Govern-

²⁵ See p. 17.

²⁶ See p. 21.

²⁷ Minute by Minto, August 3, 1813, *Bengal Civil Colonial Consultations*, August 16, 1813.

²⁸ Minto to Raffles, February 26, 1812, *Raffles Collection*, I, No. 14.

²⁹ Minto, Countess of, *Lord Minto in India*, (1880), 187.

ment early in 1814, the general objections expressed against them were firstly, that the land rent system had been introduced too suddenly, and secondly, that the Regents had been set aside without due consideration of their rank and dignity. The members of the Supreme Government thought that it would have been better if the Regents had been utilized in the collection of revenue. They considered that the reforms had been too sweeping, particularly when "the nature of Tenures, [and] the rights of Individuals in the soil" was so imperfect.³⁰ But when Muntinghe had rallied to Raffles' defence concerning the wisdom of dispensing with the services of the Regents in the revenue administration,³¹ and Minto's instructions were reconsidered, the hostility of the Supreme Government to the reforms began to wane. In June, Edmonstone admitted that it would have been impossible for Raffles to have carried out the reforms intended by Minto "*without a diminution of the authority of the Regents*".³² But at this time, and for some months afterwards, the Supreme Government was under the impression that the village system of revenue collection was in operation in Java. This suggests that Raffles' Minute of February did not receive the careful perusal that it deserved.

Raffles defends the new System.

On October 6, Raffles informed Bengal of the misconception which had arisen concerning his intentions.³³

The village mode of settlement we have ever decidedly pronounced not to be in our opinion the most advantageous, and we have always represented our having resorted to it in many districts entirely as an intermediate step, as a measure in some places thought necessary for that gradual process of introduction which on so many accounts appeared most advisable. But we did always state that it was not to be considered as an ultimate measure, but merely as a link which expediency recommended to be placed between the feudal system before existing, and the detailed settlement which it was from the

³⁰ Tucker to Assey, January 15, 1814, *Java*, Vol. 69. The despatch is printed in Deventer, M. L. van, *N.G.*, pp. 27—9.

³¹ Muntinghe to Raffles, March 20, [1814], Enclosure No. 20, *Gillespie Charges*, pp. 39—40.

³² Minute by N. B. Edmonstone, June 18, 1814, *Java*, Vol. 63. Italics mine.

³³ Raffles to Nugent, October 6, 1814, *Java*, Vol. 70.

very commencement our most determined wish to introduce at as early a period as practicable.

He regretted that the Supreme Government had not subjected his proposals to more constructive criticism "because we are of opinion that it is still in its every part open to revision, and it was particularly to retain it so, and in the anxious hope that the Government of Bengal would have thoroughly canvassed the principles of the plan, and the measures which have been pursued in the course of carrying it into execution, . . . that we determined on making that Settlement only for the period of one year".³⁴

Raffles often claimed that his proposals for the detailed settlement of the land rent, contained in his Minute of February 11, were open to revision.³⁵ He seems to have been sincere in believing this. In any case there was ample time for the Indian authorities to have expressed their disapproval of the extension of the detailed system throughout the coastal districts of Java, before that system was actually introduced. For what is not always realized is that there was a lapse of at least a year after Raffles had completed his Minute of February 1814, before the *Ryotwari* settlements were completed, and it was not until May 1815 that any regular assessment took place. But while admitting his willingness to consider criticism of the detailed system, Raffles believed that the principles enunciated in February would require few modifications. He had met the criticism of the Supreme Government concerning the hasty introduction of the land rent system when little was known about the land tenures of the island, by stating that he intended to continue research into the matter. But, he continued,³⁶ "we remain . . . of opinion . . . that our general outline of the nature of these Tenures as given in our former despatches, and the principles assumed respecting them as the basis of our settlements, will not be found to have been either prematurely or erroneously drawn. The leading features of Javanese proprietary rights were, we think, sufficiently ascertained, and as to the minor modifications of it found to exist in some places, we have taken particular care to have them paid the most scrupulous attention to, wherever they have been satisfactorily ascertained".

³⁴ *Loc. cit.*

³⁵ *Loc. cit.*; *Sub.*, 171; *Gillespie Charges*, 164.

³⁶ Raffles to Nugent, October 6, 1814, *op. cit.*

*The Priangan System.*³⁷

The present study is not concerned with the working of the land rent system during Raffles' administration, but with his ideas during the years 1811—14. Although it would be wrong to suggest that after 1814 those ideas remained static, it is nevertheless true that by then he had arrived at fairly firm and consistent principles which he wished to apply. The year 1814, therefore, forms a convenient dividing line in the history of the land rent system under the British administration. During that year, to be sure, there were occasions when Raffles paused to consider the exaggerated claims which he had advanced in favour of the new revenue system, but they were rare. However, in July he had written to Bauer, the Accountant-General, who had been appointed to investigate the working of the system in the Eastern Districts:³⁸

The principles of an entire new System of Political Economy have been introduced throughout Java since the establishment of the British Government. These principles are, I believe, generally known, and they require no sooner to be known than to be approved of; abstractly their results may be calculated upon from the immutable principles of human nature, and eventual success cannot be doubted. But in bringing them into practice, and giving them a fair trial, much must depend upon details, and from a want of attention to them in the first instance the best Systems in the world might fail. I took myself personally to establish and indeed, practically to apply these principles, and the Residents have done much in completing the detail, but several of them have unfortunately been removed and transferred from one station to another, and at all events, the finishing stroke of the details becomes necessary. This important object I confide in a great measure to your talents, judgement and integrity, and I have full confidence in the accomplishment of all I can wish.

In the course of arranging these details, you will necessarily obtain much information regarding the real state of the country. *In the estimates I have made of the advantages of the new System over that which has been exploded, I may perhaps from being the founder of the new System, and perhaps from National feeling have been led to judge too favourably of what*

³⁷ The land rent system was not introduced into the Priangan Regencies or into the Blandongs. See Day, C., *op. cit.*, pp. 189—90; Norman, H. D. Levyssohn, *op. cit.*, pp. 161—4.

³⁸ Raffles to Bauer, July 1, 1814, *Raffles Collection*, V, No. 3. Italics mine.

I considered, in some measure, a child of my own. I shall be happy to stand corrected by your more just estimate.

But it is an exaggeration to argue, as one Dutch historian has done,³⁹ that the reason why Raffles did not extend the land rent system to the Priangan was because he “lacked faith in his own system”.

Writing after he had left Java, Raffles declared that he had been on the point of introducing free cultivation into the Batavian and Priangan Regencies, but that the cession of Java to the Dutch had prevented him.⁴⁰ There is, perhaps, some truth in this statement. In February 1814 he had announced his intention of making a detailed settlement in the Regencies. “The introduction of the detailed system of management in the Batavian Regencies”, he wrote,⁴¹ “seems alone capable of affording the means of ascertaining the actual amount of territorial revenue, foregone in favour of the coffee delivery; and on this account, as well as to define the rights and duties of individuals, and to afford that spur to industry and exertion, so long wanting on this Island, I consider such a measure in these districts indispensable”. And yet Raffles hesitated about its introduction until it was too late. Why?

Part of the answer to this question is to be found in the charges which Gillespie directed against his administration. Raffles had stated that he intended to introduce free cultivation into the Priangan in February 1814. At the end of that month he learnt of the Gillespie-Blagrove charges. They placed Raffles in a dilemma. On the one hand, he wished to extend the principles of free trade throughout the Company’s domains in Java; on the other, he had to defend himself against Gillespie’s charge that the sale of coffee gardens in the Batavian-Priangan Regencies had placed a valuable export commodity in the hands of private individuals, and so had destroyed the Government’s monopoly of the product.⁴² Raffles’ obvious defence was to deny that the monopoly had been affected either by the sales of lands, or by the introduction of free cultivation in the coffee gardens in the Eastern Districts of the island. The Government’s object, he stated,⁴³ had been “to maintain such extent

³⁹ Klaveren, J. J. van, op. cit., 92.

⁴⁰ *H. of J.*, I, 130.

⁴¹ *Sub.*, pp. 67—8.

⁴² *Gillespie Charges*, 49.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 78.

of Monopoly as would secure the utmost quantity of Coffee which could be demanded, without continuing that extensive cultivation and produce of the article, the purchase of which was unprofitable, and beyond the reach of the Public Finances". He denied that the private sales in the Priangan and Batavian Regencies had in the least affected the Government's monopoly of coffee.⁴⁴ Thus because of the pressure of events, Raffles had to postpone admitting the principles of free cultivation into the Regencies. He was apparently supported in this position by McQuoid, who was opposed to the abolition of forced cultivation on the coffee gardens. Crawford wrote to Baud in 1858:⁴⁵

He [Raffles] abolished the coffee monopoly, preserving it in the Preangan Regencies very inconsistently. I remonstrated with him on the subject, but the Resident of the Preangan Regencies at that time, a Mr. Macquoid, carried it against me. The reservation of this part of the monopoly was a subject of regret afterwards to Raffles himself as he often told me.

Even when he was defending himself against the Gillespie charges, Raffles was inclined to be embarrassed by the exception allowed in the Priangan to the general principles of free trade and cultivation. He attempted to rationalize it by pointing out the difference between the Sundanese and the Javanese.⁴⁶

Raffles, of course, set high hopes on a large peace-time disposal of coffee⁴⁷ both in the European and American markets. But there is no evidence to suggest that he continued the system of forced cultivation in the Priangan because he thought that production would have declined under a system of free cultivation. In 1817 he stated his belief that the amount of coffee produced under the latter system would not have been less than under the former.⁴⁸ This opinion, of course, was expressed after he had surrendered his position as Lieutenant-Governor of Java. But it was quite consistent with his views after 1814. That it was unrealistic in ignoring the aversion of the Sundanese to the coffee cultivation must, however, be admitted.

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 78—9.

⁴⁵ Crawford to Baud, January 9, 1858, *Baud Collection*, (Rijksarchief), No. 889.

⁴⁶ *Gillespie Charges*, 159.

⁴⁷ See Norman, H. D. Levyssohn, op. cit., 241. See p. 144 above.

⁴⁸ *H. of J.*, I, 130.

There was another factor which gives support to Raffles' contention that it was the cession of Java to the Dutch which prevented him from extending the benefits of the revenue system to the Priangan and Batavian Regencies. This was that his attention had been fully occupied after August 1814 with the introduction of the detailed settlements into the Eastern Districts of Java. It was not until the middle of the following year that any regular assessments were made, and not until August of that year was it possible for him to turn his attention to the Priangan. By then, of course, the news of the restoration of the island to the Dutch had been received, and Raffles knew that his time as Lieutenant-Governor was limited. Should he have commenced a hasty introduction of the detailed system into the Priangan at that date? The Dutch can be thankful that he did not.