

In our paper of 17th May we dwelt at some length upon the course which government seemed desirous of pursuing with respect to the lands at Malacca; and our last number contained a few words in allusion to the same subject, founded upon the 2nd. and 3rd. sections of the proposed Act for regulating the assessment and collection of rents payable to Government in the Settlements in the Straits. Since writing our first remarks we have heard something, in addition, on both sides of the question. On the part of government it has been alleged that the tenants who are called upon to commute the payment of a tenth of the produce, and the other privileges they enjoy under the present system, for a specific annual rent and a twenty years' lease, will have the option either of accepting such terms as may be offered by government at the end of that period, or of returning to the former arrangement. It is moreover stated that the principal object of the government in desiring to introduce the proposed mode of assessment, in substitution of that which has heretofore prevailed, is to simplify the system, and make every tenant acquainted with the exact amount he has to pay,—the collection of a tenth of the produce being often from its nature an invidious method, liable to abuse, and sometimes giving rise to complaint. But, how well-intentioned soever may be the course of proceeding in contemplation by government, it seems certain that the means taken to promulgate it, and to introduce the desired mode of assessment, are not such as to inspire the natives with confidence as to its future designs in regard to the lands. According to our latest information from Malacca, and which is every way worthy of being depended on, the attempt to introduce a system of leases on the terms proposed, if not in every case met with opposition, is at least extremely unpopular—and in some districts the cause of considerable ferment and agitation. We have indeed within these few days heard it stated by some of the old Chinese settlers just arrived from Malacca, that the Malays are in several places quitting their lands—and that one or two district Panghoolos, on pretence of having affairs of trade to settle, have betaken themselves to Salangore and other neighbouring states, in order to leave matters to take their course without, as they suppose, compromising themselves, either by opposing the wishes of government, or by becoming instrumental in, as they conceive it, forcing on the cultivators, of the soil a system to them as novel as objectionable—and the intelligence contained in our correspondence from Malacca is confirmatory of these statements. The fact is, that even if means had not been taken to produce among the Malay occupants of the soil at Malacca a belief that it was the order of the government that they should pay a specific annual rent in money, instead of a tenth of the produce of their lands, it was but too probable that they would at once interpret the proposal for such an arrangement into a *command* to comply with it. To Malays it is generally found sufficient to intimate the "*voló*" of authority, without the supplementary addition of the "*jubeo*"—and, so far from any thing in the tone of menace being used to secure their compliance with the proposed measure of government, every means ought to have been taken to acquaint them with its precise purpose, and to prevent them from forming any conclusion so unfavourable to its character as is involved in the supposed intention to deprive them of their rights. Had this been done, whatever objections there might have existed with respect to the arrangement proposed by government, it cannot be supposed that the feelings to which it has beyond dispute given rise among so many of the Malay cultivators would ever have had existence. If, therefore, government find that their object, which it would seem is rather to protect the native cultivator than to benefit themselves by any expected increase of revenue, is not attainable without producing feelings of suspicion and alarm, why not abandon such a *generous* policy, which it seems the natives are incapable of understanding, and let them, as the best judges of their own interests, continue under the system for which they exhibit a preference! The government will then be in a situation to pursue its own views with respect to jungle and waste lands, without causing any agitation or disturbance among the occupants of plantations,—of whose disposition to embrace the proposed terms, the

ready issue of some three or four hundred *Cutting Papers*, containing leases of jungle lands, is by no means to be adopted as a criterion. The occupants of lands under cultivation, it is said, are not to be compelled (as indeed they could not rightfully be) to accept leases—it is not, however, enough that such should be the mere intention of government, but that every means should be taken to avoid any appearance of compulsion, and to ascertain the actual state of those peoples' feelings in regard to the new arrangement respecting their lands—which in the case of Malays, it is not always easy, as we have already intimated, for persons in authority to discover. The disposition of the occupants of land under cultivation, to enter upon a lease of twenty years, or for any other term, and pay a rent in money, should be ascertained through the medium of the headmen of the village or district in which the parties reside. This was the course adopted during the Dutch occupation of Malacca, when some of the landed proprietors demanded, instead of payment in kind, payment in money, from their tenants—and we have before us the translated copy of a proclamation in consequence issued by Governor TEMMERMAN THYSEN in May 1819 against such "covetous" proceedings; wherein, among other matters, it is declared.—"That whenever money shall be paid by the tenants of their leased lands or plantations, instead of payment being made in kind, the landed Proprietors must in such cases annually pass a contract in the presence of two witnesses, namely, the Panghooloo of the district, and the High Priest residing in the neighbourhood, who shall declare that none of the contracting parties have entered into such an engagement against their will."—Let the Commissioner, who is now in Malacca, take some such means of ascertaining the sentiments of the Malay tenants, instead of trusting throughout to the representations of official understrappers, who although not interested themselves in the change which it is desired to introduce, may believe him to be so, & frame their statements in unison with his supposed wishes. But has the Commissioner, we would ask, issued any proclamation announcing in distinct and explicit terms the intentions and views of the government in regard to the lands in Malacca?—Has it not rather been left to his Assistant there, and the natives whom he must employ under him, to communicate the purposes and wishes of the government?—and no one need be told what sort of form the wishes of authority is likely to assume in their mouths. We would also ask, does the printed form of lease which has been, or is intended to be, presented to the tenants to sign, contain a clause expressly providing, that at the end of the twenty years, or whatever term it may be, it will be optional with them either to renew the lease, or resume their former situation in regard to the lands? If such means are omitted of making the intentions of government clearly known, and its objects are left to take the colour they no doubt assume from the tone of those who announce them, what is the result to be expected? Since it is no object of government either to compel or delude the cultivators of the Malacca lands into compliance with the proposed arrangement, it is certainly a pity that their method of going to work should have so much belied them. Meantime our advice to the Malacca tenants is, to enter into no new engagement with the government, unless they not only see their own way clear, but also that it is for their interest in every respect to adopt the terms proposed.

We take this occasion too of giving them another piece of information and advice,—that they are not required, by whomsoever called on, to *work for nothing*—whether in cutting canals from Malim to the sea, or in any other way.—And if any of them have been employed lately in a job of the kind on such terms, we recommend them forthwith to sue their employer for the value of their work and labour,—and there is no fear of their not getting its "*quantum valeat*" in an English Court of Justice.