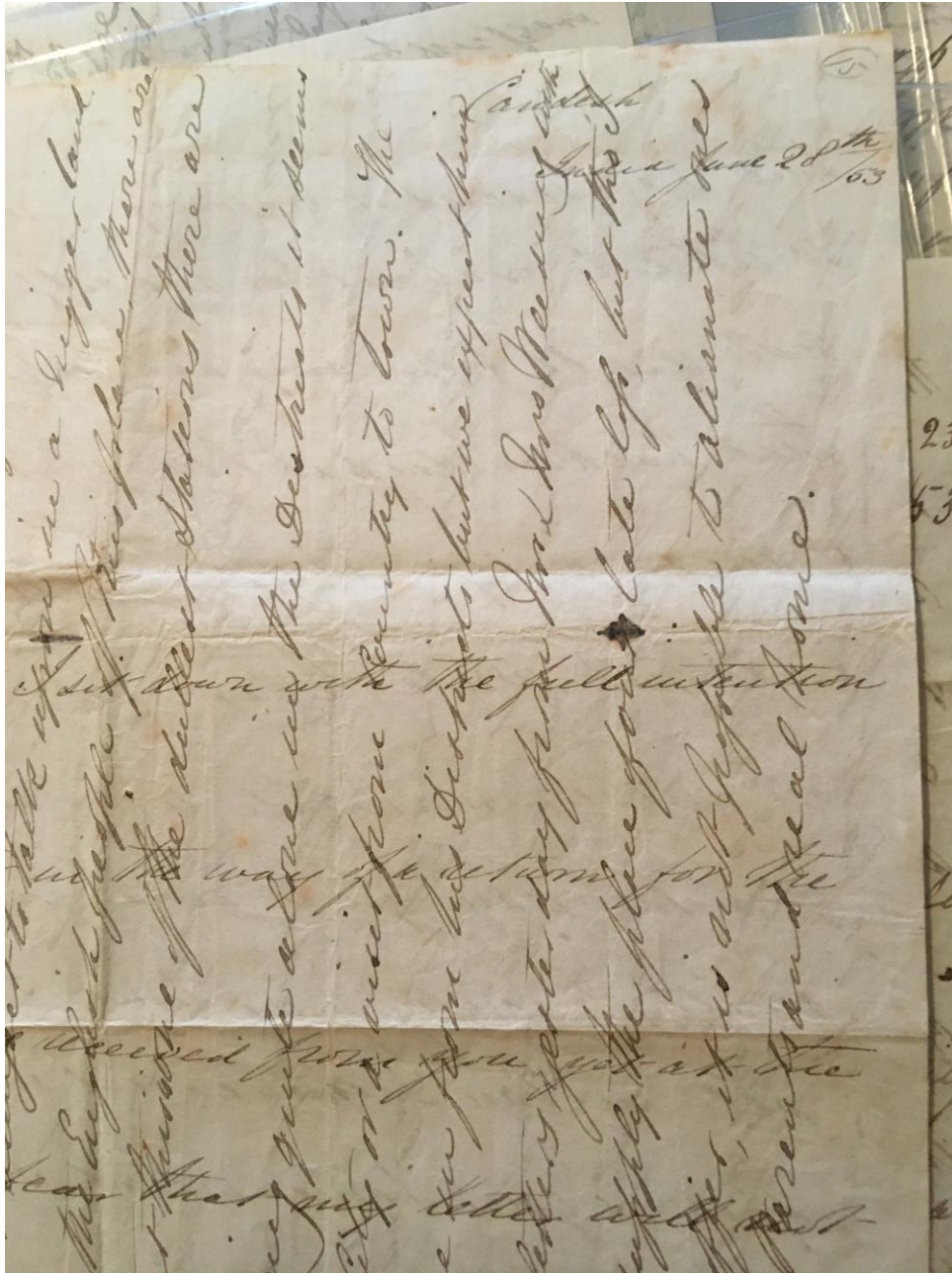


Letter 10: Life in India, Collectors and the Rebellion



Candesh
India June 28th
/53

My dear Sister,

I sit down with the full intention of writing you a long letter in the way of a return for the many nice long ones I have received from you at the same time I have some fear that my letter will not be in time for the mail which I only this morning saw was to start on the 2nd of next month. My last short letter to you was through Mr Weeding, tho' perhaps this will reach you before that. Your last letter

contained additional bad news with regard to Fannys marriage and circumstances I own I used to wonder why you did not say more about her, but at the same I considered it nothing more than I deserved for saying so little to or about her myself. I assure you this did not result from any bad feeling on my part, only from that backwardness at letter writing of which as you know I am so guilty. I hope you will inform Fanny that tho' I do not write to her I feel for all her troubles and hope you will communicate to her any little news that I send you, tho' I am quite sure your family cares must greatly occupy your time. Few things seem going on well in Van Diemens Land and perhaps the brightest spot is your home which I hope may be ever happy through the efforts of yourself and your husband and the obedience and affection of your children. I was very sorry to hear such bad accounts of Cousin Tom's health but hope the result may not be as fatal as is expected. It is a pity his Brother did not make better use of his success at the diggings but I fear advice avails very little in such cases as his –

I have now returned from the Districts to the chief town in these parts, and **am living with Mr Neave the 2nd Assistant Collector**. I may say I am promoted to be 3rd Asst. tho I have not yet received the appointment as the late 2nd Assist. wishes to remain here during the next three months tho' he has been appointed to other Districts. It is now the rainy season which lasts for three months – rain almost every day and often the most violent one can imagine. It is objectionable as much as one can't get out, but it makes the climate much cooler. The thermometer is now only 80 instead of 105 as it frequently was a few days since. Of course the rain brings out vegetation in a wonderful way and makes everything pleasant to look upon. In spite of the greater heat I think the trees keep greener here than in VanDL but the grass all disappears in the hot weather which is a little worse than you have it. We are in a large unfinished house in which many of the rooms are rendered useless from the rains soaking in through the roof which is not finished owing to the usual laziness of the native owner. **I have not a very good opinion of the natives generally**. It is difficult to treat them kindly without their taking advantage of you and becoming bothersome in begging for situations and favour, so that it is with good reason the Government have ordered that no Englishman in Office should take a present from them. It used to be allowed and the consequence was that the Natives frequently acquired an undue influence over the Company's Servants. Now beyond taking a little fruit from them now and then, no presents are publicly received, indeed one would be dismissed the Service for doing so. The Natives are also always ready to lend money which I fear is frequently borrowed to the ruin of the person who takes it. I would not borrow a rupee from a Native if I were to be paid two for it - the next day. The pay of Officers generally is so good here that the Natives never fear to be able to get their enormous interest on the money they lend, but if the borrower wants to go to Europe for bad health or other cause, they say no you shan't go as we shall have no hold upon you if go to another Country, so if you do not pay us we will show you up to your Government which will cause you to lose your appointment. Thus an officer has the option of selling off or unjustly procuring for his creditors some Govt appointment or remaining in India to the injury of his health or perhaps his death. You may imagine it is difficult to treat such fellows kindly and yet keep them at a proper distance. It can only be done by always acting with unflinching honesty. I do not know that these Nigger subjects will be very interesting to you but it is difficult to find any other subject to talk upon in a Nigger land.

I have to go and call on the English people of this place, there are only about 13 of us so that this is one of the dullest Stations there are in India, tho after living quite alone in the Districts it seems like coming into a large City or a visit from Country to Town. The Collector has not yet come in from the Districts but we expect him daily. I received kind letters yesterday from Mr & Mrs Weeding with

offers of Parental care to supply the place of our late loss, but tho I fully feel their kind offer, it is not possible to alienate ones thoughts from ones real Parents and real homes.

You say your children grow up to fast that they make you begin to think yourself getting old, I can't fancy you anything differently from what I left you. I am nearly sure I should not know any of you again if I met you accidentally and I am certain you would not know me. I believe I look much older than I am. I should like to come and see you all. Cousin Tom will like to hear that Margaret Roberts is married. Mr Weeding gave her away. The Gentleman is a Mr Barnes an Attorney, so she is generally considered to have married very well. It is after a courtship of nearly ten years! Only fancy what constancy. My kind friend Mr Bell is very ill and will perhaps have to go to England. Mr Weeding is trying to get a Military appointment for one of his sons partly I believe on account of the kindness I have received from the Bells since my arrival here. I have no more news and I fear if I set trying to think of any more I shall be late for the Post so with best love to Fanny, James Uncle and with the same to yourself believe me

Ever your affectionate Brother

Thomas Weeding

[I] am living with Mr Neave the 2nd Assistant Collector...

Mr Neave (Edward Digby Neave) is noteworthy for having died from wounds received in July 1858 from an encounter with a bear – see **'The Weeding Family of Oatlands Van Diemen's Land / Tasmania: Letters Home 1832-1873'**, John Goold Ed.

'Collectors' or 'District Collectors' formed the central core of British administration in India. As the name would suggest, their core function was collecting taxes; in the 18th century, the East India Company essentially took over the old system of taxation under the Mughal Empire and adapted it to their needs.

Collectors were also at the centre of social life for most of the British in India. One of the best known representations of a collector is that of 'Jos Sedley' in *Vanity Fair*, who holds the fictional title 'Collector of Bogley Wallah' and is depicted riding an elephant.



Emperor Shah Alam handing a scroll to Robert Clive, Governor of Bengal, granting tax collecting rights to the British East India Company (British Library)

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Thomas' words are repugnant to modern ears, but they bear close inspection as there is much in this letter which sheds light on the uneasy relationship between the British and the Indian population at that time. In the decades before Thomas' arrival in India, relations between the British and 'native' Indians had ossified to the point that there was growing divide between Indian and Anglo-Indian, a change from earlier British experience in India. In the 18th century, it was far more common for British servants of the EIC to 'go native', learning the languages, exploring the religions and art, and sometimes marrying into Indian families.

But by the time Thomas is writing (1853) there was a growing sense of contempt by the British for the people they ruled, which unsurprisingly led to a great deal of resentment. This was one of the factors (one of a great many) which contributed to the 1857 Indian Rebellion. Thomas' attitude here is fairly representative of the British attitude in India, which, accompanied by harsh land taxes, unwanted social reforms and a growing sense of national identity fuelled the movement towards the rebellion. Many in India now refer to the 1857 Rebellion as the First War of Independence, marking it as the beginning of the long road to Indian Independence in 19145.



British troops re-take Delhi, 1857. Images such as this give a glimpse of the brutality committed by both mutineers and British troops.



'The Relief of Lucknow' by Thomas Jones Baker

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Emperor Shah Alam handing a scroll to Robert Clive, Governor of Bengal, granting tax collecting rights to the British East India Company (British Library)