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BARON VAN IMHOFF AND DUTCH POLICY IN CEYLON 1736-1740

For a greater part of its history, the Dutch East India Company, as sovereign of the island of Ceylon, was struggling for a policy. Governor after Governor came and went fulfilling his usually five year term of office. No doubt he was expected to leave behind for his successor a memoir for the latter's general guidance and this was intended to provide continuity in matters of policy. But a study of most of these documents shows the general insubstantiality of their content, at least on matters of basic policy, thus revealing that no Governor had anything concrete to say to his successor. The impression one gathers is that each one was generally concerned with immediate issues, tackling problems as they arose, and only making sure that nothing untoward happened during his period of office which would reduce his standing with the Company's authorities and hinder his promotion in their service. His primary concern was to hand over intact the territories he had in his charge to his successor in office.

This succession of purposeless Governments was broken now and then by strong-willed personalities assuming the office of Governor of Ceylon. The first of these was Rijkloff Van Goens whose Governorship (1659-1663, 1665-1675), though a mixed blessing to the Dutch, was nonetheless important in bringing to the fore fundamental problems of Dutch rule in Ceylon. He was responsible for starting a great debate on questions of policy, which resulted in the adoption of, what seemed then to be, a clear cut policy for the Company towards its Ceylon possessions and the King of Kandy. It defined the extent of the Company's territorial ambitions, the nature of its attitude towards the King and it set before the Dutch administration of Ceylon certain aims that were to be pursued.¹ Another half a century had to lapse before the next major reconsideration of policy was undertaken. This time it was initiated by Baron Van Imhoff, Governor of Ceylon from 1736 to 1740.

¹ For a detailed survey of these discussions see S. Arasaratnam, *Dutch Power in Ceylon 1658-1686*, (Amsterdam, 1958) pp. 77-96.

Unlike Van Goens, Van Imhoff's reputation in history was achieved by his subsequent activities in the East Indian Archipelago. Yet this brief chapter of his career in the East, when he presided over the Company's affairs in Ceylon, is important in revealing the clear and incisive mind, the grasp of detail and the ability to penetrate the heart of a problem. Due to various reasons beyond his control, it was not within his power to appreciably change the course of events to a direction that he would have wished it to pursue; but, as will be shown later, events of later years were to vindicate his analysis and approach to the Ceylon problem.

The problems of the Dutch ruling power in Ceylon sprang from the nature of the origin of its sovereignty in the island. By an alliance entered into with the King of Kandy in 1638 the two powers had jointly been responsible for the expulsion of the Portuguese. But this alliance had a chequered history ending finally with the open breach of 1656 when the allies fought for the possession of Colombo after the Portuguese had capitulated. Thereafter the King and his successors had refused to recognise the legality of Dutch sovereignty over the maritime Provinces. And a period of hostility began, exhibited in varying degrees at different times in diverse forms. Rijkloff Van Goens had sought to dispose of this by reducing the King with armed force to dependence but this was turned down by the Supreme Government at Batavia. Then a policy of pacification was attempted, so that the King of Kandy might be persuaded to come to a new contract by means of territorial concessions.

By the beginning of the 18th Century, it was evident that it was impossible to get the King to agree to a treaty that would concede to the Dutch the sovereignty of the lowlands. To complicate the issue, a new problem arose at this time. The Directors of the Company, for reasons both strategic and commercial, ordered the stoppage of all private trade and the cutting off of all communications between the Kandyan Kingdom and the outside world.² This introduced a new element of conflict into the relations between the Dutch and the Kandyan Kingdom. Naturally this was resented by the Kandyans whose little foreign trade with the ports of Southern India was now stopped. They were in danger of being hemmed in completely by the Dutch power and kept as a land-locked Kingdom dependent on the Dutch for their external contacts.

² *Memoir of Simons, Governor of Ceylon, for his successor Hendrick Becker, 1707.* Transl. Sophia Anthonisz (Colombo, 1914) p. 17.

In the meanwhile, developments in trade and agriculture within the country were tending to bring the two powers to a new relationship. Cinnamon was the original *raison d'être* of the Company's establishment on the island. With the great increase in demand for cinnamon in the course of the 17th century both in Europe and in Asian trading factories, the quantity peeled and brought to the market from Ceylon had to increase correspondingly. The cinnamon woods within Dutch limits were being progressively exhausted and the Company had to move into the King's lands to secure its annual quota of cinnamon — in the 18th century this amounted to over 6000 bales or 480,000 Dutch pounds.³ For this the King's good will and permission was necessary. Each year an embassy was sent to Kandy with a substantial gift to request this favour of the King.

Monopoly of the island's trade meant that all the exports and imports of the island had to pass through Dutch hands. To realise the full benefits of this monopoly the co-operation of the Kandyan districts was necessary. They had to agree to buy and sell with the Dutch and with them alone. Thus the arecanuts for export had to be collected from the whole country. The Dutch must have free access to Kandyan markets to sell as much cloth as could be sold. Furthermore, from the early part of the 18th century, Ceylon was beginning to yield a fair crop of pepper. With growing unrest in Malabar, and the upsetting of Dutch pepper monopoly contracts by the English and the French, the Dutch were encouraging the production of pepper in Ceylon. The highlands were the most suitable for pepper and already the villagers were bringing these in fair quantities for sale to the Dutch store houses.⁴ To promote this too Kandyan good will was necessary. All these factors tended to bring the two political entities together even closer than they had been in the 17th century.

The closing of the ports of Ceylon to all foreign trade and the channelling of all traffic through the hands of the Dutch would be beneficial only if the Kandyans acquiesced in this and agreed to abide by it. But there was no reason why they should oblige the Dutch in this respect. Their interest lay in free competition. Undoubtedly the coming of the Dutch had opened new opportunities for their peasants but if they were to tie themselves exclusively to the Dutch they would

³ *Memoir of Becker, Governor of Ceylon, for his successor Rumpf, 1716.* Transl. Sophia Anthonisz (Colombo, 1914) p. 42.

⁴ *Memoir left by Pielat to his successor Domburg, 1734.* Transl. Sophia Anthonisz (Colombo, 1905) pp. 19—20.

not be making the best of these opportunities. Consequently they reacted adversely to these attempts to divert free trade from their ports. This was then the dilemma of Dutch policy. The attempt at monopoly was self-defeating. It could be achieved only at the expense of Kandyan hostility — a hostility which would impair in practice the fruits of monopoly.

This is precisely the picture that is seen in the 18th century. Succeeding Governors were grappling with this problem of how to pacify the Kandyans and keep the avenues to their Kingdom open to trade and traffic with the low country without letting in on the question of free trade. On the other side, Kings of Kandy were alternately blowing hot and cold, now trying to obtain the desired end of free trade by intimidation, now by persuasion. Thus periods of tension would follow upon years of friendship. All of a sudden, the entrances and exits of the Kandyan Kingdom would be closed and a virtual blockade enforced. When this did not bring about the desired effect, the Kandyans would switch over to a policy of friendship, shower concessions and favours on the Dutch. Thus neither party had a clearly conceived policy that would stand together and lead to certain well defined aims. Both powers were pursuing a policy of drift, of attempting temporary solutions to problems as they arose, and keeping intact whatever they held at that time.

This situation would have been tolerable had it not led to other complications. The nebulous character of the relationship between the two powers soon began to create problems for the Dutch *vis-à-vis* their own subjects in the lowlands. The lack of recognition of their sovereignty and the implicit claim by the Kings of Kandy to an all-island sovereignty may have looked harmless on the surface but was fraught with dangerous consequences. It seemed difficult to attract the loyalty of the Sinhalese inhabitants of the coastal areas to the Dutch authority. Nor was it possible to wean them away completely from their traditional loyalties to a Sinhalese administration. This opened opportunities for the Kandyans to interfere in low country affairs, which they could use at will as instruments of policy to further their interests. Thus we have the paradoxical situation in the 18th century that, while in terms of actual power the Kings of Kandy suffer decline, their influence is seen to extend to parts of the country they never ruled before.

In the 1730's many of these problems emerged in a concrete form. The Dutch Government of Ceylon was beginning to be confronted with

a series of administrative crises. The most serious of these, from their point of view, concerned the disaffection of the cinnamon peelers or *chalias*. It arose from two sources. There was, on the one hand, the dissatisfaction caused by pressure of work which kept them away from their homes for a greater part of the year. Then there were the differences between *chalias* and other castes over their respective duties and obligations to each other. During the period of Dutch rule, the *chalias* had risen as a key caste and were very much conscious of their importance to Dutch economic organisation. There was a natural resentment at this from other castes, who deemed the *chalias* quite low in the social hierarchy. Knowing the delicate nature of the relations between the Dutch and Kandy, the *chalias* were not reluctant to make the fullest use of this. They sometimes appealed over the heads of their own officials to the Kandyan court and got into the habit of absconding to the highlands where they were received in a friendly manner. At the time that Van Imhoff took up the reins of office in Ceylon, he was faced with one of the most serious of *chalia* discontent. They wanted to be relieved of a part of their obligations and they refused to go into the woods at the time of the cinnamon harvest. They further sent a petition to the court of Kandy of their grievances and refused to perform their service unless ordered to do so by the court. All these obstacles affected that year's supply of cinnamon, for only about 2000 bales were ready out of a required quantity of 6000 bales.⁵

Unrest of another character arose from other sources connected with the land policy of the Dutch Government. In some of the *Korles* adjacent to Colombo — Hina, Saltipiti and Alutkuru — a change was brought about by Governor Van Domburg (1734—36), Van Imhoff's immediate predecessor, in the levying of *polayepanam* or garden tax. In waste lands planted by the peasants with trees without the consent of the Government, Van Domburg increased the state levy from 1/3 to 1/2 of the produce. This created resentment. There was also dissatisfaction over the payment of school fines, and the provision of supplies for the Governor's kitchen. All these combined to produce a minor rebellion in these *Korles* where the people rose up, refused to pay their taxes and began to attack Company property.⁶ In the south too, in

⁵ Governor General and Council of India to Directors, 6 April 1736, Koloniaal Archief, The Hague, 2223 fos 2972—5.

⁶ Ibid. fos. 2977—2982.

Matara district, some discontent over the levying of taxes and services led to an uprising among the people of the Girrawaypattu and Morawa Korla. In all these cases, collusion between the rebels and elements in the Kandyan court was plainly evident. Rumours were rife in the land that the disaffected areas would be taken under the King's administration which only encouraged opposition to the Dutch and rendered more difficult the task of pacification.

Faced with this general uproar, the Dutch administration was in a panic. Governor Van Domburg was not particularly suited to tackle a situation of this kind. The only policy he had was one of repression. He asked for soldiers from the Dutch stations in Malabar and Tuticorin and even for a few Balinese and Bouginese to strike terror into the local populace. Detachments of soldiers were being moved into these areas to solve the problems which mainly arose from a failure of civil administration.⁷ It was evident to the Supreme Government that matters had declined to such an extent that a man of extraordinary ability was necessary to repair the situation. So they decided to recall Van Domburg and appointed Van Imhoff who they felt had the 'character and ability' required for this task.⁸ Before Van Imhoff landed in Ceylon, Van Domburg had passed away. His first impressions of the situation are best described in his own words. He wrote in August 1736: "I wish many times that this important island had never fallen under the administration of Van Domburg, for though Ceylon was not actually destroyed by him alone, yet it never would have come to such a deplorable state, the Company's authority and respect in such decline, the people to such poverty and the Company with its valuable interests on this island never come to such position of danger as I have presently found. The Governor had died in good time for the Company."⁹ Thus it was obvious at one glance that the Company's credit had sunk very low among its own subjects. He now addressed himself to finding why this had happened and how it could be redressed.

In spite of bland assurances to the contrary from the Court, it soon became clear to him that the Kandyans, with or without the knowledge and consent of the King, had played a major role in the recent disturbances. *Chalia* rebel leaders had frequented the court. Four of the chief rebel leaders of the Colombo district had been given refuge in Kandy and could not be brought to justice. Some of the Kandyan chiefs used

⁷ Van Imhoff to G.G.C. 7 August 1736, Kol. Arch. 2262 fo 55.

⁸ G.G.C. to Director, 6 April 1736 Kol. 223 fo 2971.

⁹ Van Imhoff to G.G.C. 7 August 1736, Kol. Arch. 2262 fo 55.

their influences to obtain amnesty for various people charged with crimes of all kinds. Van Imhoff sought to pacify the country by appealing in an earnest and friendly manner to the King, trying to convince him of his good intentions as contrasted with his predecessor.¹⁰ Instead of the strong arm tactics of Van Domburg, he conceded to the demands of the rebels. Within a short time of his arrival, he had succeeded in quelling the disturbances and persuading the *chalias* to go back to the woods to undertake the peeling of cinnamon.

It was clear to Van Imhoff that these were but temporary expedients and were no solution to the problem as long as its basic constituents were unsolved. He now set about analysing what these basic elements were. This task led him to read up the wealth of material lying in the Records rooms consisting of papers dating from the inception of Dutch power in Ceylon. Within a short time his keen mind pin-pointed the contradictions inherent in the Dutch position in Ceylon. Now began a spate of correspondence between Van Imhoff and the Batavian Government and the Directors. In these marathon letters Van Imhoff laid down clearly what in his opinion had gone wrong in Ceylon and how this could be remedied. They are a master piece of analysis and presentation and the student of Dutch expansion in South Asia in the 18th century has in them a ready-made history and exposition by one of the prime participants.

Van Imhoff started off with the proposition, a very valid one in the circumstances, that the sea coast of Ceylon could not be guarded by the indigenous power and that it was imperative that one or the other of the European trading powers should master the coastal areas. In his opinion, the Dutch were the most suited to this task both because of the extensive nature of their commitments in the East and their experience in dealing with Asian states and peoples. He said that otherwise the independence of Ceylon would be subjugated by some Indian power, either the Moghul, or one of the Hindu princelings of the far south.¹¹ This, however, seems rather doubtful because none of these Indian powers had a navy that would be essential to such an undertaking. It seems more true to conjecture that from the 16th century onwards it was inevitable that Ceylon should lose its independence to one of the European powers trading in South Asia.

He then compared in a general way the early period of the Com-

¹⁰ Van Imhoff to King of Kandy, 9 November 1736 Kol. Arch. 2265 fos 1609—1618.

¹¹ Van Imhoff to G.G.C. 16 September 1736, Kol. Arch. 2262 fos 65—67.

pany's presence in the island with the later period and pointed out that while those first were days of accommodation and compromise, the latter had become one of force and arms *vis-à-vis* the native population. While the early period was one when the Dutch were lawfully established with the acquiescence of the King of Kandy, the later was a period when they arrogated to themselves powers and privileges they were not entitled to. This forcible expansion of the Company's authority in the second half of the 17th century into the interior and along the sea coast was the beginning of her troubles. This caused the antagonism of the Kings of Kandy and brought years of uncertainty and insecurity in the Company's position in Ceylon. Towards the end of the 17th century, it was felt urgent to direct all efforts to the contracting of a new peace treaty with the King in which the new relationship between the two parties would be clearly defined. Three governors, Laurens Pyl, Thomas van Rhee and Simons attempted successively to bring this about. Governor Simons in his memoir to his successor in office categorically advised him to give up all hopes of ever signing a peace treaty with the King and recommended that things be continued as they were.¹²

The next important land mark, in Van Imhoff's view, which turned the course of relations between the Dutch and the King of Kandy was the decision taken in 1707 to close the ports of Ceylon to all foreign traffic. This was an order that came from the Directors and was therefore irrevocable by the officials in the East. Van Imhoff takes this, with justification, as the starting point of the Company's declining state in the island. All the efforts of succeeding Governors were directed towards giving effect to this order and at the same time sidetracking in a pacific way the incessant opposition of the Kandyan. Every Kandyan embassy that came to Colombo would earnestly request the opening of the ports and would be met with nothing but prevarication and vague promises. As each new Governor assumed office, the court would shower favours on him in the hope that he would concede to their demands, only to be disillusioned in a short while. This would again make the court return to its unpleasant attitude and retaliate with various pinpricks to the Dutch administration on all sides.¹³

In addition to this decline in the relations with Kandy, Van Imhoff also noticed a deterioration in the standards of administration. He saw

¹² Ibid. fos 70—78, *Memoir of Simons*, pp. 12—13.

¹³ Van Imhoff to G.G.C. 16 September 1736, Kol. Arch. 2262 fos 79—83.

that Governors 'with a view to currying favour with the authorities, had taken short cuts in matters of revenue administration. They had assumed more rights over the land than was warranted by custom and though this produced the immediate effect of an increase in land revenue, it was ruinous to the interests of the Company in the long term. This assertion of despotic rights had also enabled the native chiefs in many places to profit thereby and earn for the Dutch administration a bad name among its subjects. This had provoked dissatisfaction among the people which the Kandyans had encouraged.¹⁴ Thus the converging of the two problems — internal and external — had led to the serious troubles of the 'thirties.

Basing himself on this analysis, Van Imhoff began to put forward to his superiors some suggestions for a solution to the predicament in which Dutch power found itself. He was convinced that the key to security in the coastal lands lay in the Kandyan court and therefore it was this problem that had to be attacked first. "The dissatisfaction of the court", he said "must be seen as the first and weightiest inconvenience, the most important cause of all the disorder, the source of all the disorder, the source of all disobedience of the inhabitants, the rod by which all the chiefs of the Company's Korles can be bestirred, the support of all evil-minded men, and the root of Ceylon's bad condition."¹⁵ He was also convinced that trying to solve this by the customary way of sweet words, embassies and presents to the court of Kandy was tantamount to self-deception. Some permanent solution must be discovered by which relations between Kandy and the Dutch could be regularised, and only this would lead to the removal of all other disabilities that Dutch policy had been labouring under.

Everything pointed to the need to enter into a peace treaty with the King and now Van Imhoff began to consider concrete proposals as to how this could be done. Van Imhoff conjectured that so far the Kings had expected to realise their ambition of freeing their ports and this had been their minimum demand. Until and unless this was conceded to them they could not be brought to discuss terms of a treaty. By now they would have awakened to the realisation that this was an impossibility and this realisation would bring them to accept a part of what they had formerly demanded. Van Imhoff knew very well that the Directors would never consent to the liberation of trade in the King's ports. So he offered a compromise. He recommended that the King

¹⁴ Ibid. fos 83—84.

¹⁵ Ibid. fos 90.

be permitted to send one, two or even three vessels on his own from Puttelam to the Indian coast to buy and sell on his behalf, cinnamon and other contraband monopoly goods being excepted from the cargo. The loss the Company would incur by the trading activity of these King's vessels would be negligible compared to the good will that it would generate which in turn would lead to the conclusion of a satisfactory peace treaty.¹⁶ Van Imhoff asked the Supreme Government to give this proposals its serious consideration and authorise him to take the necessary action.

To Van Imhoff, this was a means to bridge the gulf between the interests of the Company and those of the King. If the royal vessels were successful in carrying out a profitable trade, a bond would have been established between King and Company. This would divert their hostile attention from the closing of the harbours to private trade and create suitable conditions for the enactment of some new treaty. Van Imhoff very pertinently asked the question: What profit does our occupation of the country bring to the King? All the really valuable products of the country were taken solely by the Dutch and, because of the curtailment of trade, neither the court nor the people could make anything out of the lesser articles. Van Imhoff desired to create some common ground on which friendship between the two powers could be based. He wanted to share some at least of the profits of Ceylon with the native administration. Van Imhoff also thought that real participation in trade would make the Kandyans conscious of the problems and difficulties attendant on it. The fact was that trade in the South Indian area was declining because of the warfare caused by Muslim invasions. A direct experience of these difficulties might also make them less keen on the opening of the ports.¹⁷

Once good relations were established, Van Imhoff really wanted to direct them to more intensive agriculture with mutual benefit to both parties. Coffee had just been introduced into the low country and was showing promise. The Ceylon beans had superior qualities and were fetching good prices. Their cultivation could be extended into the highlands and the produce bought by the Company. Similarly, pepper and cardamoms grew well in the highlands and with royal support their cultivation and supply could be intensified. This would bring the Kandyans real prosperity which was a far firmer foundation on which

¹⁶ *Ibid.* fos 101—2.

¹⁷ Secret Resolutions of the Council of Ceylon, 19 September 1737, Kol. Arch. 2292 fos 555—563.

friendship could be based. All these could be grown as peasant crops and once their cultivation was well established in the highlands conditions would be ideal for the maintenance of peace.¹⁸

Van Imhoff's superiors at Batavia did not share his enthusiasm to strike at the root of the Ceylon problem. They had merely expected that Van Imhoff, more able than his predecessors, would tide over the crisis that confronted Ceylon and pacify the country. They dampened his zeal for a peace treaty with the King with the comment that nothing was more desirable but at the same time nothing more impossible. On the specific proposal put forward, they gave a guarded and rather non-committal reply. They authorised Van Imhoff to permit a few vessels for the King only on condition that a written treaty was signed between the two parties. They also required complete assurance that orders and restrictions would be placed such that this would not lead to abuse and malpractices in its operation.¹⁹ There was the worry that this concession might be used by the officials to indulge in private trade in conjunction with the Kandyan. Already there was considerable smuggling of monopoly goods and, in spite of the very strict watch and the death penalty, sometimes even cinnamon was stealthily taken away. Because of these considerations, Van Imhoff's proposals were not very favourably received.

It would also appear that Van Imhoff had underestimated the degree of the Kandyan urge for free trade. It may well be true that the country's trade everywhere was in decline. For the Kandyans free traffic in their harbours was more than an economic question, it was a matter of prestige. So when the Governor tentatively suggested to the Kandyan ambassadors the possibility of permitting them some vessels they did not seize upon it with enthusiasm, as he had expected they would. The Governor expected the Court to take this matter up when these ambassadors returned to Kandy and reported the offer. But he was disappointed to see that nothing ensued.²⁰ The Kandyan attitude seems to have been that the court was not going to receive permission from the Dutch to trade. They wanted to assert their right to trade in their own ports. They desired all or nothing. Compromise solutions as suggested by Van Imhoff certainly showed a greater understanding of the problem than had been hitherto present among Dutch officials, and would have

¹⁸ *Memoir left by Baron Van Imhoff to his successor Bruynink, 1740*, transl. Sophia Anthonisz (Colombo, 1911) pp 11–13.

¹⁹ G.G.C. to Van Imhoff, 12 November 1736, Kol. Arch. 2292 fos 566–568.

²⁰ Van Imhoff to Director, 15 December 1738, Kol. Arch. 2320 fo 313.

led to some settlement if both parties had been talking the same language and held the same attitudes and assumptions. It must be taken into account by students of this period that there was an archaic element in Kandyan statecraft at this time which prevented them from seeing political facts in the way they appeared to the Dutch. Thus their reactions to situations appeared strange and incomprehensible to the Dutch, which was yet another factor that stood in the way of any fruitful negotiations and settlement.

If the necessity to maintain the monopoly could not be reconciled with Kandyan demands for freedom of trade by negotiation and compromise, then it seemed logical to Van Imhoff's mind that other means should be adopted to secure the Company's interests. The use of force appeared now as the only, though unwelcome, alternative and he suggested this for the consideration of the authorities. It was no flippant suggestion made in a moment of irritation with the Kandyan court. He was fully ware of the difficulties involved in an expedition against Kandy. The opinion of almost all Governors of Ceylon, with the exception of the two Van Goenses (father and son), was against it. Van Imhoff himself put forward the problems connected with it. There was the problem of moving Dutch forces in the inaccessible highlands where the enemy could easily withdraw in the face of the advancing army from its settlements and subsist in the woods. From here they could always come back as and when they wanted, as the Portuguese had discovered sometimes to their cost. There was no victory or defeat with such an enemy.²¹ In spite of these overwhelming problems Van Imhoff recommended a swift, pointed thrust into Kandy as a means of forcing the King to come to terms. Then Dutch control over the whole island could be firmly established. They would be complete master of all the cinnamon growing in the island, as also the pepper and the arecanut. This might also enable them to get enough pepper to dispense with Malabar. Thus all their efforts in this region could be centred on Ceylon. It also seemed a feasible plan to Van Imhoff to divide the Kandyan Kingdom into two and thus weaken it. He thought a good opportunity would be offered by the succession of a new monarch in Kandy. The reigning King Narendra Sinha lay on his death bed and it was known that he had no direct heir of the Sinhalese race to succeed him. It was a circumstance that could cause a disputed succession and thus seemed a good occasion for outside interference.²²

²¹ Van Imhoff to G.G.C., 16 September 1736, Kol. Arch. 2262 fo 93.

²² Van Imhoff to Directors, 12 January 1737, Kol. Arch. 2263 fos. 620—627.

The Batavian Government reacted violently against this proposal. They took their stand on the resolution of 1681, repeating all the arguments that had been used then to defeat a similar proposal made by Rijckloff van Goens. They threw up their hands in horror at the merest mention of war against the Kandyan King and pointed out the innumerable difficulties. They invoked the example of the Portuguese to show that once wars were started in Ceylon they became never-ending. The ruin of the Portuguese in Ceylon had been caused by their war policy, while the Dutch had subsisted so far because of their policy of peace. They repeated the pious resolutions to accommodate the demands of the King as far as it lay within the interests of the Dutch to do so and thus to arrive at an honourable and reasonable settlement.²³ All this was clear enough to Van Imhoff. But he was really seeking to get behind the façade of Dutch policy and strengthen its weak foundations. In exhorting Van Imhoff to seek peace with the King, they were merely preaching to the converted. Van Imhoff was taking Dutch policy in Ceylon to where it logically led him and the two proposals that he had put forward were the only alternatives. He knew of no other way. If anyone sought to suggest anything else it was either a piece of bluff or of self-deception.

All these discussions took place within the first two years of Van Imhoff's Governorship and in the way they were concluded they put an end to any expectations that Van Imhoff had of basing Dutch power in Ceylon on firmer foundations. Thereafter he too had perforce to revert to the traditional policy of embassies, presents and prevarication. In May, 1739 the reigning King died and was succeeded by his brother-in-law. This preoccupation in Kandy made the last year of Van Imhoff's tenure rather uneventful in the matter of Dutch-Kandyan relations. He relinquished office in March, 1740 and handed over to his successor Bruyninck. In a memoir to his successor, he reflected ruefully that his "alternative propositions for reform were rejected" by the Governor General and Council of India whose views did not agree with his. Nor had they given him any better policy of their own which he could now recommend to his successor. In the event the best advice he could give him was to "make the best of the matter, and adapt yourself to time and circumstances."²⁴

It is perhaps possible to understand and appreciate Van Imhoff's

²³ G.G.C. to Directors, 2 April 1737, Kol. Arch. 2257 fos. 2306—2312.

²⁴ *Memoir left by Van Imhoff* p. 10.

policy better if we look briefly at the subsequent years. The weakness of the Company's position in Ceylon as analysed by Van Imhoff was not remedied but permitted to continue. There was no common bond forged, as Van Imhoff had desired, between the Kings of Kandy and the Dutch. Nor was the clear predominance of one asserted by superior force. The closing of the harbours was increasingly opposed by the King's people at every opportunity. And the cleavage between the two powers made it more and more difficult for the Dutch to exercise sovereignty in their lands. After the effectiveness of sabotage and subversion of activity in the lowlands was demonstrated by the events of the 'thirties, this became a more common feature. Interference of the Kandians in low country affairs became more daring and open. In the time of Governor Van Gollennesse (1743—1751), the peeling of cinnamon in their lands was prohibited. The Dutch were not allowed to transport elephants through their lands. Smuggling was encouraged actively from Puttalam. *Chalias* were incited to disobedience.²⁵ Again under Governor Loten (1752—1757) they went even further. Now Kandians sought to assert their claims over the pearl banks along the coast of Mannar and Puttalam.²⁶

The final vindication of Van Imhoff's thesis came in dramatic fashion in 1760. All the many grievances of the King and the people erupted and initiated a five year period of open rebellion and warfare that strained the resources of the Dutch to breaking point. The then Governor put the position in picturesque language: "The pitcher, which so long had gone to the well and gradually began to leak, could, as at present, hold water no longer, and by a truculent thrust of a sulky court broke into fragments in my hands."²⁷ For about four years the Kandians were masters of everything and Dutch power retreated to the few coastal strongholds. It was a grim compliment that Schreuder paid to Van Imhoff when he said: "What we have seen these days is nothing but a fulfillment of what Heer Van Imhoff predicted, though His Excellency had expected this even earlier and had not thought that this storm cloud would have remained hanging above our head for so long without bursting sooner."²⁸

²⁵ Memoir of Governor Van Gollennesse to Vreelands (Ceylon Government Archives, Nuwara Eliya) pp 11—16.

²⁶ *Memoir of Jan Gideon Loten 1752—1757*. Transl. E. Reimers (Colombo, 1935, pp 7—9.

²⁷ *Memoir of Jan Schreuder 1757—1762* (Colombo, 1946) p. 118.

²⁸ *Ibid.* p. 117.

If the position was to be retrieved, the Dutch had to strike at the root of Kandyan power. At last in 1765 it was decided to march an expedition to Kandy — a decision which the Dutch had fought shy of for about a century. The expedition showed that some of the fears of the Dutch for such action were real. It ended disastrously, costing the Governor (Van Eck) his life, beside considerable loss in men and material. His successor Valck conducted a better planned and more successful campaign and was able to conclude the treaty of 1766 with the Kandyans. The treaty gave the Dutch everything they had been striving to secure in Ceylon.

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