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NIALL FERGUSON

Empire

How Britain Made the Modern World



PENGUIN BOOKS

For Ken and Vivienne

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The old river in its broad reach rested unruffled at the decline of day, after ages of good service done to the race that peopled its banks, spread out in the tranquil dignity of a waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth . . . The tidal current runs to and fro in its unceasing service, crowded with memories of men and ships it had borne to the rest of home or to the battles of the sea. It had known and served all the men of whom the nation is proud . . . It had borne all the ships whose names are like jewels flashing in the night of time . . . It had known the ships and the men. They had sailed from Deptford, from Greenwich, from Erith – the adventurers and the settlers; kings' ships and the ships of men on 'Change; captains, admirals, the dark 'interlopers' of the Eastern trade, and the commissioned 'generals' of East India fleets. Hunters for gold or pursuers of fame, they all had gone out on that stream, bearing the sword, and often the torch, messengers of the might within the land, bearers of a spark from the sacred fire. What greatness had not floated on the ebb of that river into the mystery of an unknown earth! . . . The dreams of men, the seed of commonwealths, the germs of empires . . .

Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*

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Introduction

Britain controls today the destinies of some 350,000,000 alien people, unable as yet to govern themselves, and easy victims to rapine and injustice, unless a strong arm guards them. She is giving them a rule that has its faults, no doubt, but such, I would make bold to affirm, as no conquering state ever before gave to a dependent people.

Professor George M. Wrong, 1909

. . . Colonialism has led to racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and . . . Africans and people of African descent, and people of Asian descent and indigenous peoples were victims of colonialism and continue to be victims of its consequences . . .

Durban Declaration of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, 2001

Once there was an Empire that governed roughly a quarter of the world's population, covered about the same proportion of the earth's land surface and dominated nearly all its oceans. The British Empire was the biggest Empire ever, bar none. How an archipelago of rainy islands off the north-west coast of Europe came to rule the world is one of the fundamental questions not just of British but of world history. It is one of the questions this book seeks to answer. The second and perhaps more difficult question it addresses is simply whether the Empire was a good or bad thing.

It is nowadays quite conventional to think that, on balance, it was bad. Probably the main reason for the Empire's fall into

disrepute was its involvement in the Atlantic slave trade and slavery itself. This is no longer a question for historical judgement alone; it has become a political, and potentially a legal, issue. In August 1999 the African World Reparations and Repatriation Truth Commission, meeting in Accra, issued a demand for reparations from 'all those nations of Western Europe and the Americas and institutions, who participated and benefited from the slave trade and colonialism'. The sum suggested as adequate compensation – based on estimates of 'the number of human lives lost to Africa during the slave-trade, as well as an assessment of the worth of the gold, diamonds and other minerals taken from the continent during colonial rule' – was \$777 trillion. Given that more than three million of the ten million or so Africans who crossed the Atlantic as slaves before 1850 were shipped in British vessels, the putative British reparations burden could be in the region of £150 trillion.

Such a claim may seem fantastic. But the idea was given some encouragement at the United Nations World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, held in Durban in the summer of 2001. The conference's final report 'acknowledged' that slavery and the slave trade were 'a crime against humanity' of which 'people of African descent, Asians and people of Asian and indigenous peoples' were 'victims'. In another of the conference's declarations, 'colonialism' was casually lumped together with 'slavery, the slave trade . . . apartheid . . . and genocide' in a blanket call to UN member states 'to honour the memory of the victims of past tragedies'. Noting that 'some States have taken the initiative to apologize and have paid reparation, where appropriate, for grave and massive violations committed', the conference 'called on all those who have not yet contributed to restoring the dignity of the victims to find appropriate ways to do so'.

These calls have not gone unheeded in Britain itself. In May 2002 the director of the London-based 'think tank' Demos, which may be regarded as the avant-garde of New Labour, suggested that the Queen should embark on 'a world tour to apologize for the past

sins of Empire as a first step to making the Commonwealth more effective and relevant'. The news agency that reported this remarkable suggestion added the helpful gloss: 'Critics of the British Empire, which at its peak in 1918 covered a quarter of the world's population and area, say its huge wealth was built on oppression and exploitation.'

At the time of writing, one BBC website (apparently aimed at school-children) offered the following equally incisive overview of imperial history:

The Empire came to greatness by killing lots of people less sharply armed than themselves and stealing their countries, although their methods later changed: killing lots of people with machine guns came to prominence as the army's tactic of choice . . . [It] . . . fell to pieces because of various people like Mahatma Gandhi, heroic revolutionary protester, sensitive to the needs of his people.

The questions recently posed by an eminent historian on BBC television may be said to encapsulate the current conventional wisdom. 'How', he asked, 'did a people who thought themselves free end up subjugating so much of the world . . . How did an empire of the free become an empire of slaves?' How, despite their 'good intentions', did the British sacrifice 'common humanity' to 'the fetish of the market'?

Beneficiaries

Thanks to the British Empire, I have relatives scattered all over the world – in Alberta, Ontario, Philadelphia and Perth, Australia. Because of the Empire, my paternal grandfather John spent his early twenties selling hardware and hooch to Indians in Ecuador.* I grew up marvelling at the two large oil paintings he brought back of the Andean landscape, which hung luminously on my

* Not a colony, of course, but part of Britain's 'informal' economic empire in Latin America.

grandmother's living room wall; and the two Indian dolls, grim faced and weighed down with firewood, incongruous beside the china figurines in her display cabinet. Thanks to the Empire, my other grandfather Tom Hamilton spent more than three years as an RAF officer fighting the Japanese in India and Burma. His letters home, lovingly preserved by my grandmother, are a wonderfully observant and eloquent account of the Raj in wartime, shot through with that sceptical liberalism which was the core of his philosophy. I can still recall the joy of leafing through the photographs he took while stationed in India, and the thrill of hearing his stories about swooping kites and sweltering heat. Thanks to the Empire, my Uncle Ian Ferguson's first job after he qualified as an architect was with the Calcutta firm of McIntosh Burn, a subsidiary of the Gillanders managing agency. Ian had started his working life in the Royal Navy; he spent the rest of his life abroad, first in Africa, then in the Gulf states. To me he seemed the very essence of the expatriate adventurer: sun-darkened, hard-drinking and fiercely cynical – the only adult who always, from my earliest childhood, addressed me as a fellow-adult, profanities, black humour and all.

His brother – my father – also had his moment of *Wanderlust*. In 1966, having completed his medical studies in Glasgow, he defied the advice of friends and relatives by taking his wife and two infant children to Kenya, where he worked for two years teaching and practising medicine in Nairobi. Thus, thanks to the British Empire, my earliest childhood memories are of colonial Africa; for although Kenya had been independent for three years, and the radio constantly played Jomo Kenyatta's signature tune 'Harambe, Harambe' ('Let's all pull together'), scarcely anything had changed since the days of White Mischief. We had our bungalow, our maid, our smattering of Swahili – and our sense of unshakeable security. It was a magical time, which indelibly impressed on my consciousness the sight of the hunting cheetah, the sound of Kikuyu women singing, the smell of the first rains and the taste of ripe mango. I suspect my mother was never happier. And although we finally came back to the grey skies and the winter slush of Glasgow, our house was always filled with Kenyan memorabilia. There was the

antelope skin on the sofa; the Masai warrior's portrait on the wall; the crudely carved but exquisitely decorated footstool that my sister and I liked to perch on. Each of us had a zebra skin drum; a gaudy basket from Mombasa; a wildebeest-hair fly-whisk; a Kikuyu doll. We did not know it, but we grew up in a little post-colonial museum. I still have the carved wooden hippopotamus, warthog, elephant and lion which were once my most treasured possessions.

Still, we had come home – and we never went back. One who did not return to Scotland was my great-aunt Agnes Ferguson (Aggie to all who knew her). Born in 1888, the daughter of my great-grandfather James Ferguson, a garden labourer, and his first wife Mary, Aggie personified the transforming power of the imperial dream. In 1911, enticed by alluring pictures of the Canadian prairies, she and her new husband Ernest Brown decided to follow his brother's example: to leave their home, their family and friends in Fife, and head west. The lure was the offer of 160 acres of virgin real estate in Saskatchewan, free of charge. The only stipulation was that they had to build a dwelling there and cultivate the land. According to family legend, Aggie and Ernest were supposed to sail on the *Titanic*; by chance, only their luggage was on board when the ship went down. That was luck of a sort, but it meant that they had to start their new life from scratch. And if Aggie and Ernest thought they were getting away from the nasty Scottish winter, they were swiftly disillusioned. What they found in Glenrock was a windswept wilderness where temperatures could plunge far lower than in drizzly Fife. It was, as Ernest wrote to his sister-in-law Nellie, 'sure terriabl [*sic*] cold'. The first shelter they were able to build for themselves was so primitive they called it a chicken shack. The nearest town, Moose Jaw, was ninety-five miles away. To begin with, their nearest neighbours were Indians; friendly ones, fortunately.

Yet the black and white photographs they sent back to their relatives every Christmas of themselves and 'our prairie home' tell a story of success and fulfilment; of hard-won happiness. As the mother of three healthy children, Aggie lost the pinched look she

had worn as an emigrant bride. Ernest grew tanned and broad-shouldered working the prairie soil; shaved off his moustache; became handsome where once he had been hangdog. The chicken shack was supplanted by a clapboard farmhouse. Gradually, their sense of isolation diminished as more Scots settled in the area. It was reassuring to be able to celebrate Hogmanay with fellow countrymen so far from home, since 'they don't hold New Year out here very much just the Scotch folk'. Today their ten grandchildren live all over Canada, a country whose annual income per capita is not merely 10 per cent higher than Britain's but second only to that of the United States. All thanks to the British Empire.

So to say that I grew up in the Empire's shadow would be to conjure up too tenebrous an image. To the Scots, the Empire stood for bright sunlight. Little may have been left of it on the map by the 1970s, but my family was so completely imbued with the imperial ethos that its importance went unquestioned. Indeed, the legacy of the Empire was so ubiquitous and omnipresent that we regarded it as part of the normal human condition. Holidays in Canada did nothing to alter this impression. Nor did that systematic defamation of Catholic Ireland which in those days was such an integral part of life on the south side of the Clyde. I grew up still thinking complacently of Glasgow as the 'Second City' (of the Empire); reading quite uncritically the novels of H. Rider Haggard and John Buchan; relishing all the quintessentially imperial sporting clashes – best of all the rugby tours by the 'British Lions' to Australia, New Zealand and (until they were regrettably interrupted) South Africa.* At home we ate 'Empire biscuits'. At school we did 'Empire shooting'.

* The ban on sporting tours of Africa was in fact quite easy to reconcile with the liberal imperialist assumptions of my youth. It seemed obvious that in denying black South Africans civil and political rights, the Afrikaners were merely showing their true colours and vindicating earlier (but sadly unsuccessful) efforts by the enlightened British to break their dominance. I am afraid the possibility that the apartheid system might have anything to do with British rule – or that the British had ever practised their own tacit systems of apartheid – never occurred to me.

Cases Against

Admittedly, by the time I reached my teens, the idea of a world ruled by chaps with red coats, stiff upper lips and pith helmets had become something of a joke, the raw material for *Carry On Up the Khyber*, *It Ain't Half Hot Mum* and *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. Perhaps the archetypal line in the genre is in the Monty Python film *The Meaning of Life*, when a blood-spattered 'Tommy', fatally wounded in a battle with the Zulus, exclaims ecstatically: 'I mean, I killed fifteen of those buggers, sir. Now, at home, they'd hang me! Here, they'll give me a fucking medal, sir!'

When I got to Oxford in 1982 the Empire was no longer even funny. In those days the Oxford Union still debated solemn motions like 'This House Regrets Colonization'. Young and foolish, I rashly opposed this motion and in doing so prematurely ended my career as a student politician. I suppose that was the moment the penny dropped: clearly not everyone shared my confidently rosy view of Britain's imperial past. Indeed, some of my contemporaries appeared quite scandalized that I should be prepared to defend it. As I began to study the subject in earnest, I came to realize that I and my family had been woefully misinformed: the costs of the British Empire had, in fact, substantially outweighed its benefits. The Empire had, after all, been one of history's Bad Things.

There is no need here to recapitulate in any detail the arguments against imperialism. They can be summarized, I think, under two headings: those that stress the negative consequences for the colonized; and those that stress the negative consequences for the colonizers. In the former category belong both the nationalists and the Marxists, from the Mughal historian Gholam Hossein Khan, author of the *Seir Mutaqherin* (1789) to the Palestinian academic Edward Said, author of *Orientalism* (1978), by way of Lenin and a thousand others in between. In the latter camp belong the liberals, from Adam Smith onwards, who have maintained for almost as many years that the British Empire was, even from Britain's point of view, 'a waste of money'.

The central nationalist/Marxist assumption is, of course, that imperialism was economically exploitative; every facet of colonial rule, including even the apparently sincere efforts of Europeans to study and understand indigenous cultures, was at root designed to maximize the 'surplus value' that could be extracted from the subject peoples. The central liberal assumption is more paradoxical. It is that precisely because imperialism distorted market forces – using everything from military force to preferential tariffs to rig business in the favour of the metropolis – it was not in the long-term interests of the metropolitan economy either. In this view, it was free economic integration with the rest of the world economy that mattered, not the coercive integration of imperialism. Thus, investment in domestic industry would have been better for Britain than investment in far-flung colonies, while the cost of defending the Empire was a burden on taxpayers, who might otherwise have spent their money on the products of a modern consumer goods sector. One historian, writing in the new *Oxford History of the British Empire*, has gone so far as to speculate that if Britain had got rid of the Empire in the mid 1840s she could have reaped a 'decolonization dividend' in the form of a 25 per cent tax cut. The money taxpayers would have saved as a result of this could have been spent on electricity, cars and consumer durables, thus encouraging industrial modernization at home.

Nearly a century ago, the likes of J. A. Hobson and Leonard Hobhouse were arguing along very similar lines; they in turn were in some measure the heirs of Richard Cobden and John Bright in the 1840s and 1850s. In *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), Adam Smith had expressed his doubts about the wisdom of 'raising up a nation of customers who should be obliged to buy from the shops of our different producers, all the goods with which these could supply them'. But it was Cobden who had originally insisted that the expansion of British trade should go hand in hand with a foreign policy of complete non-intervention. Commerce alone, he maintained, was 'the grand panacea',

which, like a beneficent medical discovery, will serve to inoculate with the healthy and saving taste for civilization all the nations of the world. Not a bale of merchandise leaves our shores, but it bears the seeds of intelligence and fruitful thought to the members of some less enlightened community; not a merchant visits our seats of manufacturing industry, but he returns to his own country the missionary of freedom, peace, and good government – whilst our steamboats, that now visit every port of Europe, and our miraculous railroads, that are the talk of all nations, are the advertisements and vouchers for the value of our enlightened institutions.

The critical point for Cobden was that neither trade nor even the spread of British 'civilization' needed to be *enforced* by imperial structures. Indeed, the use of force could achieve nothing if it sought to run counter to the benign laws of the global free market:

So far as our commerce is concerned, it can neither be sustained nor greatly injured abroad by force or violence. The foreign customers who visit our markets are not brought hither through fear of the power or the influence of British diplomatists: they are not captured by our fleets and armies: and as little are they attracted by feelings of love for us; for that 'there is no friendship in trade' is a maxim equally applicable to nations and to individuals. It is solely from the promptings of self interest that the merchants of Europe, as of the rest of the world, send their ships to our ports to be freighted with the products of our labour. The self-same impulse drew all nations, at different periods of history, to Tyre, to Venice, and to Amsterdam; and if, in the revolution of time and events, a country should be found (which is probable) whose cottons and woollens shall be cheaper than those of England and the rest of the world, then to that spot – even should it, by supposition, be buried in the remotest nook of the globe – will all the traders of the earth flock; and no human power, no fleets or armies, will prevent Manchester, Liverpool, and Leeds, from sharing the fate of their once proud predecessors in Holland, Italy, and Phoenicia . . .

Thus there was no need for an Empire; trade would take care of itself – and everything else too, including world peace. In May 1856 Cobden went so far as to say that it would 'be a happy day when England has not an acre of territory in Continental Asia'.

The common factor in all such arguments was and remains, however, the assumption that the benefits of international exchange could have been and can be reaped without the costs of empire. To put it more concisely, can you have globalization without gunboats?

Empire and Globalization

It has become almost a commonplace that globalization today has much in common with the integration of the world economy in the decades before 1914. But what exactly does this overused word mean? Is it, as Cobden implied, an economically determined phenomenon, in which the free exchange of commodities and manufactures tends 'to unite mankind in the bonds of peace'? Or might free trade require a political framework within which to work?

The Leftist opponents of globalization naturally regard it as no more than the latest manifestation of a damnably resilient international capitalism. By contrast, the modern consensus among liberal economists is that increasing economic openness raises living standards, even if there will always be some net losers as hitherto privileged or protected social groups are exposed to international competition. But economists and economic historians alike prefer to focus their attention on flows of commodities, capital and labour. They say less about flows of knowledge, culture and institutions. They also tend to pay more attention to the ways government can *facilitate* globalization by various kinds of deregulation than to the ways it can actively promote and indeed *impose* it. There is a growing appreciation of the importance of legal, financial and administrative institutions such as the rule of law, credible monetary regimes, transparent fiscal systems and incorrupt bureaucracies in encouraging cross-border capital flows. But how did the West European versions of such institutions spread as far and wide as they did?

In a few rare cases – the most obvious being that of Japan – there was a process of conscious, voluntary imitation. But more often

than not, European institutions were imposed by main force, often literally at gunpoint. In theory, globalization may be possible in an international system of multilateral cooperation, spontaneously arising as Cobden envisaged. But it may equally well be possible as a result of coercion if the dominant power in the world favours economic liberalism. Empire – and specifically the British Empire – is the instance that springs to mind.

Today, the principal barriers to the optimal allocation of labour, capital and goods in the world are, on the one hand, civil wars and lawless, corrupt governments, which together have condemned so many countries in sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Asia to decades of impoverishment; and, on the other, the reluctance of the United States and her allies to practise as well as preach free trade, or to devote more than a trifling share of their vast resources to programmes of economic aid. By contrast, for much (though certainly, as we shall see, not all) of its history, the British Empire acted as an agency for imposing free markets, the rule of law, investor protection and relatively incorrupt government on roughly a quarter of the world. The Empire also did a good deal to encourage those things in countries which were outside its formal imperial domain but under its economic influence through the 'imperialism of free trade'. *Prima facie*, there therefore seems a plausible case that empire enhanced global welfare – in other words, was a Good Thing.

Many charges can of course be levelled against the British Empire; they will not be dropped in what follows. I do not claim, as John Stuart Mill did, that British rule in India was 'not only the purest in intention but one of the most beneficent in act ever known to mankind'; nor, as Lord Curzon did, that 'the British Empire is under Providence the greatest instrument for good that the world has seen'; nor, as General Smuts claimed, that it was 'the widest system of organized human freedom which has ever existed in human history'. The Empire was never so altruistic. In the eighteenth century the British were indeed as zealous in the acquisition and exploitation of slaves as they were subsequently zealous in trying to stamp slavery out; and for much longer they practised

forms of racial discrimination and segregation that we today consider abhorrent. When imperial authority was challenged – in India in 1857, in Jamaica in 1831 or 1865, in South Africa in 1899 – the British response was brutal. When famine struck (in Ireland in the 1840s, in India in the 1870s) their response was negligent, in some measure positively culpable. Even when they took a scholarly interest in oriental cultures, perhaps they did subtly denigrate them in the process.

Yet the fact remains that no organization in history has done more to promote the free movement of goods, capital and labour than the British Empire in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. And no organization has done more to impose Western norms of law, order and governance around the world. To characterize all this as ‘gentlemanly capitalism’ risks underselling the scale – and modernity – of the achievement in the sphere of economics; just as criticism of the ‘ornamental’ (meaning hierarchical) character of British rule overseas tends to overlook the signal virtues of what were remarkably non-venal administrations. It was not just my family that benefited from these things.

The difficulty with the achievements of empire is that they are much more likely to be taken for granted than the sins of empire. It is, however, instructive to try to imagine a world without the Empire. But while it is just about possible to imagine what the world would have been like without the French Revolution or the First World War, the imagination reels from the counter-factual of modern history without the British Empire.

As I travelled around that Empire’s remains in the first half of 2002, I was constantly struck by its ubiquitous creativity. To imagine the world without the Empire would be to expunge from the map the elegant boulevards of Williamsburg and old Philadelphia; to sweep into the sea the squat battlements of Port Royal, Jamaica; to return to the bush the glorious skyline of Sydney; to level the steamy seaside slum that is Freetown, Sierra Leone; to fill in the Big Hole at Kimberley; to demolish the mission at Kuruman; to send the town of Livingstone hurtling over the Victoria Falls – which

would of course revert to their original name of Mosioatunya. Without the British Empire, there would be no Calcutta; no Bombay; no Madras. Indians may rename them as many times as they like, but they remain cities founded and built by the British.

It is of course tempting to argue that it would all have happened anyway, albeit with different names. Perhaps the railways would have been invented and exported by another European power; perhaps the telegraph cables would have been laid across the sea by someone else. Maybe, as Cobden claimed, the same volumes of trade would have gone on without bellicose empires meddling in peaceful commerce. Maybe too the great movements of population which transformed the cultures and complexions of whole continents would have happened anyway.

Yet there is reason to doubt that the world would have been the same or even similar in the absence of the Empire. Even if we allow for the possibility that trade, capital flows and migration could have been ‘naturally occurring’ in the past 300 years, there remain the flows of culture and institutions. And here the fingerprints of empire seem more readily discernible and less easy to expunge.

When the British governed a country – even when they only influenced its government by flexing their military and financial muscles – there were certain distinctive features of their own society that they tended to disseminate. A list of the more important of these would run:

- 1 The English language
- 2 English forms of land tenure
- 3 Scottish and English banking
- 4 The Common Law
- 5 Protestantism
- 6 Team sports
- 7 The limited or ‘night watchman’ state
- 8 Representative assemblies
- 9 The idea of liberty

The last of these is perhaps the most important because it remains the most distinctive feature of the Empire, the thing that sets it apart

from its continental European rivals. I do not mean to claim that all British imperialists were liberals: some were very far from it. But what is very striking about the history of the Empire is that whenever the British were behaving despotically, there was almost always a liberal critique of that behaviour from within British society. Indeed, so powerful and consistent was this tendency to judge Britain's imperial conduct by the yardstick of liberty that it gave the British Empire something of a self-liquidating character. Once a colonized society had sufficiently adopted the other institutions the British brought with them, it became very hard for the British to prohibit that political liberty to which they attached so much significance for themselves.

Would other empires have produced the same effects? It seems doubtful. In my travels I caught many glimpses of world empires that might have been. In dilapidated Chinsura, a vision of how all Asia might look if the Dutch empire had not declined and fallen; in whitewashed Pondicherry, which all India might resemble if the French had won the Seven Years War; in dusty Delhi, where the Mughal Empire might have been restored if the Indian Mutiny had not been crushed; in humid Kanchanaburi, where the Japanese empire built its bridge on the River Kwai with British slave labour. Would New Amsterdam be the New York we know today if the Dutch had not surrendered it to the British in 1664? Might it not resemble more closely Bloemfontein, an authentic survivor of Dutch colonization?

Anglobalization

There are already several good general histories of the British Empire in print. My aim has not been to replicate these but to write the history of globalization as it was promoted by Great Britain and her colonies – 'Anglobalization', if you like. The structure is broadly chronological, but each of the six chapters has a distinct theme. For simplicity's sake the contents may be summarized as the globalization of:

- 1 Commodity markets
- 2 Labour markets
- 3 Culture
- 4 Government
- 5 Capital markets
- 6 Warfare

Or, in rather more human terms, the role of:

- 1 Pirates
- 2 Planters
- 3 Missionaries
- 4 Mandarins
- 5 Bankers
- 6 Bankrupts

The first chapter emphasizes that the British Empire began as a primarily economic phenomenon, its growth powered by commerce and consumerism. The demand for sugar drew merchants to the Caribbean. The demand for spices, tea and textiles drew them to Asia. But this was from the outset globalization with gunboats. For the British were not the first empire-builders, but the pirates who scavenged from the earlier empires of Portugal, Spain, Holland and France. They were imperial imitators.

The second chapter describes the role of migration. British colonization was a vast movement of peoples, a *Völkerwanderung* unlike anything before or since. Some quit the British Isles in pursuit of religious freedom, some in pursuit of political liberty, some in pursuit of profit. Others had no choice, but went as slaves or as convicted criminals. The central theme of this chapter, therefore, is the tension between British theories of liberty and the practice of imperial government; and how that tension came to be resolved.

Chapter Three emphasizes the voluntary, non-governmental character of Empire-building, focusing in particular on the increasingly important role played by Evangelical religious sects and missionary societies in the expansion of British influence. A critical point here is the self-consciously modernizing project that emanated from these

organizations – the Victorian ‘NGOs’. The paradox is that it was precisely the belief that indigenous cultures could be Anglicized which provoked the most violent nineteenth-century revolt against imperial rule.

The British Empire was the nearest thing there has ever been to a world government. Yet its mode of operation was a triumph of minimalism. To govern a population numbering hundreds of millions, the Indian Civil Service had a maximum strength of little more than 1,000. Chapter Four asks how it was possible for such a tiny bureaucracy to govern so huge an empire, and explores the symbiotic but ultimately unsustainable collaboration between British rulers and indigenous elites, both traditional and new.

Chapter Five deals primarily with the role of military force in the period of the ‘Scramble for Africa’, exploring the interaction between financial globalization and the armaments race between the European powers. Though they had been anticipated before, this was the era when three critical modern phenomena were born: the truly global bond market, the military-industrial complex and the mass media. Their influence was crucial in pushing the Empire towards its zenith. The press, above all, led the Empire into the temptation the Greeks called hubris: the pride that precedes a fall.

Finally, Chapter Six considers the role of the Empire in the twentieth century, when it found itself challenged not so much by nationalist insurgency – it could deal with that – but by rival, and far more ruthless, empires. The year 1940 was the moment when the Empire was weighed in the historical balance; when it faced the choice between compromise with Hitler’s evil empire and fighting on for, at best, a Pyrrhic victory. In my view, the right choice was made.

In a single volume covering what is, in effect, 400 years of global history, there must necessarily be omissions; I am all too painfully aware of these. I have tried, however, not to select so as to flatter. Slavery and the slave trade cannot be and are not disclaimed; any more than the Irish potato famine, the expropriation of the Matabele or the Amritsar massacre. But this balance sheet of the

British imperial achievement does not omit the credit side either. It seeks to show that the legacy of Empire is not just ‘racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance’ – which in any case existed long before colonialism – but

- the triumph of capitalism as the optimal system of economic organization;
- the Anglicization of North America and Australasia;
- the internationalization of the English language;
- the enduring influence of the Protestant version of Christianity; and, above all
- the survival of parliamentary institutions, which far worse empires were poised to extinguish in the 1940s.

As a young man, fresh from his first colonial war, Winston Churchill asked a good question:

What enterprise that an enlightened community may attempt is more noble and more profitable than the reclamation from barbarism of fertile regions and large populations? To give peace to warring tribes, to administer justice where all was violence, to strike the chains off the slave, to draw the richness from the soil, to plant the earliest seeds of commerce and learning, to increase in whole peoples their capacities for pleasure and diminish their chances of pain – what more beautiful ideal or more valuable reward can inspire human effort?

But Churchill recognized that, even with such aspirations, the practicalities of empire were seldom edifying.

Yet as the mind turns from the wonderful cloudland of aspiration to the ugly scaffolding of attempt and achievement, a succession of opposite ideas arise . . . The inevitable gap between conquest and dominion becomes filled with the figures of the greedy trader, the inopportune missionary, the ambitious soldier, and the lying speculator, who disquiet the minds of the conquered and excite the sordid appetites of the conquerors. And as the eye of thought rests on these sinister features, it hardly seems possible for us to believe that any fair prospect is approached by so foul a path.

INTRODUCTION

For better for worse – fair and foul – the world we know today is in large measure the product of Britain's age of Empire. The question is not whether British imperialism was without a blemish. It was not. The question is whether there could have been a less bloody path to modernity. Perhaps in theory there could have been. But in practice? What follows will, I hope, enable the reader to decide.

I Why Britain?

By what means are the Europeans thus powerful; or why, since they can so easily visit Asia and Africa for trade or conquest, cannot the Asiaticks and Africans invade their coasts, plant colonies in their ports, and give laws to their natural princes? The same wind that carries them back would bring us thither.

Samuel Johnson, *Rasselas*

In December 1663 a Welshman called Henry Morgan sailed five hundred miles across the Caribbean to mount a spectacular raid on a Spanish outpost called Gran Grenada, to the north of Lago de Nicaragua. The aim of the expedition was simple: to find and steal Spanish gold – or any other movable property. When Morgan and his men got to Gran Grenada, as the Governor of Jamaica reported in a despatch to London, '[They] fired a volley, overturned eighteen great guns . . . took the serjeant-major's house wherein were all their arms and ammunition, secured in the great Church 300 of the best men prisoners . . . plundered for 16 hours, discharged the prisoners, sunk all the boats and so came away.' It was the beginning of one of the seventeenth century's most extraordinary smash-and-grab sprees.

It should never be forgotten that this was how the British Empire began: in a maelstrom of seaborne violence and theft. It was not conceived by self-conscious imperialists, aiming to establish English rule over foreign lands, or colonists hoping to build a new life

God willed it,' he later wrote, he would be 'the next martyr to geographical science, or if my life is spared . . . [would] clear up . . . the secrets of the Great River [Nile] throughout its course.' At the time of Livingstone's funeral (at which he was among the eight pallbearers), Stanley wrote in his diary: 'May I be selected to succeed him in opening up Africa to the Shining light of Christianity.' But he added a significant rider: 'My methods, however, will not be Livingstone's. Each man has his own way. His, I think, had its defects, though the old man, personally has been almost Christ-like for goodness, patience . . . and self-sacrifice.'

Goodness, patience and self-sacrifice were not to be the qualities Henry Stanley brought to Africa. When he led an expedition up the River Congo, he went equipped with Winchester rifles and elephant guns, which he did not hesitate to use on unco-operative natives. Even the sight of spears being shaken at his boat made him reach for his repeating gun: 'Six shots and four deaths', he recorded with grim satisfaction after one such encounter, 'were sufficient to quiet the mocking.' By 1878 Stanley was working on behalf of King Leopold II of the Belgians to create a 'private colony' for his International African Association in the Congo. By an irony that would have appalled Livingstone, the Belgian Congo would soon become notorious for its murderous system of slave labour.

Livingstone had believed in the power of the Gospel; Stanley believed only in brute force. Livingstone had been appalled by slavery; Stanley would connive at its restoration. Above all, Livingstone had been indifferent to political frontiers; Stanley wanted to see Africa carved up. And so it was. In the time between Livingstone's death in 1873 and Stanley's death in 1904 around a third of Africa would be annexed to the British Empire; virtually all the rest would be taken over by a handful of other European powers. And it is only against this background of political domination that the conversion of sub-Saharan Africa to Christianity can be understood.

Commerce, Civilization and Christianity were to be conferred on Africa, just as Livingstone had intended. But they would arrive in conjunction with a fourth 'C': Conquest.

4 Heaven's Breed

A man should, whatever happens, keep to his own caste, race and breed. Let the White go to the White and the Black to the Black.

Kipling

The Victoria Memorial in the centre of Calcutta was intended by the British to be their answer to the Taj Mahal, a timeless expression of imperial grandeur that would awe those over whom they ruled. Today, however, the statue of Queen Victoria, gazing wearily out over the Maidan, looks more like a symbol of the transient nature of British rule. Splendid though it looks, the memorial is a solitary white island in the sea of Bengalis who inhabit every available corner of this miasmic metropolis. The astounding thing is that for the better part of two centuries not just Bengal but the whole of India was ruled by just a few thousand Britons. As someone remarked, the government of India was 'a gigantic machine for managing the entire public business of one-fifth of the inhabitants of the earth without their leave and without their help'.

The British were also able to use India to control an entire hemisphere, stretching from Malta all the way to Hong Kong. It was the foundation on which the entire mid-Victorian Empire stood.

Yet behind the marble façade, the Raj was the conundrum at the very heart of the British Empire. How on earth did 900 British civil servants and 70,000 British soldiers manage to govern upwards of 250 million Indians?

How did the Victorians do it?

The Annihilation of Distance

At the apex of the Victorian Empire was the Queen herself: industrious, opinionated, as passionate in private as she was impassive in public, indefatigably procreative and spectacularly long-lived. Like a latter-day Plantagenet, she was remarkably peripatetic. She disliked Buckingham Palace, preferred Windsor and had a soft spot for remote and rainy Balmoral. Her favourite residence, however, was probably Osborne, on the Isle of Wight. It had been acquired and remodelled at the instigation of her adored husband (and cousin) Albert and it was one of the few places where the couple could enjoy a measure of that privacy – and intimacy – which they were usually denied. It was, she declared, ‘so snug & nice to have a place of *one’s own*, – quiet & retired . . . It is impossible to imagine a prettier spot, we have a charming beach quite to ourselves – we can walk anywhere without being followed or mobbed.’

Osborne House itself is built in the Renaissance style, a typical piece of nineteenth-century architectural historicism. It is both literally and metaphorically thousands of miles from the global Empire over which Victoria reigned. In other ways, however, it was far from backward looking. The garish allegorical fresco above the main staircase looks at first sight like yet more Italianate pastiche. But closer inspection reveals ‘Britannia’ receiving the crown of the sea from Neptune, attended by ‘Industry’, ‘Commerce’ and ‘Navigation’. As those three figures on her right suggest, the royal couple understood full well the connection between Britain’s economic power and her global mastery.

Since the late eighteenth century, Britain had been pulling ahead of her rivals as a pioneer of new technology. British engineers were in the vanguard of a revolution – the Industrial Revolution – that harnessed the power of steam and the strength of iron to transform the world economy and the international balance of power. Nothing illustrated this better than the view from Osborne House, which looks straight across the Solent. Reassuringly visible on the other side is Britain’s principal naval base at Portsmouth, then the

largest in the world, and an imposing manifestation of British sea power. Fog permitting, the Queen could watch the comings and goings of her navy as she and her husband promenaded through Osborne’s elegantly landscaped gardens. By 1860 she would have been able to pick out with ease the supreme expression of mid-Victorian might: HMS *Warrior*. Steam-driven, ‘iron clad’ in five inches of armour plate and fitted with the latest breech-loading, shell-firing guns, *Warrior* was the world’s most powerful battleship, so powerful that no foreign vessel ever dared to exchange fire with her. And she was just one of around 240 ships, crewed by 40,000 sailors – making the Royal Navy the biggest in the world by far. And thanks to the unrivalled productivity of her shipyards, Britain owned roughly a third of the world’s merchant tonnage. At no other time in history has one power so completely dominated the world’s oceans as Britain did in the mid-nineteenth century. Queen Victoria had good cause to feel secure by the seaside.

If the British wished to abolish the slave trade, they simply sent the navy. By 1840 no fewer than 425 slave ships had been intercepted by the Royal Navy off the West African coast and escorted to Sierra Leone, where nearly all of them were condemned. A total of thirty warships were engaged in this international policing operation. If the British wished the Brazilians to follow their example by abolishing the slave trade, they simply sent a gunboat. That was what Lord Palmerston did in 1848; by September 1850 Brazil had passed a law abolishing the trade. If the British wished to force the Chinese to open their ports to British trade – not least to exports of Indian opium – they could once again send the navy. The Opium Wars of 1841 and 1856 were, of course, about much more than opium. The *Illustrated London News* portrayed the 1841 war as a crusade to introduce the benefits of free trade to yet another benighted Oriental despotism; while the Treaty of Nanking, which ended the conflict, made no explicit reference to opium. Likewise, the Second Opium War – sometimes known as the Arrow War, after the ship that was the *casus belli* – was fought partly to uphold British prestige as an end in itself; just as the ports of Greece had been blockaded in 1850 because a Gibraltar-born Jew claimed that

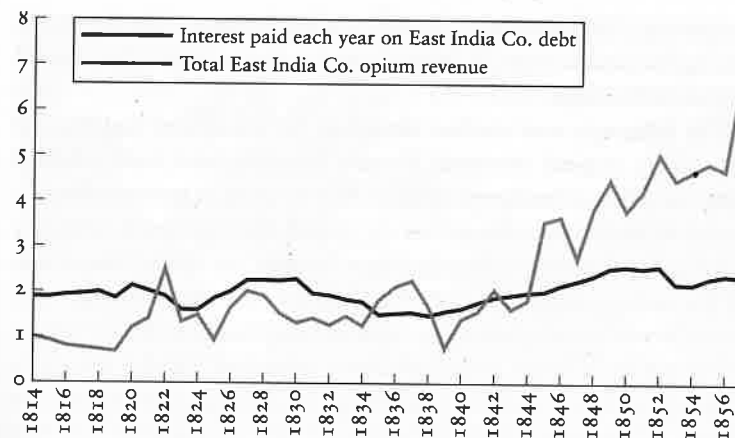
his rights as a British subject had been infringed by the Greek authorities. Yet it is very hard to believe the Opium Wars would have been fought if exports of opium, prohibited by the Chinese authorities after 1821, had not been so crucial to the finances of British rule in India.* The only real benefit of acquiring Hong Kong as a result of the war of 1841 was that it provided firms like Jardine Matheson with a base for their opium-smuggling operation. It is indeed one of the richer ironies of the Victorian value-system that the same navy that was deployed to abolish the slave trade was also active in expanding the narcotics trade.

What these events – the war against slavery and the wars for opium – had in common was that British naval mastery made them possible. At first, it is true, the Admiralty had been appalled by the advent of steam, believing it would ‘strike a fatal blow at the naval supremacy of the Empire’. But quickly it became apparent that the new technology had to be adopted, if only to keep up with the French. (The French warship *La Gloire*, launched in 1858, had been one of the principal reasons for building HMS *Warrior*.) Far from weakening the Empire, steam power tended to knit it together. In the days of sail it had taken between four and six weeks to cross the Atlantic; steam reduced that to two weeks in the mid-1830s and just ten days in the 1880s. Between the 1850s and the 1890s, the journey time from England to Cape Town was cut from forty-two to nineteen days. Steamships got bigger as well as faster: in the same period, average gross tonnage roughly doubled.†

Nor was that the only way the Empire became more tightly knit.

* It is a remarkable fact that throughout the first half of the nineteenth century the amount the East India Company earned from its monopoly on the export of opium was roughly equal to the amount it had to remit to London to pay the interest on its huge debt (see chart on p. 167). The opium trade was also crucial to the Indian balance of payments.

† Not only did it therefore take much less time to cross the oceans from metropolis to empire; it also cost a great deal less. The cost of shipping a bushel of wheat from New York to Liverpool was halved between 1830 and 1880 and halved again between 1880 and 1914. In 1830 transport costs for bar iron had been not much less than total production costs; by 1910 they were less than a fifth.



Debt and dope: the East India Company's interest payments and opium revenue, 1814–1857 (£ million)

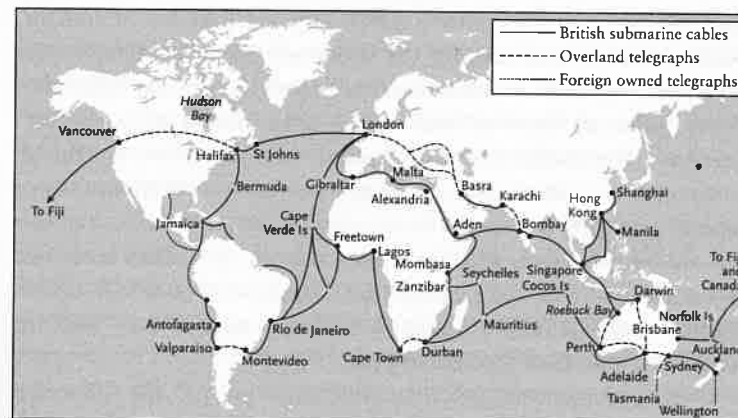
In the early years of her reign – until the Indian Mutiny, in fact – Victoria had taken relatively little interest in foreign affairs outside Europe. But the Mutiny awoke her with a jolt to her imperial responsibilities, and as her reign wore on they took up more and more of her attention. In December 1879 she recorded ‘a long talk with Ld Beaconsfield, after tea, about India and Affghanistan [sic] and the necessity for our becoming Masters of the country and holding it . . .’ In July 1880 she was ‘urg[ing] strongly on the Govt, to do all in their power to uphold the safety and honour of the Empire’. ‘To protect the poor natives and to advance civilization,’ she told Lord Derby in 1884, was to her mind ‘the mission of Great Britain’. ‘It is I think important’, she declared airily in 1898, ‘that the world at large should not have the impression that we will not let any one but ourselves have anything . . .’ In one of the more obscure corners of Osborne House is a clue to why the Queen felt in closer touch with her Empire as she grew older. It was not considered worthy of preservation when the house was given to the nation in 1902, but downstairs in the Household Wing was the Queen’s telegraph office. By the 1870s messages from India could reach here in a matter of hours; and the Queen read them

attentively. This perfectly illustrates what happened to the world during Victoria's reign. It shrank – and it did so largely because of British technology.

The telegraph was another invention the Admiralty had tried to ignore. Its original inventor, Francis Ronalds, had been rebuffed when he offered the Navy his brainchild in 1816. It was not the military but the private sector that developed the nineteenth century's information highway, initially piggy-backing on the infrastructure of the early railways. By the late 1840s it was clear that the telegraph would revolutionize overland communications; by the 1850s construction in India was sufficiently advanced for the telegraph to play a decisive part in suppressing the Mutiny.* However, the crucial development from the point of view of imperial rule was the construction of durable undersea cables. Significantly, it was an imperial product – a rubber-like substance from Malaya called gutta-percha – that solved the problem, allowing the first cross-Channel cable to be laid in 1851 and the first transatlantic cable to follow fifteen years later. When the Anglo-American Telegraph Company's cable finally reached the American coast on 27 July 1866, having been successfully unrolled and dropped along the ocean floor by Isambard Kingdom Brunel's mighty *Great Eastern*, it was plainly the dawn of a new era. That the cable ran from Ireland to Newfoundland made it clear which power was most likely to dominate the age of the telegraph. That the telegraph link from India to Europe had already been constructed by the government of India several years earlier made it clear that the rulers of that power (for all their *laissez-faire* principles) were resolved that it should do so.† By 1880 there were altogether 97,568 miles of cable across the world's oceans, linking Britain to India, Canada, Australia, Africa and Australia. Now a message could be relayed from Bombay to London at the cost of four shillings a word with the reason-

* One mutineer, on his way to execution, identified the telegraph as 'the accursed string that strangles me'.

† Although the British domestic network was nationalized, most of the overseas network was constructed and operated by private enterprise.



The global telegraph network c. 1913: the imperial information highway

able expectation that it would be seen the next day.* In the words of Charles Bright, one of the apostles of the new technology, the telegraph was 'the world's system of electrical nerves'.

The telegraph cable and the steamship route were two of three metal networks that simultaneously shrank the world and made control of it easier. The third was the railway. Here too the British tacitly acknowledged the limitations of the free market. The British railway network had been constructed after 1826 with only minimal state intervention. But the railways the British built throughout their Empire, though they too were constructed by private sector companies, depended on generous government subsidies which effectively guaranteed that they would pay dividends. The first line in India, linking Bombay to Thane twenty-one miles away, was formally opened in 1853; within less than fifty years, track covering more than 24,000 miles had been laid. In the space of a generation, the '*te-rain*' transformed Indian economic and social life: for the first time, thanks to the standard third-class fare of seven annas,

* Messages for the Foreign or Colonial Offices had to cross London from the Eastern Telegraph Company's offices in the City; then they had to go through the same registration process as conventional written dispatches.

long-distance travel became a possibility for millions of Indians, 'joining friends and uniting the anxious'. Some contemporaries predicted a cultural revolution arising from this, in the belief that 'thirty miles an hour is fatal to the slow deities of paganism'. Certainly, the Indian railways created a huge market for British locomotive manufacturers, since most of the tens of thousands of engines put into service in India were made in Britain. Yet this network was from its very inception strategic as well as economic in purpose. It was not through the munificence of British shareholders that the main Lucknow railway station was built to resemble a grandiose Gothic fortress.

As one eminent imperial commentator put it, the Victorian revolution in global communications achieved 'the annihilation of distance'. But it also made possible long-distance annihilation. In time of war, distance simply had to be overcome – for the simple reason that Britain's principal source of military power now lay on the other side of the world.

As had long been the case, the standing army in Britain itself was relatively small. In Europe it was the Royal Navy that did the work of defence: more than a third of the country's huge fleet was permanently stationed in home waters or the Mediterranean. It was in India that the British kept the bulk of their offensive military capability. In this respect, little had been changed by the Mutiny. True, the number of native troops was reduced after 1857 and the number of British troops increased by roughly a third. But there were limits to the number of men the British could afford to station in India. A Royal Commission reported in 1863 that the mortality rate for other ranks (enlisted men) in India between 1800 and 1856 was 69 per thousand, compared with a rate for the equivalent age group in British civilian life of around 10 per thousand. Troops in India also had a much higher incidence of sickness. With quintessentially Victorian precision, the Commission calculated that, out of an army of 70,000 British soldiers, 4,830 would die each year and 5,880 hospital beds would be occupied by those incapacitated by illness. Since it cost £100 to recruit a soldier and maintain him in India, Britain was thereby losing more than £1 million a year.

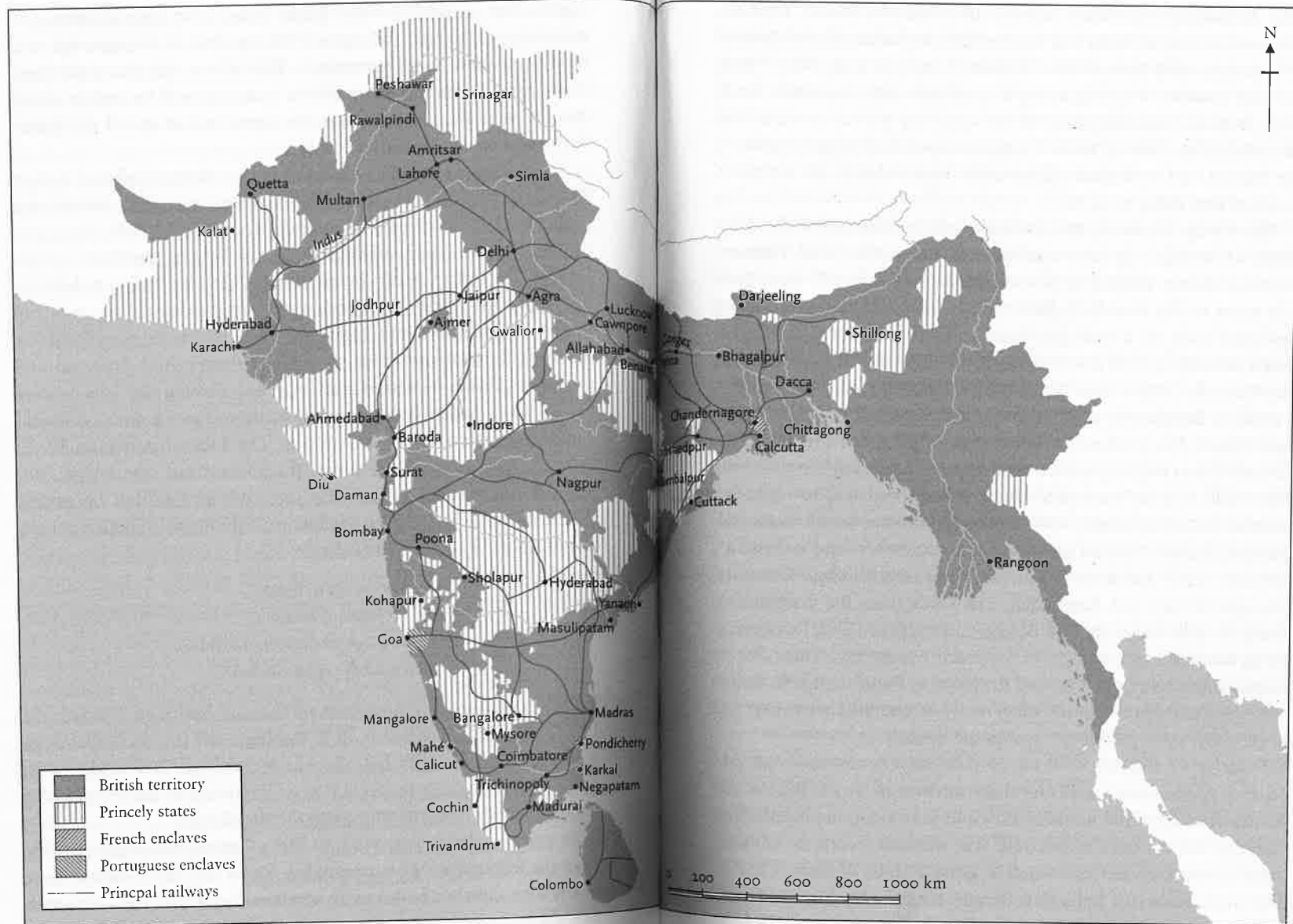
Given that a similar force might have cost around £200,000 stationed in Europe, the extra £800,000 had to be regarded as a kind of tropical service premium. This was a very circumlocutory way of saying that no more British troops should be sent to sicken and die in India. Consequently, the sepoy had to stay if the Indian Army was to maintain its strength.

The upshot was that by 1881 the Indian Army numbered 69,647 British troops and 125,000 Native, compared with British and Irish forces at home of 65,809 and 25,353 respectively. As a proportion of the total manpower of all British garrisons in the Empire, the Indian Army therefore accounted for well over half (62 per cent). In Lord Salisbury's acid description, India was 'an English barrack in the Oriental Seas from which we may draw any number of troops without paying for them'. And draw he and his fellow Prime Ministers regularly did. During the half century before 1914 Indian troops served in more than a dozen imperial campaigns, from China to Uganda. The Liberal politician W. E. Forster complained in 1878 that the government was relying 'not upon the patriotism and spirit of our own people' but on getting 'Gurkhas and Sikhs and Mussulmen to fight for us'. There was even a music-hall parody on the subject:

We don't want to fight,
But, by Jingo, if we do,
We won't go to the front ourselves,
We'll send the mild Hindoo.

Like nearly every component of the mid-Victorian Empire, the Indian Army too depended on technology: not just the technology that produced its rifles but also the technology that produced its maps. We should never forget that as important as the telegraph in the technology of domination was the theodolite.

As early as the 1770s, the East India Company had grasped the strategic importance of cartography, for in the Anglo-Indian wars of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the army with the more accurate maps had a crucial advantage. The British Isles themselves had been mapped – for precisely the same reason – by



British India, 1931

the pioneering Ordnance Survey. In 1800 the Great Trigonometrical Survey of India had been established under the leadership of intrepid map-makers like William Lambton and, from 1818, George Everest. Working at night to protect their theodolite readings from the distorting heat of the sun, they set out to create the first definitive *Atlas of India* – a vast compendium of geographical, geological and ecological information immaculately set out on a scale of four miles to an inch.

Knowledge is power, and knowing where things are is the most basic knowledge a government requires. But as the Great Trigonometrical Survey pushed in to the Himalayas – where Everest gave his name to the world's highest mountain – the intelligence being gathered took on a new significance. Where, after all, did British India actually end? It is easy to forget that, at its full extent, it was substantially larger than India today, encompassing present-day Pakistan, Bangladesh and Burma, not to mention southern Persia and Nepal. For a time, it seemed that Afghanistan too would be absorbed into the Raj; some even dreamt of annexing Tibet. On the other side of India's mountainous northern marches, however, lay another European empire with similar aspirations. In the nineteenth century, Russia's empire grew just as rapidly over land as Britain's did over sea – southwards into the Caucasus, through Circassia, Georgia, Erivan and Azerbaijan; eastwards from the Caspian Sea along the Silk Road through Bokhara, Samarkand and Tashkent as far as Khokand and Andijan in the Pamir Mountains. There, barely twenty miles apart, the lion and the bear (as *Punch* cartoons invariably depicted them) glared belligerently at one another across one of the most inhospitable terrains in the world.

From 1879, the date of the second British attempt to invade and control Afghanistan, until the third attempt in 1919, Britain and Russia conducted the world's first Cold War along the North-West Frontier. But the spies in this Cold War were surveyors, for whoever mapped the frontier first stood a good chance of controlling it. The Great Survey of India thus became inextricably bound up with espionage: what one of the early British frontiersmen called the 'Great Game'. At times it really did seem like a game. British agents

ventured into the uncharted territory beyond Kashmir and the Khyber Pass disguised as Buddhist monks, measuring the distances between places with the aid of worry-beads – one bead for every hundred paces – and concealing the maps they surreptitiously drew in their prayer wheels.* But this was a deadly game played in a no man's land where the only rule was the merciless Pakhtun or 'Pathan' code of honour: hospitality to the stranger, but a cut throat and an interminable vendetta against all his kin if he transgressed.

The British could never drop their guard on the North-West Frontier. Yet this was not the furthest extremity of British India. Thanks to the Victorians' mastery of technology, the Raj could extend its reach right across the Indian Ocean.

In 1866 the Empire found itself confronted by a distant hostage crisis that tested its system of communications to the limit. A group of British subjects had been imprisoned by the Emperor Theodore (Tewodros) of Abyssinia, who felt the British were showing his regime – the only Christian monarchy in Africa – insufficient respect. Theodore had written to seek British recognition. When the Colonial Office failed to reply, he arrested every European he could get his hands on and marched them to his remote mountain fortress at Magdala. A diplomatic mission was sent, but they too were incarcerated.

It was a truth almost but not quite universally acknowledged: no one treated subjects of Queen Victoria like that and got away with it. But to extricate a group of hostages from darkest Ethiopia was no small undertaking, since it called for the dispatch of what today would be called a rapid reaction force. The remarkable thing was that the force in question was not itself British. Abyssinia was about to feel the full military might of British India.

Without the burgeoning global network of telegraphs and steam engines, the British response would have been impossible. The decision to send an invasion force to free the hostages was taken by the

* Among the heroes of this romantic game were 'pandits' like Kishen Singh and Sarat Chandra Das, the original of 'Hurry Chunder Mokerjee' in Kipling's *Kim*.

Prime Minister, Lord Derby, after consultation with the Cabinet and sovereign. When the Queen's written appeal of April 1867 for the release of the prisoners went unanswered, the government saw no alternative but to liberate them 'by force'. Naturally, a decision like this had implications for all the great departments of state: the Foreign Office, the War Office, the Admiralty and the Treasury – all had to be consulted. But to be carried out, the invasion order had to cross the world from the Secretary of State for India in London to the Governor of the Bombay Presidency ten thousand miles away, because that was where the necessary troops were. Once such an order would have taken months to arrive. Now it could be sent by telegraph.

The man charged with planning the expedition was Lieutenant-General Sir Robert Napier, a stern disciplinarian of the old school, but also a military engineer of genius. For public consumption, 'Break thou the Chains' was the rousing command he received from the Queen, and Napier afterwards adopted *Tu Vincula Frange* as his motto. But privately Napier approached his task with the gloomy realism of the professional soldier. It was to be hoped, he wrote to the Duke of Cambridge on 25 July 1867,

that the captives may be released by the Diplomats at any cost of money, for the expedition would be very expensive and troublesome; and if not a hostile shot is fired, the casualties from the climate and accident will amount to ten times the number of the captives. Still if these poor people are murdered, or detained, I suppose we must do something.

As he had probably expected, it fell to him – and therefore to the Indian Army – to do it. On 13 August Napier produced his estimate of the forces required: 'four regiments of Native Cavalry, one squadron of British cavalry, ten regiments of Native Infantry . . . four batteries of Field and Horse Artillery; one mountain train; a battery of six mortars 5½ inch . . . if possible two of them to be 8-inch and a coolie corps, 3,000 strong, for loads and working parties.' Two days later he was offered command of the expedition. By November, Parliament – recalled early by Disraeli, who hoped to reap some electoral benefit from the affair – had voted the neces-

sary funds. Thereafter, as the Secretary of State, Sir Stafford Northcote, informed the Viceroy, 'all further proceedings connected with the organization and equipment of reinforcements, when called for by Sir Robert Napier, should rest with the Government of India'. Northcote also reminded the Viceroy that the 'Native portion' of Napier's force would continue to be 'maintained' – in other words, paid for – as usual, by the Government of India.

Within a few months, the invasion force set sail from Bombay to Massowah on the Red Sea coast. On board the flotilla were 13,000 British and Indian soldiers, 26,000 camp followers and a huge mass of livestock: 13,000 mules and ponies, an equal number of sheep, 7,000 camels, 7,000 bullocks and 1,000 donkeys – not to mention 44 elephants. Napier even brought a prefabricated harbour, complete with lighthouses and a railway system. It was a huge logistical feat, perfectly combining Indian muscle with British technology.

The Abyssinian Emperor had taken it for granted that no invading force would be able to cross the 400 parched and mountainous miles between the coast and Magdala. He had not reckoned with Napier. Slowly but inexorably, he marched his men to their destination, leaving the carcasses of thousands of dehydrated beasts in their wake. They reached the foot of the fortress after three long months, and, in a mood of relief that the footslogging was over, prepared for the final assault. As a violent thunderstorm broke above them, and with the band playing 'Garry Owen', the West Riding and Black Watch regiments led the charge uphill. In just two hours of fierce fighting Napier's force killed more than 700 of Theodore's men and wounded 1,200 more. The Emperor himself committed suicide rather than be captured. Only twenty British soldiers were wounded; not one was killed. As one member of the expedition gleefully recalled: 'There was a fluttering of silk regimental Colours, the waving of helmets, and the roaring of triumphant cheers. The sounds of victory rang down the hill and travelled along the plateau for a distance of two miles . . . and the hills re-echoed "God Save the Queen".'

Napier's victory was the archetypal mid-Victorian surgical strike: what was known at the time as a 'butcher and bolt' operation. Vast

superiority in logistics, firepower and discipline had overthrown an emperor with the minimum of British casualties. The victor returned in triumph, bearing with him not only the freed hostages but also such spoils of war as he and his men had been able to find – notably 1,000 ancient Abyssinian Christian manuscripts and the Emperor's necklace, for the delectation of Disraeli. His delighted sovereign had no hesitation in conferring a peerage on Napier, not to mention the inevitable equestrian statue, which now stands stiffly erect in the gardens of the old Viceregal residency at Barrackpore.

The fact that Indian troops could be deployed as far afield as Ethiopia with such success spoke volumes about how India had changed since the 1857 Mutiny. Just ten years before Napier's expedition, British rule in India had been shaken to its foundations by the Mutiny. But the British were determined to learn from that bitter experience. In the Mutiny's aftermath, there was a transformation in the way they ruled India. The East India Company was finally wound up, ending the anomaly whereby a corporation had governed a subcontinent. Admittedly, some of the changes were merely a matter of labelling. The old Governor-General became the new Viceroy, and there were only minor changes to the structure of the six-member Cabinet which advised him. In theory, ultimate authority now rested with the Secretary of State for India in London, advised by his India Council (a combination of the old Court of Directors and Board of Control). But the assumption was that 'the government of India must be, on the whole, carried out in India itself'. And in her proclamation of November 1858 the Queen gave her Indian subjects two assurances about how this government would be conducted. The first we know already: there would be no further meddling with traditional Indian religious culture, an implicit recognition of one of the principal causes of the Mutiny. But the proclamation also referred to 'the principle that perfect equality was to exist, so far as all appointments were concerned, between Europeans and Natives'. This would subsequently prove to be an important hostage to fortune.

Of course, this still left India a despotism, without a shred of representation of the Queen's millions of Indian subjects. As one later Viceroy put it, India was 'really governed by confidential correspondence between the Secretary of State and the Viceroy'. Moreover, the conciliatory assurances in the proclamation were accompanied by practical measures on the ground which were altogether more confrontational. What happened in Lucknow reveals just how radically British rule was being reconstructed at the grassroots. Even as the dust settled after the Mutiny, it was clear to at least one man, a brigadier in the Bengal Engineers, that only the most profound changes could prevent a repetition of the events of 1857. As he observed in his 'Memorandum on the Military Occupation of the City of Lucknow', 'The city of Lucknow, from its vast extent, and from the absence of any very prominent features of the ground on which it stands, must always remain difficult to control except by a large body of troops.' The engineer's name was Robert Napier, the same man who would later lead the British to victory at Magdala, and his solution to the Lucknow problem was devised in much the same methodical spirit:

That difficulty may be greatly diminished by establishing a sufficient number of military posts . . . and by opening broad streets through the city . . . so that troops may move rapidly in any direction . . . All suburbs and cover . . . which would interrupt the free movement of troops . . . must be swept away . . . With regard to the [new] streets . . . they are absolutely necessary . . . Hardship will no doubt be inflicted upon individuals whose property may be destroyed, but the community generally will benefit, and may be made to compensate the individual sufferers.

First, therefore, the population was expelled from the city; then the demolitions began. By the time Napier had finished, he had knocked down around two-fifths of the old town and added insult to injury by converting the principal mosque into a temporary barracks. And it was all paid for by the inhabitants, who were not allowed to return until they had settled their tax bills.

As in every major Indian city, the main garrison was now placed outside the built-up area, in a 'cantonment' from which their

soldiers could emerge at a moment's notice to quell any challenge to British rule. Within the cantonment, each officer was housed in his own bungalow which had a garden – varying in size according to his rank – servants' quarters and a carriage house. The British troops had their brick barracks in close proximity, while the native troops lived further away in thatched huts that they were expected to build for themselves. Even the new Lucknow railway station was designed with the preservation of order in mind, for the building itself was structured like a fortress and its long platforms were purpose-built for disembarking reinforcements, should they be needed. Outside it, Napier's broad boulevards ensured that British troops would have a clear field of fire. It is often said that Victorian Britain did nothing to match Haussmann's rebuilding of Paris for Napoleon III. At Lucknow they came close.

Napier's re-engineering of Lucknow illustrates a basic and inescapable fact about the British Raj in India. Its foundation was military force. The army here was not just an imperial strategic reserve. It was also the guarantor of the internal stability of its Asian arsenal.

Yet British India was not ruled solely by the mailed fist. As well as martinets like Napier, it also had its mandarins: the civilian administration that actually governed India, dispensing justice and grappling with an infinity of local crises, ranging from petty disputes about broken bridges to full-blown famines. Though it was a thankless and sometimes hellish job, the elite who did it gloried in their nickname: 'the heaven born'.

The View from the Hills

Every year, towards the end of March, the Indian plains become intolerably hot and stay that way right through the monsoon rains until late September:

Every door and window was shut, for the outside air was that of an oven. The atmosphere within was only 104°, as the thermometer bore witness,

and heavy with the foul smell of badly-trimmed kerosene lamps; and this stench, combined with that of native tobacco, baked brick, and dried earth, sends the heart of many a strong man down to his boots, for it is the smell of the Great Indian Empire when she turns herself for six months into a house of torment.

Before the advent of air conditioning, India in the summer was indeed 'a house of torment' for Europeans, a torment scarcely relieved by the ineffectual fanning of the punkah wallahs. As they sweated and swore, the British yearned to escape from the enervating heat of the plains. How could they govern a subcontinent without succumbing every year to heat exhaustion? The solution was found in the foothills of the Himalayas, where the midsummer weather offered a passable imitation of the climate back in 'the old country'.

There were several lofty refuges for chronically sunburned Britons – Darjeeling to the east, Ootacamund in the south – but one particular hill station was in a league of its own. If you take the train that runs northwards from Delhi and winds its way up into the mountains of what is now Himachal Pradesh, you follow the path taken by generations of British soldiers and administrators, not to mention their wives and sweethearts. Some of them went there on leave, to promenade, party and pair off. But most went because for seven months every year it was the seat of the government of India itself.

Simla is just over 7,000 feet above sea level and more than 1,000 miles from Calcutta. Until the railway from Kalka was built in 1903, the only way to get up there was to ride or be carried in a *dooly* or a *dandy*. When the rivers flooded, elephants were required. To the modern visitor, Simla seems even more remote than that suggests. With its breathtaking mountain views, its towering pines and its exquisitely chilled air – not to mention the occasional rain cloud – it looks more like the Highlands than the Himalayas. There is even a Gothic kirk and a Gaiety Theatre. It comes as no surprise that it was a Scotsman who founded it, one Charles Pratt Kennedy, who built himself the first hilltop house there in 1822. To the Victorians,

taught by Romanticism to idealize the Caledonian mountains, Simla seemed a paradise: the mountain air, one early visitor enthused, 'seemed to have instilled ether in my veins, for I felt as I could have bounded headlong into the deepest glens, or spring nimbly up their abrupt sides with a daring ease . . .' The men who ruled in India soon picked up the scent of this rejuvenating air. Lord Amherst visited Simla as Governor-General as early as 1827, and in 1864 it became the Viceroy's official summer residence. From then on, the Viceregal Lodge atop Observatory Hill became the summer seat of power.

Perched on its mountaintop, Simla was a strange, little hybrid world – part Highlands, part Himalayas; part powerhouse, part playground.* It was a world no one understood better than Rudyard Kipling. Born in Bombay in 1865, Kipling had spent more of the first five years of his life with his Indian *ayah* than with his parents, had spoken Hindustani before he spoke English and had loathed England when he was sent there to be educated at the age of five. He returned eleven years later to take up a post as assistant editor of the Lahore-based *Civil and Military Gazette*, which he soon enlivened with a stream of jaunty verses and stories depicting Anglo-Indian life with (in his own phrase) 'no half-tints'. As a keen cub reporter, Kipling loved to wander in search of good copy through the bazaars of Lahore ('that wonderful, dirty, mysterious ant hill') bantering and bargaining with Hindu shopkeepers and Muslim horse-traders. This was the real India, and he found its assault on his senses intoxicating: '[The] heat and smells of oil and spices, and puffs of temple incense, and sweat, and darkness, and dirt and lust and cruelty, and, above all, things wonderful and fascinating innumerable.' At night, he even took to visiting opium dens. A prim man who yearned to be risqué, Kipling thought the drug 'an excellent thing in itself'.

* Below the commanding heights of the Viceregal Lodge and the Commander-in-Chief's residence, the Peterhof, the slopes soon became rather cluttered with mock-Tudor holiday homes. Lutyens said of Simla: 'If one was told that the monkeys had built it all one could only say [would be]: "What wonderful monkeys – they must be shot in case they do it again."'

By contrast, Kipling was ambivalent about Simla. Like everyone who came there, he relished the 'champagne air' of the mountains and delighted in the 'grass-downs swelling like a woman's breasts . . . the wind across the grass, and the rain among the deodars say[ing] "Hush-hush-hush"'. He found the social life a diverting whirl of 'garden-parties, and tennis-parties, and picnics, and luncheons at Annandale, and rifle-matches, and dinners and balls; besides rides and walks.' At times, life at Simla seemed 'the only existence in this desolate land worth the living'. Half seriously, Kipling acknowledged in his own 'Tale of Two Cities' (Calcutta and Simla):

That the Merchant risks the perils of the Plain

For gain.

Nor can Rulers rule a house that men grow rich in,

From its kitchen.

He could understand perfectly well why

. . . the Rulers in that City by the Sea

Turned to flee –

Fled, with each returning spring-tide from its ills

To the Hills.

Besides the pleasant weather, there was the fun of flirting with other men's wives consigned to the hills for the good of their health by trusting husbands sweating it out down in the plains.

Still, Kipling could not help wondering if it was entirely wise that the Viceroy and his advisers should choose to spend half the year 'on the wrong side of an irresponsible river', as cut off from those they governed as if they were 'separated by a month's sea voyage'. Fond though he was of Simla's grass widows, Kipling's sympathies were always with his countrymen who stuck it out down in the plains: Kim, the orphan son of a British soldier, 'going native' along the Great Trunk Road; the stoical squaddie Corporal Terence Mulvaney, speaking his strange patois, half Irish, half Hindustani; and, above all, the District Officers of the Indian Civil Service, sweltering in their sun-baked outposts. They might, as he

once put it, be 'cynical, seedy and dry'. They might, like poor Jack Barrett, be betrayed by their wicked wives up in the hills.* But the 'Civilians' were the men who held the Raj together.

Perhaps the most baffling statistic of all about British India was the size of the Indian Civil Service. Between 1858 and 1947 there were seldom more than 1,000 members of the covenanted Civil Service,† compared with a total population which, by the end of British rule, exceeded 400 million. As Kipling remarked, 'One of the few advantages that India has over England is a great Knowability . . . At the end of twenty [years, a man] knows, or knows something about, every Englishman in the Empire.' Was this, then, the most efficient bureaucracy in history? Was a single British civil servant really able to run the lives of up to three million Indians, spread over 17,000 square miles, as some District Officers were supposed to do? Only, Kipling concluded, if the masters worked themselves like slaves:

Year by year England sends out fresh drafts for the first fighting-line, which is officially called the Indian Civil Service. These die, or kill themselves by overwork, or are worried to death or broken in health and hope in order

* 'Jack Barrett went to Quetta
Because they told him to.
He left his wife at Simla
On three-fourths his monthly screw:

...
'Jack Barrett went to Quetta,
And there gave up the ghost,
Attempting two men's duty
In that very healthy post;
And Mrs. Barrett mourned for him
Five lively months at most.'

† The covenanted Civil Service was known as such because its members entered a covenant with the Secretary of State of India. For most of the nineteenth century it had around 900 members. Only in the twentieth century did the number of ICS officers rise significantly above a thousand. In 1939 there were 1,384. Nor was this skeletal staffing unique to India. The entire administrative elite of the African colonial service – spread over a dozen colonies with a population of around 43 million – numbered just over 1,200. The Malayan civil service had 220 administrators for 3.2 million people, which by Indian standards was chronic overmanning.

that the land may be protected from death and sickness, famine and war, and may eventually become capable of standing alone. It will never stand alone, but the idea is a pretty one and men are willing to die for it, and yearly the work of pushing and coaxing and scolding and petting the country into good living goes forward. If an advance be made all credit is given to the native while the Englishmen stand back and wipe their foreheads. If a failure occurs the Englishmen step forward and take the blame.

'Until steam replaces manual power in the working of the Empire,' wrote Kipling in 'The Education of Otis Yeere', there would always be 'men who are used up, expended, in the mere mechanical routine'. Such men were 'simply the rank and file – the food for fever – sharing with the ryot [peasant] and the plough-bullock the honour of being the plinth on which the State rests'. Otis Yeere was the archetypal 'sunken-eyed man who, by official irony, was said to be "in charge" of [a] seething, whining, weakly hive, impotent to help itself, but strong in its power to cripple, thwart, and annoy'.

As Kipling describes it, the ICS hardly sounds an attractive career option. Yet competition for places was fierce, so fierce that selection had to be based on perhaps the toughest exams in history. Consider some of the questions the candidates were set back in 1859. By modern standards, it is true, the History paper is something of a crammer's delight. Here are two not untypical questions:

14. Enumerate the chief Colonies of England, and state how and when she acquired each of them.

15. Name the successive Governors-General of British India as far as 1830, giving the dates of their Governments, and a brief summary of the main Indian transactions under each.

By comparison, the Logic and Mental Philosophy paper is more demanding – and more elegantly phrased:

3. What Experimental Methods are applicable to the determination of the true antecedent in phenomena where there may be a Plurality of Causes.

5. Classify Fallacies.

But it is the Mental and Moral Philosophy paper which is the most challenging, and revealing, part of the ICS exam:

1. Describe the various circumstances of situations which give birth to the pleasurable sentiment of Power.

If ever there was a trick question, that is it (presumably any candidate who acknowledged that Power *did* induce a pleasurable sentiment would be failed). Nor is the next question much easier:

2. Specify, as far as you are able, the particular duties coming under the general head of Justice.

Finally, just to separate the cream of Balliol* from the rest, comes this:

7. State the arguments for and against Utility, considered as (1) the actual, and (2) the proper, basis of morals.

Things had certainly changed since the days of Thomas Pitt and Warren Hastings. Then, jobs in the East India Company had been bought and sold as part of an elaborate system of aristocratic patronage. Even after the creation of Haileybury College as a school for future Indian civil servants in 1805 and the introduction of the first qualifying exam in 1827, the company's directors still regarded ICS places as being in their gift. Only in 1853 was patronage replaced by meritocracy. The Government of India Act of that year did away with Haileybury's effective monopoly on ICS posts and introduced instead the principle of open competition by examination. The Victorians wanted India to be ruled by the ultimate academic elite: impartial, incorruptible, omniscient.

The idea was to attract university achievers into imperial administration directly after they had completed their first degree, ideally at Oxford or Cambridge, and then put them through one or two years of training in law, languages, Indian history and riding. In practice, the ICS tended not to attract the Oxbridge *crème de la*

* Especially under the Empire-minded mastership of Benjamin Jowett, Balliol became the college of choice for would-be proconsuls. Between 1874 and 1914 no fewer than 27 per cent of Balliol graduates were employed in the Empire.

crème – the Scholars, Double Firsts and University. The men who opted for the rigours of the subcontinent, those whose prospects at home were modest: bright young provincial professionals who were willing to cram for the prestigious job overseas – men like Devon-born Evan Machonochie. His great-uncle and elder brother had both been Indian civil servants and it had been their letters home which had convinced him that 'Eastward lay the path to happiness'. In 1887, after two years of cramming, he passed the ICS entrance exam and set off for Bengal after another couple of years at Oxford mugging up and passing further exams in Indian history, law and languages. Nor was that the end of the selection process, since his first few months in India were spent preparing for yet more exams. After a preliminary test in Hindustani, Machonochie was formally gazetted as a Third-Class Magistrate. To his embarrassment, he managed to 'bungle' his first departmental exams in Gujarati, Indian Law, Treasury Procedure and Revenue Accounts (because his head was 'full of much more interesting matters, my first horses, my fox terrier pup [and] the right range at which to down a quail'); but he scraped through at the second attempt.

Machonochie found the life of a magistrate (now Second-Class) and then a District Collector surprisingly enjoyable:

The early mornings were spent, in the absence of any special work, in exercising the horses, tent-pegging and the like, in the garden or with a camera. The day's work occupied the middle hours from eleven to five, and, after that a game of tennis and a chat in the collector's veranda carried us on to dinner time . . . Imagine then, the young Assistant setting forth on horseback on a crisp November morning, after a good monsoon . . . he has few cares, his heart is light and it must be a dull soul that does not respond to the vision. On the way there will be villages to inspect, perhaps, if time permits, a quiet shoot . . . Many a clue as to what the villager is thinking is gained over a chat between beats or while watching one's float by a quiet pool . . .

But the life of an expatriate mandarin had another side to it. There was the tedium of hearing appeals against tax assessments, when

'on a hot-weather afternoon, after a long morning round (in the camps) and a hearty breakfast, the effort to keep awake while recording evidence or listening to the reading of vernacular papers amounted almost to physical pain . . .' Then there was the loneliness of being the only white man for hundreds of miles:

When I first started out none of my office staff, but few of the Mamlatdars, and no one else in the Talukas, spoke English, and I rarely met another District Officer. For seven months I scarcely spoke English and was thrown very much on my own resources.

Worst of all was the responsibility of governing literally millions of people, particularly during crises like the plague that swept Bombay in 1896 or the famine of 1900. As Machonochie later recalled, 'that time marked the end of happy irresponsible days. In the years that followed, they were rarely free from the haunting anxiety attendant on pestilence and famine.'* Finally, in 1897, came respite: a posting to Simla as Under-Secretary in the Department of Revenue and Agriculture. It was there that he was able to appreciate that 'you were not merely an individual of no importance . . . but part of a great machine to whose efficiency you were in honour bound to contribute'.

Machonochie had no doubt about the importance of the lone District Officer in the eyes of the people in his care. 'To the raiyat [peasant] the visit of a "saheb" or a casual meeting with one has some of the qualities of excitement . . . It will be talked of for days over the village fire and remembered for years. The white man will be sized up shrewd and frankly. So take heed unto your manners and your habits!'

* It is fashionable to allege that the British authorities did nothing to relieve the drought-induced famines of the period. But this is not so. In 1874 H. M. Kisch, an ICS magistrate of the Second Class, was sent to organize famine relief in an area of Behar covering 198 square miles and a population of around 100,000. 'Since I came here,' he wrote home proudly, 'I have erected 15 government grain store-houses, and opened about 22 relief works, I give employment to about 15,000 men and women per day, and am feeding gratuitously about 3,000 more. I have full authority to do what I choose, and I do it.' The calamity of 1877 was due to a failure to adopt the same methods.

Yet between the lines of his memoir, a crucial, though tacit, reality can be discerned. Everything he and the other District Officers did was dependent on another, much larger tier of bureaucracy below them. This was the uncovenanted civil service, composed of Indians, and it was they who took responsibility for the day-to-day administration of each District's local *talukas* and *tahsils*. There were 4,000 Indians in the uncovenanted service by 1868, and below them was a veritable army of lesser public employees: the telegraph clerks and ticket collectors, many of whom were Eurasians or Indians. In 1867 there were around 13,000 public sector jobs paying 75 or more rupees per month, of which around half were held by Indians. Without this auxiliary force of civil servants who were native born, the 'heaven born' would have been impotent. This was the unspoken truth about British India; and that was why, as Machonochie himself put it, it did not really feel like 'a conquered country'. Only the Indian rulers had been supplanted or subjugated by the British; most Indians carried on much as before – indeed, for an important class of them British rule was an opportunity for self-advancement.

The key to the emergence of a pro-British Indian elite was education. Though the British themselves were at first dubious about offering natives Western education, many Indians – particularly high-caste Bengalis – were quick to discern the benefits of speaking the language and understanding the culture of their new masters. As early as 1817 a Hindu College had been founded in Calcutta by prosperous Bengalis eager for Western education; offering European history, literature and natural sciences, it was the first of many such institutions. As we have seen, the proponents of modernizing as well as evangelizing India seized on the idea of giving Indians access to Western education. In 1835 the great Whig historian and Indian administrator Thomas Babington Macaulay – son of the abolitionist Zachary – spelt out explicitly what could be achieved this way in his famous Minute on Education:

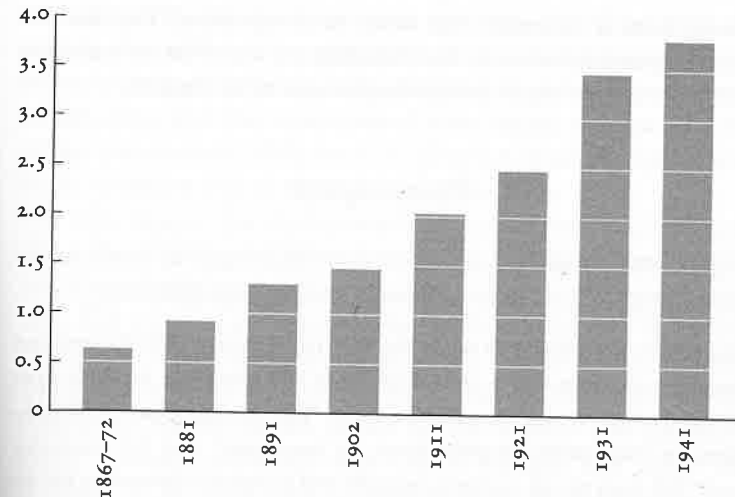
It is impossible for us, with our limited means, to attempt to educate the body of the people. We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect.

By 1838 there were forty English-based seminaries under the control of the General Committee of Public Instruction. By the 1870s, Macaulay's vision had been in large measure realized. Six thousand Indian students had enrolled in higher education and no less than 200,000 in Anglophone secondary 'schools of the higher order'. Calcutta had acquired a substantial English-language publishing industry, capable of turning out more than a thousand works of literature and science a year.

Among the beneficiaries of the expansion of Anglicized education was an ambitious young Bengali named Janakinath Bose. Educated in Calcutta, Bose was called to the Bar in the town of Cuttack in 1885 and went on to serve as Chairman of the Cuttack municipality. In 1905 he became Government Pleader and Chief Prosecutor, and seven years later crowned his career by being appointed to the Bengal Legislative Council. Bose's success as a lawyer enabled him to buy a spacious mansion in the fashionable district of Calcutta. It also won him from the British the title of Rai Bahadur, the Indian equivalent of a knighthood. And he was not alone: two of his three brothers entered government service, one of them in the Imperial Secretariat at Simla.

This new elite even penetrated the ranks of the covenanted ICS itself. In 1863 Satyendernath Tagore became the first Indian to pass the exam – which was always open to applicants regardless of skin colour, just as Queen Victoria had promised – and in 1871 another three natives were admitted to the ranks of the 'heaven born'.

Bose and his ilk were the people on whom the Empire really depended in India. Without their ability to turn the orders of the ICS into reality, British rule in India simply would not have worked. Indeed, the truth was that government throughout the Empire was only really possible with the collaboration of key sections of the



Under British rule the percentage of the Indian population in primary and secondary education rose steadily, though it remained low by European standards. In 1911 the percentage of European populations in school lay between 8 and 18 per cent.

governed. That was comparatively easy to secure in places like Canada, Australia and New Zealand, where the native populations had been reduced to insignificant minorities. The key problem was how to retain the loyalty of both settlers and indigenous elites where it was the white community that was in the minority, as in India where the British population amounted to at most a mere 0.05 per cent of the total.*

Under Indian conditions, administrators sent out from London saw no alternative but to co-opt an elite of natives. But this was precisely what the British who were actually resident in India ruled out. The men on the spot preferred to keep the natives down: to

* There were only 31,000 British in India in 1805 (of whom 22,000 were in the army, 2,000 in civil government and 7,000 in the private sector). In 1881 the British in India numbered 89,778 in total. By 1931 there were 168,000 in all: 60,000 in the army and police, 4,000 in civil government and 60,000 employed in the private sector.

coerce them if necessary, but never to co-opt them. This was the great imperial dilemma of the Victorian era – and on its horns not just India but the entire British Empire was to be impaled.

Races Apart

In June 1865 a placard appeared on a wharf gate at Lucea in the Jamaican parish of Hanover bearing a mysterious prophecy:

I heard a voice speaking to me in the year 1864, saying, 'Tell the sons and daughters of Africa that a great deliverance will take place for them from the hand of oppression', for, said the voice, 'They are oppressed by Government, by magistrates, by proprietors, by merchants', and the voice also said, 'Tell them to call a solemn assembly and to sanctify themselves for the day of deliverance which will surely take place; but if the people will not harken I will bring the sword into the land to chastise them for their disobedience and for the iniquities which they have committed.' ... The calamity which I see coming upon the land will be so grievous and so distressing that many will desire to die. But great will be the deliverance of the sons and daughters of Africa, if they humble themselves in sackcloth and ashes, like the children of Ninevah before the Lord our God; but if we pray truly from our hearts, and humble ourselves, we have no need to fear; if not the enemy will be cruel for there will be Gog and Magog to battle. Believe me.

The placard was signed simply 'A Son of Africa'.

Jamaica had once been the centre of the most extreme form of colonial coercion: slavery. But its abolition had not much improved the lot of the average black Jamaican. The ex-slaves had been given wretchedly small allotments to farm for themselves. A period of drought had pushed up food prices. Meanwhile, without the subsidy provided by unfree labour, the old plantation economy stagnated. Sugar prices were falling and the development of coffee as a cash crop was only a partial substitute. Where once men had been literally worked to death, now they were idle as unemployment soared. Yet power – political and above all legal – remained con-

centrated in the hands of the white minority, who dominated the island's Assembly and its magistracy. A tiny few Jamaican blacks acquired enough property and education to form an embryonic middle class, but they were viewed with intense suspicion by the ruling 'plantocracy'. Only in their churches were the majority of black Jamaicans able to express themselves freely.

It was against this background that a religious revival swept across the island in the 1860s, a revival that blended Baptism with the African religion Myal to produce a heady millenarian mixture. The sense of an approaching 'great deliverance', so vividly anticipated in the Lucea placard, was only heightened by the publication of a letter by Edward Underhill, the secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society, which called for an inquiry into Jamaica's plight. Rumours circulated that Queen Victoria had meant the ex-slaves to be given land as well as their freedom, instead of having to rent it from their former masters. Meetings were held to debate the contents of Underhill's letter. A classic revolution of rising expectations was in the making.

It began in the town of Morant Bay in the parish of St Thomas in the East on Saturday 7 October 1865, the date set for the appeal of one Lewis Miller against a minor charge of trespass brought by a neighbouring planter. Miller was the cousin of Paul Bogle, the owner of a small farm at Stony Gut and an active member of the local black Baptist church, who had been galvanized into direct political action by the Underhill letter. Previously Bogle had favoured the creation of alternative black 'courts'; now he had formed his own armed militia. At the head of around 150 men he marched to the courthouse where his cousin's case was to be heard. The ensuing skirmishes with the police outside the court gave the authorities good reason to arrest Bogle and his men, but the police were seen off with death threats when they sought to carry out this order at Stony Gut the following Tuesday. The next day, several hundred people sympathetic to Bogle marched into Morant Bay 'with a blowing of shells or horns, and a beating of drums' and confronted the volunteer militia who had been sent to protect a meeting of the parish vestry. In the ensuing violence, the crowd

stabbed or beat to death eighteen people, among them members of the vestry; seven of their own number were killed by the militia. In the following days, two planters were murdered as violence spread through the parish and beyond. On 17 October Bogle sent a circular letter to his neighbours which was nothing less than a call to arms:

Everyone of you must leave your house, takes your guns, who don't have guns take your cutlisses down at once . . . Blow your shells, roal your drums, house to house, take out every man . . . war is at us, my black skin, war is at hand from to-day to to-morrow.

As those words suggest, this was now an overtly racial conflict. One white woman claimed she heard the rebels singing a bloodcurdling song:

Buckras' [whites'] blood we want,
Buckras' blood we'll have.
Buckras' blood we are going for,
Till there's no more to have.

A planter received a death threat signed by 'Thomas Killmany, and intend to kill many more'.

There had been revolts against white rule in Jamaica before. The last one, in 1831, had been suppressed ferociously. To the newly appointed Governor-in-Chief, Edward Eyre, a man baked hard in the Australian outback,* there could only be one response. In his view, the only causes of black poverty were 'the idleness, improvidence, and vice of the people'. On 13 October he declared martial law throughout the county of Surrey and sent in regular troops. In the course of a month of unbridled retribution, around 200 people were executed, another 200 flogged and 1,000 houses

* The third son of a Whipsnade curate, Eyre had been the first white man to walk across the Australian desert from Adelaide to Moorundie. Ironically, in the light of subsequent events at Morant Bay, his reward for this feat of exploration and endurance was to be made Magistrate and Protector of the Aborigines in the area. Today a lake, a peninsula and the motorway between Adelaide and Perth are all named after him.

razed. The tactics Eyre sanctioned were strongly reminiscent of those adopted to suppress the Indian Mutiny just eight years before. To say the least, there was scant regard for due legal process; indeed, the soldiers – many of whom were in fact black themselves, as it was the 1st West India Regiment which was deployed, with the Maroons in support – were effectively licensed to run amok. A number of prisoners were simply shot without trial. One invalid youth was shot dead in front of his mother. A woman was raped in her own home. There were countless floggings.

Besides Bogle himself, among those executed was George William Gordon. A landowner, a former magistrate and a member of the island's elected assembly, Gordon was a pillar of the black community and an unlikely revolutionary; the only surviving photograph of him shows the bespectacled, bewhiskered incarnation of respectability. He had almost certainly played no part in the uprising. He was in fact nowhere near Morant Bay when it broke out, though the parish of St Thomas in the East was his constituency and he had recently been expelled from the vestry there. But as a 'half-caste' – the son of a planter and slave girl – who had publicly championed the cause of the former slaves, Gordon had been marked down by Eyre as a troublemaker; indeed, it had been Eyre who had dismissed him from the magistracy three years before. Now, to ensure that he was finally disposed of, Eyre had him arrested and removed from Kingston to the area where martial law was in force. After a hurried trial, he was convicted – partly on the basis of highly dubious written depositions – of inciting the rebellion. On 23 October he was hanged.

The Morant Bay rising had been emphatically and ruthlessly crushed; but the white planters who applauded Eyre's handling of the crisis were in for a shock – as was Eyre himself. Having initially been praised by the Colonial Secretary for his 'spirit, energy and judgment', he was stunned to hear that a Royal Commission had been set up to inquire into his conduct and that he himself had been temporarily replaced as Governor. This reaction against his brutal tactics originated among the membership of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, who still kept the old flame of abolitionism

burning and saw Eyre's use of martial law as a reversion to the days of slavery. In far-flung Africa, even David Livingstone heard of the affair and fulminated:

England is in the rear. Frightened in early years by their mothers with 'Bogie Blackman' they were terrified out of their wits by a riot, and the sensation writers, who act the part of the 'dreadful boys' who frighten the aunts, yelled out that emancipation was a mistake. 'The Jamaica negroes were as savage as when they left Africa.' They might have put it much stronger by saying, as the rabble . . . that collects at every execution at Newgate.

But the campaign against Eyre soon spread beyond what one of his defenders called 'the old ladies of Clapham' to embrace some of the great liberal intellectuals of the Victorian era, including Charles Darwin and John Stuart Mill. Not content with his dismissal as Governor, the committee they formed mounted four separate legal actions against him, beginning with a charge of accessory to murder. However, the deposed Governor also had influential supporters: among them Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin, Charles Dickens and the poet laureate Alfred Lord Tennyson. None of the legal actions was successful, and Eyre was able to retire to Devon on a government pension, which he collected until his death, aged eighty-six, in 1901.

Nevertheless, from the moment Eyre left Jamaica, the old regime of rule by the planter class was over. From now on, the island would be governed directly from London through the Governor; a Legislative Council dominated by his appointees would replace the old Assembly. Here was a step back to the old days before 'responsible government' had devolved political power to British colonists; but it was a step taken in a progressive rather than a reactionary spirit, designed to circumscribe the power of the plantocracy and protect the rights of black Jamaicans.* This was to become a fundamental feature of the later British Empire. In Whitehall and Westminster,

* No one considered for a moment that this might best be achieved by allowing them to be properly represented in the Assembly and magistracy.

Liberal ideas were in the ascendant, and that meant the rule of law had to take precedence, regardless of skin colour. If that did not seem to be happening, then the will of colonial assemblies would simply have to be overridden. Yet British colonists – the men and women on the spot – increasingly saw themselves as not just legally but biologically superior to other races. As far as they were concerned, the people who attacked Eyre were ingenuous *bien pensants* who had no experience or understanding of colonial conditions. Sooner or later, these two visions – the liberalism of the centre and the racism of the periphery – were bound to collide again.

By the 1860s race was becoming an issue in all of the British colonies, in India as much as in Jamaica; and no one took the issue more seriously than the Anglo-Indian business community.* Jamaica was an economy in decline. Victorian India, by contrast, was booming. Immense sums of British capital were being invested in a range of new industries: cotton and jute spinning, coal mining and steel production. Nowhere was that more obvious than in Cawnpore, on the banks of the River Ganges: once the site of some of the most bitter fighting of the Indian Mutiny, transformed within a few years into the 'Manchester of the East', a thriving industrial centre. This transformation was due in large measure to hard-faced men like Hugh Maxwell. His family – originally from Aberdeenshire – had settled in the district in 1806, where they had pioneered the cultivation of indigo and raw cotton. After 1857 it was Maxwell and men of his stamp who brought the industrial revolution to India by importing British spinning and weaving machinery and building textile mills on the British pattern. In the age before steam power, India had led the world in manual spinning, weaving and dyeing. The British had first raised tariffs against their products; then demanded free trade when their alternative industrial mode of production had been perfected. Now they were intent on rebuilding

* The term Anglo-Indian is sometimes used, confusingly, to denote people of mixed British and Indian parentage. I have preferred to follow the Victorian practice of using 'Anglo-Indian' to refer to British long-term residents in India and 'Eurasian' to refer to the issue of ethnically mixed unions.

India as a manufacturing economy using British technology and cheap Indian labour.

Our image of British India tends to be that of the official classes, the soldiers and civil servants described so vividly by Kipling, E. M. Forster and Paul Scott. As a result it is easy to forget how few of them there actually were. In fact they were outnumbered several times by businessmen, planters and professionals. And there was a profound difference in attitude between those in government employ and the business community. Men like Hugh Maxwell felt threatened by the growth of an educated Indian elite, not least because it implied that they themselves might be dispensable. After all, why should not a properly educated Indian be every bit as good at running a textile factory as a member of the Maxwell family?

When people feel threatened by another ethnic group, their reaction is usually to disparage it, in order to affirm their own superiority. This was the way the Anglo-Indians behaved after 1857. Even before the Mutiny, there had been a creeping segregation of the white and native populations, a kind of informal apartheid that divided towns like Cawnpore in two: the white town behind the 'Civil Lines' and 'Blacktown' on the other side. Between the two ran what Kipling called 'the Borderline, where the last drop of White blood ends and the full tide of Black sets in'. While the most progressive liberals in London looked forward to a distant future of Indian participation in government, the Anglo-Indians increasingly used the language of the American South to disparage the native 'niggers'. And they expected the law to uphold their superiority.

This expectation was to be shattered in 1880 when the newly formed Gladstone government appointed George Frederick Samuel Robinson, Earl de Grey and Marquess of Ripon, as Viceroy. Even Queen Victoria was 'greatly astounded' to hear of the appointment of this notably progressive figure, who also happened to be a convert to Catholicism (a black mark in her eyes). She wrote to warn the Prime Minister that she 'thought it a very doubtful appointment, as, though a very good man, he was weak'. It did not take Ripon long to vindicate her doubts. No sooner had he arrived in

Calcutta than he began to meddle in matters old India hands like Hugh Maxwell took very seriously indeed.

Between 1872 and 1883 there was a crucial difference between the powers of British district magistrates and session judges in the Indian countryside – the *Mofussil* – and their native-born counterparts.* Although both were members of the covenanted civil service, the Indians were not entitled to conduct trials of white defendants in criminal cases. In the eyes of the new Viceroy, this was an indefensible anomaly; so he requested a bill to do away with it. The task fell to the Law Member of his Council, Courtenay Peregrine Ilbert. As earnest a Liberal as his chief, Ilbert was in many ways the antithesis of Hugh Maxwell. Maxwell's family had been born and bred in India for generations; Ilbert had only just arrived there, a rather timid little lawyer who had seen little of the world beyond his rooms in Balliol and his chambers in Chancery. Nevertheless, he and Ripon had no hesitation in putting principle before experience. Under the legislation Ilbert drafted, suitably qualified Indians would be allowed to try defendants regardless of the colour of their skin. Justice would henceforth be colour-blind, like the blindfolded statue representing her in the gardens of the Calcutta High Court.

In practice, the change affected the position of no more than twenty Indian magistrates. To the Anglo-Indian community, however, what Ilbert proposed was an insupportable assault on their privileged status. Indeed, the reaction to the Ilbert Bill was so violent that some called it a 'White Mutiny'. On 28 February 1883, within just a few weeks of the Bill's publication, and after a preliminary bombardment of irate letters to the press, a crowd of several thousand gathered inside Calcutta's imposing neo-classical Town Hall to hear a series of inflammatory speeches directed against the educated Indian civil servant, the despised 'Bengali Babu'. The charge was led by the imposing J.J.J. 'King' Keswick, a senior partner in the tea and trading firm Jardine Skinner & Co. 'Do you think', Keswick asked his audience, 'that native judges will, by three or four years' residence in England, become so Europeanized in nature and

* This was not the case in the cities of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras.

character, that they will be able to judge as well in false charges against Europeans as if they themselves were bred and born? Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?' Educating the Indians had done no good:

The education which the Government has given them . . . they use chiefly to taunt it in a discontented spirit . . . And these men . . . now cry out for power to sit in judgment on, and condemn the lion-hearted race whose bravery and whose blood have made their country what it is, and raised them to what they are[!]

To Keswick, training Indians to be judges was simply pointless, since an Indian was incapable by both birth and upbringing of judging a European. 'Under these circumstances,' he concluded to rousing cheers, 'is it any wonder that we should protest – if we should say that these men are not fit to rule over us, that they cannot judge us, that we will not be judged by them?' It was a peroration only outdone in its crudeness by the evening's second main speaker, James Branson:

Truly and verily the jackass kicketh at the lion. (*Thunders of applause.*) Show him as you value your liberties; show him that the lion is not dead; he sleepeth, and in God's name, let him dread the awakening. (*Cheers, and shouts from all sides.*)

Across the street, in Government House, Ripon was taken aback by this audibly hostile reaction to the Ilbert Bill. 'I quite admit', he confessed to the Colonial Secretary Lord Kimberley, 'that I had no idea that any large number of Englishmen in India were animated by such sentiments.'

I deserve such blame as may be attached to me for not having found out in a residence of 2½ years in India the true feeling of the average Anglo-Indian toward the natives among whom he lives. I know them now, and the knowledge gives me a feeling akin to despair as to the future of this country.

Ripon nevertheless resolved to press on, in the belief 'that as we have taken the question up, we had better go through with it, and get it settled out of the way of our successors'. As far as he could

see, the question was clear-cut: was India to be ruled 'for the benefit of the Indian people of all races, classes, and creeds', or 'in the sole interest of a small body of Europeans'?

Is it England's duty to try to elevate the Indian people, to raise them socially, to train them politically, to promote their progress in material prosperity, in education, and in morality; or is it to be the be-all and the end-all of her rule to maintain a precarious power over what Mr Branson calls 'a subject race with a profound hatred of their subjugators'?

Ripon was right, of course. The opposition of the Calcutta business community was based not just on visceral racial prejudice but on narrow self-interest: put simply, men like Keswick and Branson were used to having the law their own way in the Mofussil, where their firms' jute, silk, indigo and tea plantations were located. But now that their opposition to the Ilbert Bill was out in the open, the Viceroy needed to think about practicalities as well as principles. Unfortunately, he let precedent dictate his tactics. Having dropped his bombshell on the white community, Ripon left Calcutta almost immediately. Summer was approaching, after all, and nothing could alter the Viceroy's sacrosanct routine. It was time for him to take the annual trip to Simla, so off to Simla he went. This retreat to the hills was never an option to the businessmen in the Calcutta counting houses; business went on as usual down in the plains, whatever the temperature. The spectacle of Ripon swanning off to Simla was not calculated to mollify the likes of 'King' Keswick.

Also heading for the hills – for Chapslee, his elegant Simla residence – was the author of the controversial bill himself. Ilbert's strategy was to sit out the summer and hope the fuss would go away. 'As to the kind and amount of feeling which the Bill was likely to excite,' he wrote anxiously to his Oxford mentor Benjamin Jowett, 'I had no knowledge of my own . . . and . . . certainly did not anticipate such a storm.' 'I am intensely sorry', he told another friend, 'that the measure should have disclosed and intensified racial animosities.' From the Board of Trade, his friend Sir Thomas Farrer wrote to reassure Ilbert that Liberal opinion was on his side:

The struggle between lust of dominion, pride of race [and] mercantile avarice . . . on the one hand and true self-regard, humanity, justice to inferiors, sympathy (Sermon on the Mountism – what an abominable word) on the other, goes on like the fight between the angel and the devil . . . for the soul of man.

As that suggests, the Ilbert Bill was polarizing opinion not just in India but in England as well. To Liberals like Farrer, this was a moral struggle. The enlightened devotees of the Sermon on the Mount were, however, less numerous in Calcutta than they were in Clapham. Indeed, the deepening crisis over the Ilbert Bill was about to illustrate perfectly the perils of ruling a continent *from* a mount.

Across the country, in the searing heat of the Indian summer, the agitation spread. Committees were formed and money was raised as non-official Anglo-India mobilized. Kipling weighed in, accusing Ripon of 'sketch[ing] a swart utopia, nourishing the Babu's pride / On the fairy-tales of justice – with a leaning to his side.' This, he complained, was the Viceroy's policy: 'turmoil and babble and ceaseless strife'. From Cawnpore, Hugh Maxwell too joined in the chorus of dissent. It had been, he declared dourly, 'unwise' of the government 'to provoke so much race animosity'. Why could Ripon and Ilbert not see 'how unfit the native mind is to appreciate and sympathize with European ideas of administering the government of a country and people'?

This 'White Mutiny' was intimately connected with memories of the original Indian Mutiny, just twenty-five years before. Then every white woman in Cawnpore had been killed – and, as we have seen, a legend soon sprang up of rape as well as murder, as if every Indian man only awaited the opportunity to ravish the nearest memsahib. In a strangely similar vein, a recurrent theme of the anti-Ilbert campaign was the threat posed by Indian magistrates to English women. In the words of an anonymous letter to the *Englishman*: 'One's wife may be walked off for an imaginary offence and . . . what would more please our fellow subjects – than to bully and disgrace a wretched European woman? . . . The higher her husband's station and the greater respectability, the greater the delight

of her torturer.' Writing in the same vein to the *Madras Mail*, a correspondent demanded to know: 'Are our wives to be torn from our homes on false pretenses [to] be tried by men who do not respect women, and do not understand us, and in many cases hate us? . . . Fancy, I ask you Britishers, her being taken before a half-clad native, to be tried and perhaps convicted . . .' Such language laid bare one of the odder complexes of the Victorian Empire: its sexual insecurity. It is no coincidence that the plots of the Raj's best-known novels – Forster's *A Passage to India* and Scott's *The Jewel in the Crown* – begin with an alleged sexual assault by an Indian man against an English woman, followed by a trial presided over by an Indian judge. Such cases did in fact occur. As the anti-Ilbert campaign reached its climax, an Englishwoman named Hume accused her sweeper of raping her and, though the allegation turned out later to be false (they had in fact been lovers), in the febrile atmosphere of the time it seemed somehow to prove the point.

The question is why the threat of Indian judges trying Englishwomen was so often linked to the danger of sexual contact between Indian men and British women. After all, there was no shortage of such contact in the other direction, between British men and Indian women; until 1888 there had even been legalized brothels for British soldiers. Yet somehow the Ilbert Bill seemed to threaten to break down the walls not just of the cantonment but of the bungalow bedroom too. Ninety thousand white people who claimed to rule 350 million brown ones saw equality before the law as the high road to inter-racial rape.*

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* One possible source of sexual anxiety was the awareness that the supposedly clear line between 'White and Black' was in reality quite blurred. After two centuries of contact with Europeans, there was a substantial mixed race population, usually referred to as 'Eurasians', who were often employed in low-level public sector jobs (particularly on the railways and telegraphs). Revulsion against 'miscegenation' was an important feature of the later Victorian period: Kipling devotes at least two short stories to the 'fact' that the hue of a woman's fingernails was the best guide to the purity of her breeding (a darkness to the semicircles along the base of the nail spelling ostracism). One Indian-born soldier who won notoriety after the First World War heard his mother exclaim when his father lit his cigarette from a Burmese girl's

When Ripon finally returned to Calcutta from Simla in December, it was to a mixed – or rather a racially divided – reception. As he crossed the bridge from the railway station the streets were packed with applauding Indians, cheering their ‘friend and saviour’. But at Government House he was hissed, booed and jeered by a crowd of his own countrymen, one of whom was moved to call him a ‘damned old bugger’. At public dinners, only officials were prepared to drink the Viceroy’s health. There were even rumours of a plot to kidnap him and pack him off back to England. An effigy of the hapless Ilbert was publicly burned.

As weak as his Queen had predicted he would be – and not helped by an ill-timed visit by her son, the Duke of Connaught, who dismissed Ripon as ‘the greatest fool in Asia’ – the Viceroy gave way. The Ilbert Bill was emasculated, giving white defendants in any criminal case that might be heard by an Indian magistrate the right to ask for a jury, not fewer than half of whose members must be English or American. That may sound as arcane a compromise as could be imagined. Yet it was a climb-down, and one that was pregnant with peril for the future of the Raj. To educated Indian magistrates and their friends, the contempt with which they were regarded by the majority of Anglo-Indians was now out in the open. As one of Ilbert’s colleagues observed uneasily, the tone of the press campaign against the bill had been recklessly intemperate. The letters had ‘teemed with wild invective and insulting domineering attacks against the Native, on whom every railway guard or indigo planter’s foreman pretends to trample, as a master upon serfs, with impunity’. The ‘political veil which the Government has always thrown over the delicate relations between the two races’ had been ‘rudely rent in twain’ by a ‘mob shaking their fists in the face of the whole Native population’. And now, just as he feared, the really important consequence of the Ilbert Bill became apparent: not the ‘White Mutiny’, but the reaction that this provoked among Indians.

cheroot: ‘That sort of looseness is what has peopled Simla with thirty thousand Eurasians!’ The fact that the majority of such liaisons were between white men and Indian women did not stop people fantasizing about inter-racial sex with the genders reversed.

Quite unintentionally, Ripon had brought into being a genuine Indian national consciousness. As the *Indian Mirror* put it:

For the first time in modern history, Hindus, Mohammedans, Sikhs, Rajputs, Bengalis, Madrasis, Bombayites, Punjabis, and Purbiahs have united to join a constitutional combination. Whole races and classes, who never before took any interest in the affairs of their country, are taking it now with a zeal and an earnestness which more than atone for their former apathy.

Just two years after the White Mutiny, the first meeting of the Indian National Congress was held. Though initially intended by its British founder to channel and thereby defuse Indian disaffection, Congress would quickly become the crucible of modern Indian nationalism.* From the outset, it was attended by stalwarts of the educated class who served the British Raj, men like Janakinath Bose and an Allahabad lawyer named Motilal Nehru.

The latter’s son Jawaharlal would be the first Prime Minister of an independent India. Bose’s son Subhas Chandra would lead an army against the British in the Second World War. It is not too much to see the White Mutiny as the fount and origin of their families’ alienation from British rule.

India was the strategic core of the British Empire. If the British alienated the Anglicized elite that foundation would begin to crumble. But could another section of Indian society be found to prop up the British Raj? Somewhat improbably, the alternative to Asian apartheid was sought by some in the English class system.

Tory-entalism

For many British officials in India, toiling for years on end in a far-flung land, the thought of ‘home’ – not simulated in Simla,

* Congress was founded by Allan Octavian Hume, a Liberal ICS man who had been sickened by the anti-Ilbert campaign.

but the real thing, to which a man might one day retire – provided consolation in the heat of the plains. As the Victorian era drew to a close, however, the expatriates' memories of home became increasingly at odds with the reality. Theirs was a nostalgic, romantic vision of an unchanging rural England, of squires and parsons, thatched cottages and forelock-tugging villagers. It was an essentially Tory vision of a traditional, hierarchical society, ruled by landed aristocrats in a spirit of benign paternalism. The fact that Britain was now an industrial giant – where as early as 1870 most people lived in towns with more than 10,000 inhabitants – was somehow forgotten.

A similar process happened in the other direction, however, as people in Britain imagined India. 'What should they know of England, who only England know?' Kipling once asked, a reproach to his countrymen who ruled a global Empire without setting foot outside the British Isles. He might have put the question to Queen Victoria herself. She was delighted when Parliament bestowed on her the title of Empress of India (at her own suggestion) in 1877. But she never actually went near the place. What Victoria preferred was for India to come to her. By the 1880s her favourite servant was an Indian named Abdul Karim, also known as the 'Munshi', or teacher. He came with her to Osborne in 1887, the personification of the India the Queen liked to imagine: courteous, deferential, obedient, faithful. Not long after that, the Queen-Empress added a new wing to Osborne House, the centrepiece of which was the spectacular Durbar Room. The work was overseen by Lockwood Kipling, Rudyard's father, and was clearly inspired by the ornately carved interiors of Mughal palaces: indeed, parts of it look like a white version of Delhi's Red Fort. The Durbar Room offers another distinctly backward-looking vision, giving no hint of the new India of railways, coalmines and cotton mills the British were bringing into being. In this, it was typical of the way the British liked to see India in the 1890s. It was a fantasy.

Then, in 1898, the Marquess of Salisbury's Conservative government appointed a Viceroy whose whole career in India was an attempt to turn that fantasy into a reality.

To many of his contemporaries, George Nathaniel Curzon was a most insufferable person. Born into an aristocratic Derbyshire family who liked to trace their line back to the Norman Conquest, he had risen like an arrow through Eton, Oxford, the House of Commons and the India Office. In truth, there was nothing effortless about his famous superiority.* Entrusted as a child to a deranged governess, he was periodically forced to parade through the village wearing a large conical cap bearing the words 'liar', 'sneak' and 'coward'. ('I suppose', he later mused, 'no children well-born and well-placed ever cried so much or so justly.') At school Curzon was 'bent on being first in what I undertook and . . . I meant to do it in my way and not theirs'. At Oxford – 'that brief interval which must intervene between Eton and the Cabinet,' as someone joked – he was no less driven. Denied a First by the examiners, he determined to 'show them they had made a mistake', proceeding to win the Lothian Prize, the Arnold Prize and a Fellowship of All Souls in swift succession. Margot Asquith could not help being impressed by his 'enamelled self-assurance'. Others were less gentle in their mockery. A cartoon of him addressing Parliament at the Dispatch Box was entitled 'A Divinity addressing Black Beetles'.

When Curzon was appointed Viceroy he was not yet forty. It was a job for which he felt himself predestined. After all, was not the Viceroy's magnificent Calcutta residence an exact replica of his family's country seat at Kedleston? The Viceroyalty, he openly avowed, was 'the dream of my childhood, the fulfilled ambition of my manhood, and my highest conception of duty to the State'. In particular, Curzon felt himself called to restore British rule in India, which Liberals like Ripon had been undermining. The Liberals believed all men should have equal rights, regardless of skin colour; the Anglo-Indians, as we have seen, preferred a kind of apartheid, so that a tiny white minority could lord it over the mass of 'blacks'. But to a Tory aristocrat like Curzon, Indian society could never be as simple as these two opposing visions implied. Raised to see

* He was most concisely satirized in verse: 'My name is George Nathaniel Curzon, / I am a most superior person, / My cheek is pink, my hair is sleek, / I dine at Blenheim once a week.'

himself as very close to the pinnacle of a pyramid of status extending downwards from the monarch, Curzon thirsted above all after hierarchy. He and those like him sought to replicate in the Empire what they admired about Britain's feudal past. An earlier generation of British rulers in India had immersed themselves in Indian culture to become true Orientalists. Curzon was what you might call a 'Tory-entalist'.

The outlines of a feudal India were not far to seek. The so-called 'princely states' accounted for about a third of the area of India. There, traditional Maharajas remained nominally in charge, though always under the beady eye of a British Private Secretary (a role performed in other Oriental Empires under the title of 'Grand Vizier'). Even in the areas directly ruled by the British, most rural districts were dominated by aristocratic Indian landowners. In Curzon's eyes, it was these people who were the natural leaders of India. As he himself put it in a speech to Calcutta University's Convocation in 1905:

I have always been a devoted believer in the continued existence of the native states in India, and an ardent well-wisher of the native princes. But I believe in them not as relics, but as rulers, not as puppets but as living factors in the administration. I want them to share the responsibilities as well as the glories of British rule.

The kind of people Curzon had in mind were men like the Maharaja of Mysore, who acquired a new Private Secretary in 1902 in the person of Evan Machonochie. The Maharaja was, in theory at least, the heir to the throne of Tipu Sultan, once the most dangerous of the East India Company's foes. Those days, however, had long gone. This Maharaja had been educated by a senior ICS man, Sir Stuart Fraser; and it was thought, as Machonochie recalled, 'that a private secretary drawn from the same service and equipped with the requisite experience would be able to relieve His Highness of drudgery, show him something of our methods of disposing of work and, while suppressing his own personality, exercise some influence in the direction desired'. Machonochie's account of his seven years

at the Mysore court neatly exemplifies the puppet-like role such princes were expected to play:

His Highness . . . on young shoulders carried a head of extraordinary maturity, which was, however, no bar to a boyish and wholehearted enjoyment of manly sports . . . He [also] had the taste and knowledge to appreciate western music as well as his own . . .

We [meanwhile] got to work, cleared out the slums, straightened and widened the roads, put in a surface drainage system leading into the main sewers that discharged into septic tanks, provided new quarters for the displaced population, and tidied up generally.

The playboy Maharaja – wealthy, Westernized and weakened to the point of political impotence – was to become a familiar figure throughout India.

In return for running their kingdoms for them and granting them a generous allowance, the British expected only one thing: supine loyalty. Generally they got it. When Curzon paid a viceregal visit to Nashipur he was presented with a specially composed poem to mark the occasion:

Welcome to Thee, Oh Viceroy, Mighty Ruler of India,
Lo! Thousand eyes are eagerly waiting Thee to behold!
Over flowed are our hearts with joy transcendent,
Sanctified are we and our desires fulfilled;
And Nashipur is hallowed with the touch of Thy Feet.

Glorious and mighty is England's rule in India.
Blessed are the people that have a Ruler so benevolent.
Constant has been Thy aim to promote Thy subjects' welfare;
Loving and protecting them like a kind hearted father;
Oh! Where shall we get a Noble Ruler like Thee!

Where indeed?

In fact, Curzon's preoccupation with hierarchy was nothing new. As Viceroy, Disraeli's fellow romantic Lord Lytton had been even more extravagant in his hopes of the Indian 'feudal nobility',

on the principle that 'the further East you go, the greater becomes the importance of a bit of bunting'. Lytton had even tried to create a new section of the Indian Civil Service specifically earmarked for the sons of this Oriental aristocracy. The aim, as one Punjab official said in 1860, was to 'attach to the state by timely concessions . . . a body scattered throughout the country considerable by its property and rank'. Nor was Tory-entalism confined to India. In Tanganyika Sir Donald Cameron strove to reinforce the links from 'the peasant . . . up to his Headman, the Headman to the Sub-Chief, the Sub-Chief to the Chief, and the Chief to the District Officer'. In West Africa Lord Kimberley thought it better to 'have nothing to do with the "educated natives" as a body. I would treat with the hereditary chiefs only'. Lady Hamilton, the wife of the Governor of Fiji, even regarded the Fijian chiefs as her social equals (unlike her children's English nanny). 'All Orientals think extra highly of a Lord,' insisted George Lloyd, before taking up his duties as the newly ennobled High Commissioner in Egypt. The whole purpose of the Empire, argued Frederick Lugard, the architect of Britain's West African empire, was 'to maintain traditional rulerships as a fortress of societal security in a changing world . . . The really important category was status.' Lugard invented an entire theory of 'indirect rule' – the antithesis of the direct rule that had been imposed on the Jamaican planters in 1865 – according to which British rule could be maintained at minimal cost by delegating all local power to existing elites, retaining only the essentials of central authority (in particular the purse strings) in British hands.

Complementary to the restoration, preservation or (where necessary) invention of traditional hierarchies was the elaboration of the Empire's own administrative hierarchy. Protocol in India was strictly governed by the 'warrant of precedence', which in 1881 consisted of no fewer than seventy-seven separate ranks. Throughout the Empire, officials thirsted after membership of the Most Distinguished Order of St Michael and St George, whether as CMG ('Call Me God'), KCMG ('Kindly Call Me God') and, reserved for the very top tier of governors, GCMG ('God Calls Me God'). There was, declared Lord Curzon, 'an insatiable appetite [among]

the British-speaking community all the world over for titles and precedence'.

There was also, he was sure, an appetite for grand architecture. Under Curzon, the Taj Mahal and Fatehpur Sikri were restored and the Victoria Memorial was built in Calcutta. Significantly, the place in India Curzon most disliked was the place the Victorians themselves had built from scratch: Simla. It was, he complained, 'nothing more than a middle class suburb on a hilltop', where he had to lunch with 'a set of youths interested only in polo and dancing'. The Viceroy's Lodge struck the Curzons as odiously vulgar. ('I keep trying not to be disappointed,' confessed Lady Curzon. 'A Minneapolis millionaire would revel in it.') The company at dinner made them feel that they were dining 'every day in the housekeeper's room with the butler and the lady's maid'. It got so bad that they took to camping in a field near the Simla golf course. The sad truth was that the British in India were just too unbearably common.

The zenith of Curzon's Tory-entalism was the Delhi Durbar of 1903, a spectacular display of pomp and ceremony which he personally staged to mark the accession of Edward VII. The Durbar – or 'Curzonation', as it was dubbed – was the perfect expression of the Viceroy's pseudo-feudal view of India. Its highlight was a richly symbolic elephant procession in which the Indian princes played a prominent role. It was, as one observer said,

a magnificent sight, and all description must fail to give an adequate idea of its character, its brilliancy of colour and its ever-changing features, the variety of howdahs and trappings and the gorgeousness of the dress adorning the persons of the Chiefs who followed in the wake of the Viceroy . . . A murmur of admiration, breaking into short-lived cheers, rose from the crowd.

There they all were, from the Begum of Bhopal to the Maharaja of Kapurtala, swaying atop their elephants behind the Grand Pandrum himself. One journalist covering the Durbar 'carried away the impression of black-bearded Kings who swayed to and fro with each movement of their gigantic steeds . . . The sight was not credible of our nineteenth century [*sic*].' Amid this extravaganza,

there came a message for the absent King-Emperor, which so neatly expressed the Viceroy's own view that it can only have been penned by Curzon:

His Empire is strong . . . because it regards the liberties and respects the dignities and rights of all his feudatories and subjects. The keynote of the British policy in India has been to conserve all the best features in the fabric of native society. By that policy we have attained the wonderful measure of success: in it we recognise an assured instrument of further triumphs in the future.

There was, however, a fatal flaw in all this.* The Durbar was splendid theatre, no doubt; but it was a façade of power, not the real thing. After the Indian army, the true foundation of British power was not the Maharajas on their elephants but the elite of Anglicized lawyers and civil servants Macaulay had called into being. Yet these were the very people Curzon regarded as a threat. Indeed, he pointedly shunned the so-called 'Bengali Babus'. When asked why so few natives were promoted in the covenanted Civil Service under him, he replied dismissively: 'The highly placed native is apt to be unequal to [the task], does not attract the respect of his subordinates, European or even Native, and is rather inclined to abdicate, or to run away.'

Just two years after the Durbar, Curzon launched a premeditated attack on the 'Babus'. He announced – ostensibly for the sake of administrative efficiency – that their homeland, Bengal, would be divided in two. As the capital of both Bengal and India, Calcutta was the power-base of the Indian National Congress, which had by now ceased to be (if it ever was) a mere safety-valve for native disgruntlement. Curzon knew full well that his plan for partition would incense the emergent nationalist movement. The capital was, as he himself put it, 'the centre from which the Congress party is manipulated . . . Any measure in consequence that would divide

* And it was not just the fact that (as Machonochie observed) many of the Indian princes privately resented the 'schoolmasterly' way Curzon was inclined to treat them. Curzon even managed to upset them at the moment of their apotheosis at the Durbar by failing to return their visits.

the Bengali-speaking population . . . or that would weaken the influence of the lawyer class, who have the entire organization in their hands, is intensely and hotly resented by them.' So unpopular was the proposal that it unleashed the worst political violence against British rule since the Mutiny.

The nationalists began by organizing, for the first time, a boycott of British goods, invoking the ideal of *swadeshi*, Indian economic self-sufficiency. This was the strategy endorsed by moderates like the writer Rabindranath Tagore.* There were also widespread strikes and demonstrations. But some protesters went further. Throughout Bengal, there was a rash of violent attacks on British administrators, including several attempts on the life of the Governor of Bengal himself. At first the authorities assumed the violence was the work of poor, uneducated Indians. But on 30 April 1908, when two British women were killed by a bomb meant for the Mazafferpur District Judge, J. D. Kingsford, police raids uncovered the more disturbing truth: this was an altogether different threat from that posed by the mutinous sepoys of 1857. They had been simple soldiers, defending their traditional religious culture against British interference. This, by contrast, was modern terrorism: extreme nationalism plus nitroglycerine. And the ringleaders were anything but poor coolies. One of the terrorist organizations, known as the Anushilan Samiti, was led by Pramathanath Mitra P. Mitra, a Calcutta High Court barrister. When the Special Branch swooped on five eminently respectable Calcutta addresses, they found them stuffed with bomb-making equipment. Twenty-six young men – not the suspected coolies, but members of Bengal's Brahmin elite – were arrested.

Those who subsequently stood trial at Alipore could hardly have had more respectable backgrounds. One of the defendants, Aurobindo Ghose, was in fact a former head boy at St Paul's School in London and scholar at King's College, Cambridge. He even turned

* It was a grave blow to the self-esteem of the British literary elite when Tagore was awarded the Nobel prize for Literature in 1913. George Bernard Shaw sneered at 'Stupendranath Begor' – a cheap dig that illustrates how widespread the aversion to educated Bengalis had become.

out to be an exact contemporary of one of the magistrates who tried him; indeed, Ghose had beaten him at Greek in the ICS exam and had failed to secure an ICS place only because he missed the riding test. As one of the other British lawyers involved in the case noted, it was

a matter for regret that a man of Arabindo's [sic] mental calibre should have been ejected from the Civil Service on the ground he could not, or would not, ride a horse . . . Had room been found for him in the Educational Service for India I believe he would have gone far not merely in personal advancement but in welding more firmly the links which bind his countrymen to ours.

But it was too late for regrets now. The British had set out to create Indians in their own image. Now, by alienating this Anglicized elite, they had produced a Frankenstein's monster. Aurobindo Ghose personified the nationalism that would soon manifest itself throughout the Empire precisely because he was the product of the ultimate English education.

Yet the Alipore case was revealingly different from the Morant Bay trials of just over forty years before. Instead of the summary justice meted out then, this trial lasted nearly seven months, and in the end Aurobindo Ghose was acquitted. Even the death sentence passed on the group's ringleader – his brother Barendra Kumar Ghose – was later commuted, despite the fact that he admitted during the trial to having authorized the assassination of the chief prosecutor. The final humiliating climbdown came in 1911, when the decision to partition Bengal was itself revoked. That would have to wait – ironically, until Indian independence. This show of weakness was not calculated to put a stop to terrorism. It did not.

Meanwhile, however, the British had devised a better way of chastising Bengal's unruly capital. They decided to move the seat of government to Delhi, the erstwhile capital of the Mughal emperors. Once, before the advent of the bothersome Babu, Calcutta had been the natural base for an Empire based on the profit motive. Delhi would be a headquarters altogether more suitable to the Tory-ental

era; and New Delhi would be the supreme expression of that era's ineffable snobbery.

It was Curzon's misfortune that he did not survive in office long enough to see the great canvas city he had constructed for the Durbar turned into a real city of glowing pink stone. The architects of New Delhi, Herbert Baker and Edwin Lutyens, had no doubt that their objective was to build a symbol of British power that would match the achievements of the Mughals. This, they understood at once, was to be the ineradicable legacy of the Tory-ental Empire: as Lutyens himself confessed, simply being in India made him feel 'very Tory and pre-Tory feudal' (he even married Lord Lytton's daughter). Baker at once recognized 'the political standpoint in a political capital'; the aim, he thought, was to 'give them Indian sentiment where it does not conflict with grand principles, as the Government should do'. What the two men created was and is an astounding achievement: the British Empire's one architectural masterpiece. New Delhi is grandiose, certainly. The Viceroy's Palace alone covered four and a half acres, and had to be staffed by 6,000 servants and 400 gardeners, fifty of whom were solely employed to chase birds away. But it is undeniably beautiful. It would take a very hard-hearted anti-imperialist not to be moved by the sight of the changing of the guard at what is now the President's Palace, as the great towers and domes glow in the hazy rays of dawn. Nevertheless, the political message of New Delhi is clear; so clear that it does not have to be inferred from the symbolism of the architecture. For Baker and Lutyens crowned their creation with an inscription on the walls of the Secretariat that must be the most condescending in the entire history of the Empire:

LIBERTY DOES NOT DESCEND TO A
PEOPLE. A PEOPLE MUST RAISE THEMSELVES TO
LIBERTY. IT IS A BLESSING THAT MUST BE
EARNED BEFORE IT CAN BE ENJOYED.

Not Curzon's words, to be sure – but in their patronizing tone, distinctly Curzonesque.

The supreme irony was that this architectural extravagance was paid for by none other than the Indian taxpayer. Clearly, before they earned their liberty the Indians would have to go on paying for the privilege of being ruled by the British.

Was it a privilege worth paying for? The British took it for granted that it was. But even Curzon himself once admitted that British rule 'may be good for us; but it is neither equally, nor altogether, good for them'. Indian nationalists agreed wholeheartedly, complaining that the wealth of India was being drained into the pockets of foreigners. In fact, we now know that this drain – the colonial burden as measured by the trade surplus of the colony – amounted to little more than 1 per cent of Indian net domestic product a year between 1868 and 1930. That was a lot less than the Dutch 'drained' from their East Indies empire, which amounted to between 7 and 10 per cent of Indonesian net domestic product in the same period.

And on the other side of the balance sheet were the immense British investments in Indian infrastructure, irrigation and industry. By the 1880s the British had invested £270 million in India, not much less than one-fifth of their entire investment overseas. By 1914 the figure had reached £400 million. The British increased the area of irrigated land by a factor of eight, so that by the end of the Raj a quarter of all land was irrigated, compared with just 5 per cent of it under the Mughals. They created an Indian coal industry from scratch which by 1914 produced nearly 16 million tons a year. They increased the number of jute spindles by a factor of ten. There were also marked improvements in public health, which increased Indian average life expectancy by eleven years.* It was the British who introduced quinine as an anti-malarial prophylactic, carried out public programmes of vaccination against smallpox – often in the face of local resistance – and laboured to improve the urban water supplies that were so often the bearers of cholera and

* From 21 years to 32. However, in the same period (between 1820 and 1950), British life expectancy increased from 40 to 69 years.

other diseases. And, although it is simply impossible to quantify, it is hard to believe that there were not some advantages in being governed by as incorruptible a bureaucracy as the Indian Civil Service. After independence, that idiosyncratic Anglophile Chaudhuri was sacked from All India Radio for dedicating his *Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* to 'the memory of the British Empire in India . . . because all that was good and living within us was made, shaped and quickened by the same British Empire'. That was wilful overstatement. But it had a grain of truth, which was of course why it so outraged Chaudhuri's nationalist critics.

True, the average Indian had not got much richer under British rule. Between 1757 and 1947 British per capita gross domestic product increased in real terms by 347 per cent, Indian by a mere 14 per cent. A substantial share of the profits which accrued as the Indian economy industrialized went to British managing agencies, banks or shareholders; this despite the fact that there was no shortage of capable Indian investors and entrepreneurs. The free trade imposed on India in the nineteenth century exposed indigenous manufacturers to lethal European competition at a time when the independent United States of America sheltered its infant industries behind high tariff walls. In 1896 Indian mills supplied just 8 per cent of Indian cloth consumption.* It should also be remembered that Indian indentured labourers supplied much of the cheap labour on which the later British imperial economy depended. Between the 1820s and the 1920s, close to 1.6 million Indians left India to work in a variety of Caribbean, African, Indian Ocean and Pacific colonies, ranging from the rubber plantations of Malaya to the sugar mills of Fiji. The conditions in which they travelled and worked were often little better than those that had been inflicted on African slaves in the century before. Nor could the best efforts of civil servants like Machonochie avert terrible famines in 1876–8 and 1899–1900. Indeed, in the former the British predilection for

* That changed in the inter-war years however. By 1945 Indian mills supplied three-quarters of domestic consumption.

laissez-faire economics actually made matters worse.* But would Indians have been better off under the Mughals? Or, for that matter, under the Dutch – or the Russians?

It might seem self-evident that they would have been better off under Indian rulers. That was certainly true from the point of view of the ruling elites the British had overthrown and whose share of national income, something like 5 per cent, they then appropriated for their own consumption. But for the majority of Indians it was far less clear that their lot would improve under independence. Under British rule, the village economy's share of total after-tax income actually rose from 45 per cent to 54 per cent. Since that sector represented around three-quarters of the entire population, there can therefore be little doubt that British rule reduced inequality in India. And even if the British did not greatly increase Indian incomes, things might conceivably have been worse under a restored Mughal regime had the Mutiny succeeded. China did not prosper under Chinese rulers.

The reality, then, was that Indian nationalism was fuelled not by the impoverishment of the many but by the rejection of the privileged few. In the age of Macaulay, the British had called into being an English-speaking, English-educated elite of Indians, a class of civil service auxiliaries on whom their system of administration had come to depend. In time, these people naturally aspired to have some share in the government of the country, just as Macaulay had predicted.† But in the age of Curzon, they were spurned in favour of decorative but largely defunct Maharajas.

The result was that by the Empress-Queen's twilight years, British rule in India was like one of those palaces Curzon so adored. It

* It is, however, quite unjustifiable to compare British reliance on the free market in the famine of 1877 with the Nazi policy of genocide against the Jews. The Viceroy, Lord Lytton, was certainly wrong to imagine that market forces would suffice to feed the starving after the catastrophic drought of 1876. But his *intention* was not murderous. Hitler's was.

† 'To have found a great people sunk in the lowest depths of slavery and superstition, to have ruled them as to have made them desirous and capable of all the privileges of citizens, would indeed be a title to glory all our own.'

looked simply splendid on the outside. But downstairs the servants were busy turning the floorboards into firewood.

Far-called our navies melt away;
On dune and headland sinks the fire:
Lo, all our pomp of yesterday
Is one with Nineveh and Tyre!
Judge of the Nations, spare us yet,
Lest we forget – lest we forget!

Kipling wrote his doleful 'Recessional' in 1897, sending a shiver of apprehension down the spines of his countrymen as they celebrated Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. Sure enough, like the proud citadels of Nineveh and Tyre, most of Curzon's works have not endured. As Viceroy he had striven with all his self-assured zeal to make the British government of India more efficient. He believed passionately that without India Britain would drop from being 'the greatest power in the world' to being 'third rate'. But it was British rule he wanted to modernize, not India. Like its ancient monuments, he wanted to slap a preservation order on the Indian princes; to fill the listed buildings with a reliable aristocracy of 'listed' people. It was never a realistic undertaking.

Curzon himself would go on to be Lord Privy Seal in 1915 and Foreign Secretary in 1919. Yet he never attained the highest office he so desired. He was passed over for the Tory leadership after a confidential memorandum dismissed him as 'representing that section of privileged conservatism' which no longer had a place 'in this democratic age'. That may also suffice as an epitaph for the entire Tory-entailist project.

The MP Arthur Lee once encountered Lord Curzon in Madame Tussaud's, 'gazing with concentrated attention, but a trace of disappointment at his own effigy in wax'. How much more disappointed he would have been to see the statues of the Queen-Empress and sundry imperial proconsuls that stand today in the neglected back yard of Lucknow Zoo, where they were dumped after Indian independence. There can be few more vivid emblems of the transience of

imperial achievement than the immense marble Victoria that dominates this shabby little spot. Simply transporting such a vast lump of carved stone from London to Lucknow had been a remarkable feat, only possible with the cranes, steamships and trains that were the true engines of Victorian power. Yet today the idea that this lugubrious-looking old lady once ruled India seems almost preposterous. Removed from her plinth in whichever public place she once occupied, the great white Queen-Empress has forfeited her totemic power.*

Then again, by the turn of the century it could be argued – *pace* Curzon – that India had ceased to be the indispensable jewel it had been back in the 1860s, the be all and end all of British imperial power. Elsewhere in the world, a new generation of imperialists was coming of age, men who believed that if the Empire was to survive – if it was to adapt to the challenges of a new century – it would have to expand in new directions.

In their view, the Empire had to drop the pomp and return to its pre-Victorian roots: to penetrate new markets, to settle new colonies and – if necessary – to wage new wars.

* Even so, the fact that someone has bashed off her nose still seems strangely sacrilegious.

5 Maxim Force

There are two oriflammes; which shall we plant on the farthest islands – the one that floats in a heavenly fire, or that hangs heavy with foul tissue of terrestrial gold? There is indeed a course of beneficent glory open to us, such as never was yet offered to any poor group of mortal souls. But it must be – it is with us, now, 'Reign or Die' . . . And this is what [England] must either do, or perish: she must found colonies as fast and as far as she is able, formed of her most energetic and worthiest men; – seizing every piece of fruitful waste ground she can set her foot on.

John Ruskin, inaugural lecture as
Slade Professor at Oxford, 1870

[T]ake Constitution Jesuits if obtainable and insert English Empire for Roman Catholic Religion.

Cecil Rhodes, outlining the original concept of the Rhodes
Scholarships to Lord Rothschild, 1888

You cannot have omelettes without breaking eggs; you cannot destroy the practices of barbarism, of slavery, of superstition . . . without the use of force.

Joseph Chamberlain

In the space of just a few years, as the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth, British attitudes towards their Empire flipped over from arrogance to anxiety. The last years of Queen Victoria were a time of imperial hubris: there simply seemed no limit to what could

Bibliography

The following is not intended as a comprehensive bibliography of imperial history, which would occupy an excessive number of pages. Rather, it is intended to indicate the principal works on which I have drawn in my research, and to acknowledge my debt to their authors, as well as to provide suggestions for 'further reading'.

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