

prospect which would have amounted to an agrarian revolution throughout the whole of India. In nearly the whole of Bengal, in a part (about one-fourth) of the Madras Presidency, and in a small portion of the United Provinces the land revenue is permanently settled. In the rest of India, or four-fifths of the country, settlements, that is the determination of the annual amount of land-tax or state rent to be paid to government, are revised at various periods—generally of twenty or thirty years. Perpetual controversy has centred round the merits and demerits of these systems. The arguments for and against a permanent settlement have been dealt with in vol. i in the chapter on the administration of Lord Cornwallis. The advantages of periodical settlements are obvious from the point of view of the state, which thereby retains the power of continually intercepting part of the 'unearned increment', and it is maintained that if the settlements are made carefully and for sufficiently long periods, they need not check the development of the land or the prosperity of the people. On the other hand, if a permanent settlement were made universal throughout India, the expense and trouble of continual assessments (which occupy about four to five years in the average province) would be avoided. Further, many high authorities have held that thrift and the sinking of capital in land would be encouraged, and that the evil custom of reducing cultivation, as the settlement periods end, in order to avoid enhancement of the revenue, would cease, and that the greater prosperity of the country and the proportionate increase of wealth taxable in other ways would more than compensate the state for some immediate sacrifice of revenue.

Some even go farther and believe that the terrible mortality in the famines of the last forty years is largely due to the fact that the periodical reassessments, which have in most provinces steadily increased the land revenue, have