

### *The Glory*

If there were territories waiting to be annexed, Britain must annex them, or other nations would. Glory was more than a luxury, or even a satisfaction. It was a national need.

## 8

And there was one more stimulus to splendour: patriotism, kind and guileless—not arrogant, vicious or greedy, not Jingoism, but simply love of country, like love of family, or love of home, in an age when soldiers unquestioningly fought for their country right or wrong, because they did not think it could be wrong, and there breathed few men who ne'er had said this was their own, their native land. The British were among the most patriotic people of all. They were immensely proud of their country, trusted it, and believed it to be a force for good in the world. The stronger England was, the safer and sounder the world would be. If there were peoples who opposed her dominion, they were probably led by wicked men, or knew no better.

*Morris. Pax Britannica*

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### Caste

*It is with nations as with men—  
One must be first, we are the mightiest,  
The heirs of Rome.*

John Davidson

IN *Murray's Handbook to India*, the Baedeker of the Raj, the separateness of the British cantonments was vividly demonstrated. The maps in that indispensable guide were beautifully produced, and delineated in three or four colours the detachment of the British from their subjects. There in the centre of 'Agra And Environs' is the red splotch of the Indian city, shapeless, solid, raggety at the edges, relieved only by suggestions of stinking back streets. Hygienically to the south of it, separated by a patch of green and linked to it by Hastings Road as by a causeway, is the neat enclave of the cantonment, with its churches, its Government Gardens, its High Bungalow, its banks, its Government Slaughter House and its Metcalfe Testimonial—the usual buildings, as the guide says, of a British station, with a club the traveller really ought to join, 'if he knows a member to introduce him'. Just the look of it on the map suggests the absolute self-sufficiency of the cantonment. It was a world apart. The memsahib and her children need never visit the old city from one furlough to the next, and in the green expanse of the Government Gardens, or on the hopefully sprinkled lawns of the club, a stray native of the country must have felt horribly out of place.

There were down-to-earth reasons why a British garrison, or a British community, should not live in the heart of a tropical town. Plagues and tropical diseases were little understood, women and children were less self-reliant then, the most broad-minded of colonels would hardly wish his soldiers to associate too easily with the bazaar whores. But the detachment of the cantonments had a deeper meaning, for whatever the motives that sent the British out of their islands, a deep instinct kept them perpetually apart from their subjects of other races. The great ideal of Roman citizenship was only half-heartedly approached by the British. In theory every subject of the Queen, whatever his colour or skull formation, enjoyed

equality of opportunity, and fifty years before Lord Palmerston, springing to the defence of Don Pacifico, a Greek merchant of Portuguese Jewish origin but British nationality, had almost plunged Europe into war. There was nothing to stop an African or an Indian going to Britain and becoming a bishop, a peer of the realm or Prime Minister.<sup>1</sup> In practice, however, it was a racialist Empire—what *was* Empire, Lord Rosebery had once rhetorically asked, but the predominance of race?<sup>2</sup> Awkwardly lying between the lines of the Jubilee manifestos, with all their warmth of family feeling, were ineradicable instincts of racial superiority, inherited perhaps from the slave-masters of the earliest English colonies, and fortified in Victoria's day by pseudo-scientific theory and fuzzy-wuzzy wars. 'An anthropological museum', is how the *Daily Mail*, during an unguarded gap in the lyricism, described the colonial procession of the Jubilee, and this is how its star reporter Steevens, a scholar of Balliol, once responded to the Lascar seamen on board a British liner: 'They are a specimen of the raw material. Their very ugliness and stupidity furnish just the point. It is because there are people like this in the world that there is an Imperial Britain. This sort of creature has to be ruled, so we rule him, for his good and our own.'

## 2

The joke that 'niggers began at Calais' was not entirely a joke. Cloudy conceptions of Race and Heritage coloured the outlook of the British the moment they crossed the Straits of Dover, and, coupled with the confidence bred by the period of splendid isolation, made the average Briton feel a different being even from his contemporaries across the Channel. There were few foreign-born

<sup>1</sup> The first Afro-Asian peer was Sir Satyendra Sinha, who became Lord Sinha of Raipur in 1919.

<sup>2</sup> Rosebery, though Gladstone's Foreign Secretary, and Liberal Prime Minister himself in 1894-5, was the most eloquent of imperialists, and probably invented the phrase 'Commonwealth of Nations', in its British imperial sense. His views gradually estranged him from his party, and he died in 1929 a political independent, imperialist to the end and a famous stylist.

citizens in Britain then: the nation was homogeneous, and though people of intellectual tastes no doubt felt as close to Europe as they do now, the British were generally contemptuous of foreign things. Their prejudices had been compounded by the rise and fall of the Aesthetic Movement, that outrageously talented renaissance of art and literature, led by Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley, which had drawn its inspiration so freely from France, and had collapsed with such ignominy when Wilde was imprisoned for homosexual behaviour in 1895. 'In my opinion', wrote Admiral Sir John Fisher to his wife, looking across the celestial lake from his hotel in Geneva that same year, 'it's a very second-class place. It doesn't compare with Portsmouth for shops, nor is there any view equal to the sunset at Portsmouth, looking up at the old hulks up the harbour. I will never come abroad again.' In its Jubilee issue *Punch* offered a Conversation Book—'Some Idiosyncratic Questions and Probable Answers'—for foreign visitors to the celebrations, and offered the following sketch of a foreigner visiting a cabman's shelter.

'Good afternoon. I hope I do not disturb you, Sir, but I have been waiting here two (three, or four) hours. Could you tell me if there is a likelihood of your being discharged today? I trust you will not charge by the hour for the time I have been standing here?' 'Look 'ere, Jim, 'ere's a blooming furriner expects me to put 'im dahn on my waitin' list for nothing! Go 'ome and eat coke!'

*Go 'ome and eat coke!* The lesser breeds were not all coloured, and the racialism of the British was tinged with many shades of superiority—social, material, moral. 'Cheek!' scribbled Chamberlain in the margin, when a dispatch from the Niger told him of a French territorial claim in Africa, and Thomas Cook, the travel agent, once expressed a severe opinion of the Can-Can—not as a tourist spectacle, which Heaven forbid, but as a French national phenomenon. It was, he said, performed with 'an unnatural and forced abandon'.

## 3

But to be coloured was something else. Admiral Fisher himself,

however orthodox his opinions on Abroad, was sometimes looked on with suspicion because of his mandarin face, with its high Mongolian cheekbones and Gobi eyes—rumour suggested he had a Sinhalese mother.

The British had not always been quite so colour-conscious. In the early days of the East India Company social intercourse between white men and brown had been easy and respectful, and imperialists of the nineties must have viewed with mixed feelings a splendid picture that still hung prominently in Fort St George at Madras: attributed to Chinnery, it showed the plump adventurer Stringer Lawrence,<sup>1</sup> who went to India in 1748, amicably walking with the Nawab of the Carnatic like a pair of poets on a picnic—the Englishman florid and thick-set, the Indian marvellously shining with jewels, and the two of them promenading side by side across the canvas in a kind of springy minuet. It was not the association of the two men that must have struck a jarring note—there were many friendships still between Britons and Indian princes. It was the picture's suggestion that here was a meeting between absolute equals, each representing a great and attractive civilization, consorting to music in the sunshine.

In those days, when Englishmen went out to the tropics alone, concubinage was one of life's solaces. Most Englishmen in India took mistresses, and thus got close to the life and feelings of Indian people in a way that their successors seldom could. An entire race of Eurasians had been brought into existence by these practices, forming a social and vocational stratum of their own. Elsewhere in the Empire, too, earlier generations of imperialists had happily miscegenated. There was Scottish blood in the *métis*, the half-caste Indians of Manitoba who had rebelled against the British in 1870, and cross-bred aboriginals were found wherever the white men camped in Australia. In Burma there were commonly legal marriages between British and Burmese, while the white Rajah of Sarawak,

<sup>1</sup> This splendid fellow (1697-1775), who probably began his military career in the ranks, was unknown until he arrived in India at the age of 50. He made his name in the wars against the French, and is honoured by a spirited effigy in Westminster Abbey—and by this picture, which still hangs in the Fort St George Museum in Madras.

Charles Brooke,<sup>1</sup> had publicly suggested that the best population for the development of tropical countries would be a cross-breed of European and Asiatic: for his subordinates he preferred compliant local mistresses to burdensome European wives, and he believed physical intercourse to be much the best way of preserving the Empire.<sup>2</sup>

## 4

By the nineties the attitude had hardened. For one thing, there were far more Englishwomen in the tropical Empire. The steamship had seen to that, and the Empire-builder now found himself confined far more closely within the cocoon of cantonment and family life. Baron von Hübner, remarking upon the higher moral tone of Anglo-Indian life in the later years of the century, wrote: 'It is the Englishwoman, courageous, devoted, well-educated, well-trained—the Christian, the guardian angel of the domestic hearth—who by her magic wand has brought this wholesome transformation.' John Ferguson, a well-known British journalist in Ceylon, agreed with him, and wished it had happened sooner. 'I am convinced that the presence of his sister would have saved many a young fellow, in the pioneering days of the tropics, from drink and ruin'—'ruin' habitually meaning, in these austere imperial contexts, *intercourse with natives*. In the multi-racial Empire the white woman now occupied rather the same semi-divine status she had enjoyed in the slave states of the American South—the centre and circumference, as a Georgia toastmaster once put it, diameter and periphery, tangent and secant of all affections.

<sup>1</sup> Charles Brooke (1829-1917) was the second white rajah: his uncle James, an East India Company servant, had gone to Sarawak on an official mission in 1839, had put down a rebellion and been made ruler of Sarawak by its suzerain, the Sultan of Brunei. Charles, under whose rule Sarawak became a British protectorate, was succeeded by his son Charles Vyner Brooke, until in 1946 the country was annexed by the British Crown.

<sup>2</sup> There were corners of the Empire where these happy-go-lucky philosophies were never adopted. One was the Caribbean island of Grand Cayman, which was settled by the black descendants of slaves and the white descendants of buccaneers and castaways. Even in such circumstances an all-white *élite* arose, and to this day the Bowdens, Ebanks, Edens and Merrens of Grand Cayman can claim absolute European descent.

Newly emancipated herself, she took to India or Africa or the South Seas her own frilled and comfortable culture, patting the cushions as the muezzin called in the twilight, and receiving once a week. Fresh and fragile, pink and white, innocent by convention and inviolable by repute, among the dark skins of the subject peoples she must have seemed exquisitely distinct. To those subjects she remained, for the most part, benevolent but aloof; as one memsahib of the nineties wrote, 'It is best to treat them all as children who know no better, but . . . they are proud of their lies and the innate goodness of the Empire is not understood by them'. The Englishwoman wove a white web around her menfolk; and though there were still unrepentant reprobates to steal down to the bazaars, or lie in another sweet bosom on the scented shore, still she did drive a wedge between ruler and ruled, breaking the physical contact, and hurrying the Briton home along Hastings Road for his bridge. Englishmen evidently preferred their women white, anyway: in Calcutta, Mandalay, Hong Kong and Rangoon, as along Pioneer Street in Salisbury, European prostitutes thrived (though they were very seldom British).

The Indian Mutiny, too, had tainted British attitudes towards coloured people. It had occurred in 1857, and was one of the few imperial events which had gone into the English folk-myth, on a par with the marriages of Henry VIII, say, or the murder of the princes in the Tower. It was a favourite horror story. The British saw it in terms of cowering white ladies in fetid cellars; goggle-eyed Indians, half blood-mad, half lustful, creeping unawares upon sweet English children in lace pantaloons; the massacre of innocent hostages, ambushes, orgies, treachery. Since the Mutiny British Government in India had lost much of its old humanity, that comradely ease of Stringer Lawrence with the Nawab. The British had never felt quite the same again about the coloured peoples, and all over the Empire a multitude of memorials stoked the bitterness—like the terrible monument in St James's Church, Delhi, which recorded the deaths of a deputy collector of the city, his wife, his mother, his brother, his mother-in-law, three brothers-in-law, five sisters-in-law, eight nephews, three nieces and three grandchildren, all killed in the Mutiny.

The British had put down the rising with an uncharacteristic savagery. 'The first ten of the prisoners were lashed to the guns,' wrote an eyewitness of the punishment parade of the 55th Native Infantry, 'the artillery officer waved his sword, you heard the roar of the guns, and above the smoke you saw legs, arms and heads flying in all directions. Since that time we have had an execution parade once or twice a week, and such is the force of habit we now think little of them.' The British colonel of the 55th shot himself, so aghast was he at the disloyalty of his own soldiers; and something sour went into the Empire. In England those who believed the East could be westernized, that a man was a man for a' that, were disillusioned. In India the Government recoiled into a new correctness, and the merchants and planters developed a new arrogance. G. O. Trevelyan, travelling there soon after the Mutiny, met no European, outside the Government, 'who would not consider the sentiment that we hold India for the benefit of the inhabitants of India a loathsome un-English piece of cant'. Dilke, at about the same time, reported that a common notice in Indian hotels read: 'Gentlemen are requested not to strike the servants,'<sup>1</sup> and forty years later British soldiers fresh to India were warned by the old hands not to hit natives in the face, where the bruises would show.

Another cause of racialism was fundamentalist religion, with its shibboleths about hewers of wood and drawers of water—those allegedly divine proscriptions, those appeals to the pedigrees of Ham and Shem, which were so often propagated by missionaries, and which had such effect in the days when the Bible was taken literally by people of all classes. Darwinian ideas, too, while they seemed to show that every word of Genesis need not be taken as simple fact,

<sup>1</sup> Striking the servants, in an off-hand way, died hard in the Empire. In 1946, during my first week in Egypt, I boarded the Cairo train at Port Said with an English colonel of particular gentleness of manner and sweetness of disposition. As we walked along the corridor to find a seat we found our way blocked by an Egyptian, offering refreshments to people inside a compartment. Without a pause, apparently without a second thought, the colonel kicked him, quite hard and effectively, out of our way. I was new to the imperial scenes, and I have never forgotten this astonishing change in my companion's character, nor the absolute blank indifference with which the Egyptian accepted the kick, and moved.

at the same time convinced many people that the blacker a skin looked, the nearer it was to sin and savagery: ape or angel, is how Disraeli interpreted the alternatives of human origin, and it seemed only common sense that a Negro was more a gorilla than a Gabriel. Besides, in the past couple of decades so many horrors had come out of Africa: the human sacrifices of Benin, the death of Gordon, the Matabele atrocities, the slaughter or mutilation of an Italian army at Adowa, in Ethiopia, only a year before. Black men, it seemed, were only debatably human—and most of the Negroes seen in England had either been slaves or freaks. In the eighteenth century there are said to have been 14,000 African slaves in the British Isles, many of them later shipped to the settlement for freed slaves in Sierra Leone: and elderly Londoners still remembered the two Bushmen from South Africa who were publicly displayed in 1853, often in partnership with Professor Sinclair (The Wizard of All Wizards)—they were said to have no language of their own, to subsist upon insects and plants in underground burrows, and to have eyes which were both microscopic and telescopic.

Microscopic, telescopic, Bushmen or Sioux, black, brown or yellow: in the public mind the colours and peculiarities blurred. It infuriated Queen Victoria to hear her Indian subjects called niggers,<sup>1</sup> but to the man in the street in London the distinction was shadowy between a porcelain princeling from Rajasthan and some swathed worthy out of Ashantiland. Nor was anybody very self-conscious about race. The word 'native' was only beginning to acquire its undertones of mockery and condescension. The natives themselves were not often sensitive to racialism—only among educated Indians and Chinese did the idea of white supremacy much rankle, and even the most terrible of the African potentates recognized that the fittest to survive mostly seemed to be white.

## 5

The immediate problems of race arose only in the tropical Empire.

<sup>1</sup> It was in 1857, the *Oxford Dictionary* says, that the word was first applied to dark-skinned people other than Negroes, but perhaps the Mutiny was the reason. Certainly it was in 1858 that the Queen recorded in her journal her abhorrence of the usage.

In the temperate zones of white settlement there were, for most purposes, no subject peoples. The Red Indians of Canada were either shut away dispirited in their reserves, or else were fast being assimilated into the white culture. The aboriginals of Australia were no more than weird familiars of the Never-Never. The last of the Maori wars had ended in an inevitable British victory thirty years before, and there were now Maori representatives in the New Zealand Parliament. The Eskimos were irrelevant. The Irish did not count.

Elsewhere in the British Empire a few thousand white men ruled or worked among several hundred million coloured people: throughout the dependent Empire racial supremacy and imperial supremacy were synonymous. Racial separation was employed by the British as an instrument of Government, and there were few places in the tropical Empire where rulers and governed lived side by side in partnership. The British kept their distance now—paternal nearly always, fraternal very seldom, sisterly almost never. Cruelty was rare, and almost never official. Those mutineers were not shot dead from guns because it was a particularly horrible death, but because the British considered it more soldierly than hanging. Private Britons, trafficking in Asian labour or blazing themselves a trail in Africa, might do terrible things to their natives. Schooner captains commissioned to take indentured labourers home to their South Sea islands, at the end of their service in Australia, sometimes did not bother to make the voyage at all, but simply dumped their passengers on the first available atoll. British private soldiers in India often behaved abominably towards Indians, hitting them at small provocation, and forcing them to salaam and remove their shoes before entering a mess-hall or barracks-room. But Britons in the civil services were horrified at such conduct. Physical violence was seldom to their taste, paternalism was their forte, and anyway to be distant was enough. Their most vicious weapon had always been contempt. 'Foreign conquerors have treated the natives with violence,' wrote Thomas Munro of the East India Company as long before as 1818, 'and often with great cruelty, but none has treated them with so much scorn as we.'

Nobody, of course, denied that natives could be clever. Old

Thomas Cook, introduced to a Sudanese magnate called the Mudir of Dongola, thought him 'one of the ablest and cleverest men I have ever met'. No, it was *character* the coloured peoples were thought to lack—steadfastness, fairness, courage, sense of duty, such as the English public schools inculcated in their pupils. 'Don't you believe that the native is a fool', a colliery manager told Kipling in the Giridih coalfields of India. 'You can train him to everything except responsibility.' Nothing irritated the British more than a veneer of Western education without, as they thought, any real understanding of the values it represented. The emergence of Western-educated Indians, speaking a flowery English of their own, casually failing to recognize their own pre-ordained place in the order of things—the arrival on the scene of these bouncy protégés did nothing to draw the British closer to their wards, but only exacerbated their aloofness.

## 6

Yet this very class of Anglicized Asians and Africans was a deliberate product of the British imperial system. The Education of the Native was one of the basic purposes of philanthropic imperialism, and the British had long ago decided that a Western education was the only kind worth giving him. It was Macaulay who had defined the object of educational policy in India as being 'to form a class of interpreters between us and the natives we govern, a class of persons Indian in blood and colour but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect'. From this conception had sprung the use of English in public instruction in the Empire, and ever since the purpose had been to produce a gentlemanly *élite* of pseudo-Englishmen, subjects in their rulers' image, who would eventually perpetuate the Britishness of the Empire, and in the meantime act as imperial subalterns or under-masters. Elementary and technical education was neglected almost everywhere in the dependent Empire. In India, after half a century of Crown rule, there were only 12 million literate people in a population of about 300 million: only 1 per cent of Indians of school age went to school at all, and three out of four Indian villages had no school anyway. In Africa, where the production of an Anglicized *élite* generally seemed premature, the

primary education of the natives was left almost entirely to missionaries, a cheap system with mixed results.

But all over the Empire there were private boys' schools in the English manner, generally Anglican of atmosphere, with blazers and rugby caps, first elevens and prefects, corporal punishment and even fagging—the whole oddly twisted or foreshortened, so that with their pallid expatriate masters, their fragile natives or husky young white colonials, they were like English public schools seen in a distorting mirror. They were assiduous and highly successful brainwashers. As the Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh said of its curriculum, its object was not merely the formation of character and the encouragement of manly pursuits, but the fostering among the boys of 'an active sense of their duty as loyal subjects'. Often the anti-intellectual prejudices of the lesser English schools were faithfully reproduced, as was the Spartan discipline: when a new headmaster turned up at Trinity College, Kandy, in Ceylon, he found 100 boys waiting to be caned as an opening duty.

From school, with luck, the chosen vessel went on to university—if not in England, then to one of the colonial universities, on British lines, then springing up elsewhere in the Empire. In India there were five, originally simply examining bodies, later full-blown teaching institutes. There, all too often, the system flagged: manly pursuits were neglected, and the sense of loyal duty often went awry. At best the Indian universities were simply crammers, at worst they were sordidly corrupt. Some Fellows of Bombay University could not sign their own names. Intellectually examinations were all that counted—socially, too. With a degree a young Indian could claim a higher dowry with his wife: an M.A. was worth substantially more than a B.A. Students who failed in their examinations commonly killed themselves, for as one of the Calcutta vernacular newspapers asked in 1897: 'What is a failed candidate? He is a doomed man! He is as doomed as a life convict. He knows he is not wanted in society.'

The British distrusted the product of this system, but their reasons were complex. On the one hand they saw him, perhaps, as an eventual threat to their own supremacy. On the other they were repelled by the spectacle of a familiar culture grafted on to an alien



root. And in these reactions, too, they were confused, because for the most part they did not think the indigenous cultures worth preserving. Macaulay, again, had set the pattern. To him the sciences, languages and literatures of the east were contemptible—'medical doctrines which would disgrace an English farrier, astronomy which would move laughter in the girls at an English boarding-school, history abounding with kings thirty feet high and reigns thirty thousand years long, and geography made up of seas of treacle and seas of butter'. Macaulay's prestige was towering still, and his influence lingered. For the most part the British could not take the subject cultures very seriously. In his travel book *From Sea to Sea* Kipling mischievously throws in a characteristic Anglo-Indian assessment of the city of Jaipur, that pink prodigy of Rajasthan: 'A station on the Rajputana-Makwa line, on the way to Bombay, where half an hour is allowed for dinner, and where there ought to be more protection from the sun.'

The British cheerfully appropriated, without malice, the monuments of conquered civilizations. Government House in Lahore was the former tomb of Muhammad Kasim Khan, cousin to the great Emperor Akhbar: the British Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab entertained his guests in a noble domed room that had once been the sarcophagus chamber. In Mandalay, the former royal capital of Burma, the private audience hall of the Burmese kings was occupied by the Upper Burma Club, while the throne room became the garrison church. A few weeks before the Jubilee a British punitive expedition attacked and burned the city of Benin, south-east of Lagos, a place of dreadfully bloodthirsty custom which had nevertheless produced the noblest sculptural art of negro Africa. The British were rightly horrified at the tales of barbarism the expedition sent home, with all their deliciously macabre embroideries of twitching corpses, skulls and witch-doctory, but their disregard for the art of the place was absolute. You would never guess, from the newspaper accounts of the affair, that anybody in Benin made anything skilful or beautiful at all. African history seemed to the British, as an Oxford professor once put it, no more than 'unrewarding gyrations of barbarous tribes in picturesque but unrewarding corners of the globe'.

This celestial detachment led to insensitivity. Often there creeps into the reports and debates of Empire a tone of frigidly impersonal lordliness, and the traditional British concern for the welfare of aboriginal peoples seems to be in abeyance. 'The advantage of limiting our rivalry to an Asiatic or African tribe,' Lord Salisbury once remarked dryly to the House of Lords about some imperial initiative, 'is one which those who are engaged in these enterprises appreciate very highly'—and thus, with a bloodless quip, he reduced the indigenous inhabitants of the tropical Empire to faintly comic insignificance. Lord Kimberley often wondered whether African disputes were worth taking seriously, since they mostly concerned 'barren deserts of places where white men cannot live, dotted with thinly scattered tribes who cannot be made to work'. The Government of India announced, during the famines of 1899, that 'while the duty of the Government is to save life, it is not bound to maintain the labouring population at its normal level of comfort'. It was this cold superiority that was most disliked about the British imperialists. They too often forgot the need to preserve face, common to all humiliated peoples, whatever their colour and culture.

But in an Empire so firmly based upon racial differences it was inevitable that people were sometimes treated as less than human. The British once coolly proposed to transfer several thousand Maltese to Cyprus; they habitually played the destinies of African tribes as bargaining counters in the diplomatic game. The superb Masai of the Kenya highlands were forcibly moved away from the line of the Uganda railway 'because they did not need railway facilities'—and white settlers did. The aboriginal prisoners shipped to the island of Rottnest, off the coast of south-west Australia, died in their hundreds—twenty-four in one day—because the British, unable to think of such convicts in altogether human terms, condemned them to a strange diet in an unfamiliar climate, their tribal customs ignored and their taboos unwittingly defied.

Among the settlers and planters of the tropical Empire there were harsher reasons for aloofness. The Empire had been built upon a



plenitude of native labour willing to do manual work, and not anxious for a share in Government. However liberal the theorists at home, or the career men of the administrative services, the settlers on the spot were determined to keep it thus. In the West Indies, in South Africa, in the plantation areas of India, in tropical Australia, men were already alarmed by the dangers of race. The old Caribbean sugar colonies had never recovered from the unhappy reconstruction period which had followed the emancipation of the slaves: segregation was so complete that when Anthony Trollope visited Jamaica the Governor's was the only table in the island where white men and black dined together. The catchwords of racial fear—'yellow peril', 'miscegenation', 'white civilization'—were already commonplace: there were 372 million people in the British Empire, but only about 50 million were white.

This was a dilemma never to be resolved: how to have your cake and eat it; how to induce your coloured labour to work for you, but not live among you; spend money, but not earn profits; mend the public highway, but not vote in the public elections. In the tropical Empire the pioneers, however humble their circumstances at home, soon came to regard themselves as a master race. The process was familiar, almost allegorical. Boldly the Briton had hacked his way through bush or jungle, to find some hospitable spot for settlement; and sooner or later the spindly natives crept furtively out of the trees in loincloths or tiger-skins; and presently some enterprising primitive, bolder than the rest, sidled into camp to examine a billy-can or wonder at a wagon-wheel; and before long two or three were there, helping with the dishes; and almost before the scrub was cleared the British had a labour force. Soon they began to feel that scrubbing pans or washing laundry was not proper to their dignity: in a year or two no white man, still less a white woman, would even consider manual labour: and so the gulf that already existed between the races, of colour, and climate, and religion, and custom, and language, and experience, was irremediably deepened by a rift of caste.

There was no pretence at equal pay for all races, except at the highest level in India. It did not often arise anyway, for the skills of the coloured people were mostly so rudimentary that all the

better-paid work was necessarily done by whites: but as time passed what had been logic became dogma. By the end of the century, in most parts of the tropical Empire, the difference in rates of pay was so great that a white man could not accept one of the simpler jobs without cutting himself off from his own fellows, and degrading himself alike in European and in native eyes.

It is curious to see how low in the social or technical scale these prejudices applied. In Canada, Indian pilots were employed on the St Lawrence River, but in India the Bombay and Calcutta pilots were all very British—important men with substantial salaries, some of them from old Indian Army families, bronzed and moustached in their blue uniforms, and often awe-inspiring to the less assertive masters of small ships from minor maritime nations. In the technical branches of the Indian railways the white cadre went down as far as signalmen and platelayers. A European mail driver of the East India Railway in the nineties was paid 370 rupees a month (rather more, incidentally, than the Viceroy's aide-de-camp): his Indian colleague, confined to shunting engines and petty branch lines, earned 20 rupees a month. In Johannesburg the newsboys of the *Transvaal Mining Argus* were all tough and gay little white urchins, wearing floppy hats like cricketers at English preparatory schools. In the West Indies a class of poor whites had, since the emancipation of slaves, replaced the black men in the most menial office jobs. In the Gold Coast, where a sizeable class of educated Africans existed, it had been decreed in 1893 that a third of the doctors should be Africans, but the system was soon abandoned—it was 'pretty clear to men of ordinary sense', Chamberlain himself commented, that British officers could not have confidence in native physicians.

The white inhabitants of Salisbury, in 1891, had sent a petition to the Administrator demanding that no further contracts should be given to Kaffirs while white artisans were unemployed: the Administrator accepted the argument at once, declaring that he 'fully recognized the prior claim for consideration of the white population'.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It was only in the colonies of southern Africa that a substantial British working class settled among a coloured majority: as they were the most obviously vulnerable of the imperialists, so in the end they proved the most intractable.

In most British colonies there was little hope of a coloured employee, however educated, becoming anything more than a junior clerk: sooner or later he was confronted by a defensive barrier which no amount of push or ability would enable him to surmount—the barrier of self-interest (which, having probably come from a society in which the hierarchical divisions were much more rigid than anything in Britain, he perfectly understood). The most notable exceptions occurred in West Africa, where a ghastly climate kept European numbers down, and many Africans held responsible commercial jobs.

In their older possessions the British were still able to depend upon Europeans for many of the services of life. In Calcutta, which the Empire had virtually created, there was a sizeable British *petite bourgeoisie*, down to English shop assistants in the more delicate departments of the big stores. The principal boarding-houses were those kept by Mrs Walters, Mrs Pell, Mrs Monk, Mrs Baily and Mrs Day—some of them Eurasian ladies, some authentic lodging-house British. There were two English lady doctors in the city, and at least six English tailors, besides dressmakers, opticians, photographers, hoteliers, house agents, dentists, chemists, lawyers, booksellers, jewellers and gunsmiths.<sup>1</sup> It was settlers, rather than transient rulers, who chiefly supported this expatriate Englishness. Settlers all over the Empire fought hard to keep their own little Englands intact, and were often at odds with the imperial authorities, whom they considered 'soft' on race. In 1883, when Lord Ripon

<sup>1</sup> Some survive, notably along Old Court House Street, where one or two jewellers and gunsmiths, with diamond rings in dusty showcases, and the gleam of gunracks among tiger-masks and horned heads, piquantly evoke imperial extravagances of long ago. Spence's Hotel, too, a favourite of the Victorians, thrives in air-conditioned modernity: it is claimed to be the oldest hotel in Asia, founded in 1830, and its telegraphic address is 'Homeliness'. All over India and Pakistan establishments still announce themselves in fading letters to be By Appointment to the Viceroy and Vicereine, and no imperial legacy lives on more strongly in the subcontinent than the tradition of the English boarding-house. Many of the smaller houses still bear the names of their old proprietors. Mrs Davis of Rawalpindi left her boarding-house to one of her male servants, but such was the commercial value of her name and sex that he adopted the professional pseudonym of *Miss Davis*, and prospered for many years.

was preparing a reform—the Ilbert Bill—which would give Indian judges the right to try European accused, the Assam tea-planters were so infuriated that they hatched a plot to kidnap the Viceroy, and opposition in Bengal was so intense that the Bill was drastically modified.<sup>1</sup>

During their Jubilee visit to London the Colonial Premiers discussed the free circulation of British subjects throughout the Empire, but they did not reach agreement. They knew that their electorates would never tolerate the free entry of Indians, Africans or Chinese into the temperate colonies. The Canadians had already passed their own legislation to prevent the immigration of Asians, and the Australians were even alarmed by the numbers of Lascar seamen on British ships putting into Australian ports. How did those digger troopers feel, one wonders, 5 feet 10½ inches and 38 inches round the chest, when they found themselves marching through the imperial capital with such a pack of brown, black, and yellow men?

## 8

A vassal could qualify for respect, if not for power or promotion, if he possessed certain specific qualities the British admired. East was East and West was West, and never the twain would meet—

*But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,  
When two strong men stand face to face, though they come from the  
ends of the earth!*

There were certain subject peoples who habitually showed these qualities to advantage, and were always favourites of their rulers. In particular the streak of romantic chivalry in the British, fortified perhaps by the immense popularity of Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, induced them to cherish a brave enemy. They admired the magnificent Zulus of Natal, who had fought with such lordly skill in the

<sup>1</sup> Nor was Ripon's attitude forgotten. When, in 1915, his statue was erected in Calcutta, it was financed entirely by Indian subscription—no European subscribed.

wars of the 1870s, and the chivalrous Maori of New Zealand—'Keep your heads down, Sikkitifif', came a voice across the battlefield to the 65th Regiment, during one engagement with those stalwart enemies, 'we're going to fire!'<sup>1</sup> They respected the manlier Indian tribes of Canada, and liked the strapping Sudanese, whose killing of General Gordon had been despicable indeed, but whose soldierly gifts surely showed that a Christian education would redeem them.<sup>2</sup> They had an overwhelming affection for the tough little mountain peoples of the Himalaya, and the fighting tribesmen of the Punjab—those swaggering Sikhs in turbans and whiskers, those irrepressible Pathans and Afridis of the North-West Frontier, rogues always worth the fighting, whose Nelsonic dash and quixotic generosity were all the British liked to imagine in themselves.

The British recognized the strength of the Chinese. Even in Australia, Baron von Hübner reported, the Chinese were admitted to be 'the best gardeners, the best agricultural labourers, the best workmen of every sort, the best cooks and the most honest and law-abiding people'. Kipling was astonished, when he first visited Singapore, at the extent to which the Chinese ran the colony—yet 'England is by the uninformed supposed to own the island'. The British worked well with the Parsees of Bombay, Zoroastrians of great business acumen who seemed to think more or less in the European manner, and were the first natives of India to play cricket: Parsees had even built ships for the Royal Navy, and so impregnable

<sup>1</sup> Above the harbour of Tauranga, in the North Island of New Zealand, are buried the British dead of the battle of Gate Pa, one of the early engagements of the Maori wars. Among them there lies a Maori chieftain, Rawiri Puhiraki, whose epitaph says of him that he gave drink to the enemy wounded, protected the unarmed and respected the dead. 'The seeds of better feeling thus sown on the battlefields have since borne ample fruit.'

<sup>2</sup> In 1898, when he had completed the conquest of the Sudan, Kitchener tried to provide it by raising funds for Gordon College, Khartoum. He soon got bored with the project, but Kipling celebrated it with an invocation to the Sudanese themselves:

*Go, and carry your shoes in your hand, and bow your head on your breast,  
For he who did not slay you in sport, he will not teach you in jest.*

The college survived nevertheless, and renamed Khartoum University is today the chief centre of higher education in the Sudan.

was their social eminence in Bombay that the British themselves found it hard to buy houses on the Ridge at Malabar Hill, where the Parsee patricians lived. The Burghers of Ceylon, half-caste Dutch left behind by a previous Empire, were liked for their solid, unassuming good sense. In South Africa and Canada the British much respected the German, Slav and Scandinavian communities which had also settled there under the Flag: the only numerous marriages between Britons and subjects of other races were those with the Swedes and Ukrainians of western Canada.

Of course they also cultivated useful allies. In India they were generally friendly with the princely caste, if only because its members were grand, rich, powerful and often educated in England. They were sometimes overawed, indeed, by the horsy opulence of the Rajahs, who carried Englishness to unapproachable extremes: but they generally preferred Muslim to Hindu princes, because the Muslim creed offered a code of conduct that seemed not so very far from their own ideal of Godly cleanliness and courage. Feudatories of this kind were often buttered up with high-sounding imperial decorations, Grand Crosses of the Star of India, Victorian Orders or Orders of St Michael and St George, and were honoured guests at governors' tables, polo matches and jubilee processions. In the field the anglophile subject was often an irritation: in England he was always fêted, and the most popular visitor to London that summer, one of the very few whose faces were generally recognized, was Wilfrid Laurier, the conciliatory French Canadian Prime Minister of Canada.

Clearly the British responded most warmly to what they would think of as Nordic qualities. In several parts of the Empire they also worked closely with Jews. In South Africa Jewish capitalists and speculators were eager allies of the British in their bid for the Transvaal goldfields, and in India one of the most celebrated of Anglo-Indian families sprang from the Persian-Jewish clan of the Sassoons, great men in Bombay: in the very heart of the Poona cantonment, just down the road from the club and the Anglican church, stood the high pinnacled tomb of David Sassoon, its sarcophagus elaborately carved by Samuel of Sydney Street, Mile End Road, with the crest of the Sassoons at its feet, and the Poona

synagogue respectfully outside the window. The Jews of other countries remained Jews, observed the *Jewish Chronicle* apropos of the Jubilee celebrations. The Jews of the British Empire became true Englishmen.

## 9

On the banks of the Hooghly River in Calcutta a grand and curious monument stood, across the road from the equestrian statue of Lord Napier, and within sight of Fort William's glowering redoubts. It was an oblong pavilion of Ionic columns, a little thicket of pillars above a jetty, severely classical in origin, but given an oriental flourish by its shaded profusion of columns. Behind it the ships steamed up and down the river, and passengers arriving at Calcutta sometimes disembarked at its landing-stage, to take a gharry into the city. In a capital notable for its monuments to generals, pro-consuls, engineers and great administrators, many people assumed this memorial, too, to honour some man of imperial steel. In fact Prinsep's Ghat commemorated the young Anglo-Indian who, in the 1830s, first translated the rock edicts of Asoka: James Prinsep, who died in his forty-first year after twenty-two years in the Indian service.

It would be unfair to end a chapter about British racial attitudes with the implication that all was arrogance or condescension. Even in that glaring noon of Empire, much generosity and respect still gave nobility to the Pax Britannica. We have been speaking of the general: the particular was often far more attractive. The Liberal party was out of power, but the liberal instinct was still alive, and the higher motives of the imperialists were not all humbug. The Colonial Office in London consistently stood for fair play towards the subject races, often against bitter criticism from white men on the spot. The Indian Civil Service still recruited men of compassionate integrity—there were even a few multi-racial clubs in India. The liberal intelligentsia fought every overbearing gesture with honourable zeal, and there were still men of all political parties, undazzled by the flash of the New Imperialism, who thought of the Empire as a trust—support for settlers in distant lands,

protection for innocent primitives, a guarantee of honest government.

Countless individual acts of kindness had entered the legends of Empire. In Australia aborigines still remembered how Sir George Grey, when Governor of South Australia, had been recognized by an old woman of the Bibbulmun tribe as the spirit of her dead son, and had gently and smilingly allowed her to embrace him crooning the words, '*Boonoo, Boonoo! Bala ngan-ya Kooling!*'—'It is true, it is true, he is my son!'<sup>1</sup> In the Punjab a sect called the Nikalsaini actually worshipped the memory of John Nicholson, 'the Lion of the Punjab', one of the great men of the North-West Frontier before the Mutiny. If few such reputations were being established at our particular moment of the imperial history, at least there lay beneath the cant and gasconade older and gentler traditions of Empire. Queen Victoria herself was their living symbol, and stood recognizably in the line of Wilberforce and Livingstone, maternally caring for the coloured peoples. She detested the Boers, because they were so cruel to black Africans. She thought it unfair that in the casualty lists of frontier wars British soldiers were named, but seldom natives. She very much wished the Zulus could be allies rather than enemies—not only were they honest, merry and brave, but they did not smoke. She often felt for the Queen's coloured enemies as much as she did for the Queen's white men. She kept an eagle eye on Kitchener's armies that year, as they fought their revengeful way up the Nile,<sup>2</sup> and when she was once told that the fierce Afridis were again about to attack her soldiers on the North-West Frontier of India, her first response was to wonder

<sup>1</sup> Grey (1812-98), who went on to be both Governor and Prime Minister of New Zealand, was not so successful with white settlers—Matthew Arnold's brother Tom, then living in New Zealand, noted that there was 'something less manly about him than I expected'. In life he constantly antagonized them, and in death he bequeathed them a fateful phrase of his own invention: 'One Man One Vote'.

<sup>2</sup> But she was unable to prevent, in the following year, the barbaric destruction of the tomb of the Mahdi, whose bones were thrown into the Nile, and whose skull Kitchener proposed to send to the Royal College of Surgeons to be exhibited with Napoleon's intestines. The Queen thought this medieval—after all, the Mahdi 'was a man of a certain importance'—and in the end the skull was secretly buried by night at Wadi Halfa.

why: 'I fear that the poor people are suffering from the necessity of supplying horses and ponies and cattle to us . . . which comes heavily upon them after their famine and plague.'

She was an outspoken admirer of Indian art, too—some might say ostentatious, for she had one room at Osborne fitted out entirely as a Durbar Room, with murals by Rudyard Kipling's father. Despite the disregard for Asian and African cultures which was ingrained in the nature of British imperialism, there were always individuals to cherish the conquered civilizations: Prinsep's Ghat was paid for by public subscription among the British of Calcutta. It was not a fault of the British to destroy alien cultures for the sake of mere uniformity. Their innate respect for tradition, bred by so many centuries of continuity at home, obliged them to tolerate most native ways, unless—like human sacrifice, suttee, or infanticide—such ways offended the conscience even of the humanist. Throughout the British presence overseas there had been scholars and artists eagerly devoted to the laws, the religions, the art, the folk-lore of the east. Once, when Lord Napier invaded Ethiopia with an avenging army in 1867, the British deliberately tried to emulate Napoleon, attaching savants of several specialities to their armies, and producing the most thorough studies till then of the Abyssinian civilization—at least 500 precious manuscripts were taken home to England.<sup>1</sup> The Ajanta Caves, those prodigies of Buddhist art, were first appreciated in modern times by British soldiers of the Indian Army,<sup>2</sup> and it was the British Archaeological Department of Ceylon which rescued from the jungle the stupendous temples of Anuradhapura. The officers' mess of Queen Victoria's Own Corps of Guides, perched on a high ridge at Mardan, near the Afghan frontier, was decorated with a remarkable series of Graeco-Buddhist sculptures, reminders of Alexander's conquests in those regions: they had been found during the digging of the Swat Canal, and were lovingly preserved by the soldiery.

<sup>1</sup> Among the other loot was the gold crown of the Emperor Theodore. It remained in England until the Emperor Haile Selassie was exiled there in 1936, when King George V gave it back to him.

<sup>2</sup> Though Indians claim the British later used the Ajanta statuary for target practice.

For it was not viciousness, nor even simply conceit, that fostered the general aloofness of the British. It was partly a sense of ordained separateness, partly the natural reserve of islanders, and partly no doubt the awkwardness people feel when they do not understand a foreign caper, or more especially do not speak a foreign language. Many a British official, his life spent in the imperial territories, learnt to love his charges with a passionate sincerity—even Tommy Atkins, Alfred Milner wrote from Cairo in 1893, regarded the Sudanese 'with half-amused, half-admiring and inoffensively patronizing affection'. Sometimes the sympathy was so complete that the imperialist genuinely thought himself a son of the country, like those many colonial administrators who could never bear to leave, but settled upon their retirement in cottages called *Mon Repos* or *Journey's End*, in fragrant alcoves of Darjeeling or beside the Pyramids road. 'Ah India, my country, my country!' Kipling had cried, in the middle of a travel essay, and there were many Britons to whom the whole vast panoply of Empire really was a community, multi-coloured, inconceivably dispersed, yet still a brotherhood of sorts, in which it was a man's job to encourage the backward, comfort the neglected and honour the Queen. A faint irony sometimes salted these high-minded attitudes, as the Briton considered how extraordinarily obtuse some of his brothers were, but in such men it was not contemptuous, only wry. This is how a balladeer calling himself Brer Rabbit, writing in *The Pioneer* of Allahabad that year, described a leave in Europe:

*I bided me north to Como where the lake is azure blue,  
Where you loaf about on steamers quite content with naught to do.  
But upon the mountainside I saw a Sadr Kamungo  
With patwaris and the Khasras all for me to 'janch karo'.*

*Then I took a train for Avignon, but gazing from the car  
I perceived upon the platform my old friend the chaukidar.  
The 'brave gendarme' had vanished, the 'gorait' was in his place,  
With his 'waradat ka notbuk' and a grin upon his face.*

## Caste

*Next I flew across to Monaco in Maxim's new machine—  
After all these misadventures for a gamble I felt keen  
But a sub-inspector met me with a smile upon his face—  
He'd 'chalaned' 2,000 gamblers, and I'd got to try the case!*

*I said 'Das roz tak Hawalat' and off to Naples fled  
(That I had not jurisdiction never came into my head)  
But in 'Napoli' that's 'bella' but can beat Cologne for smells  
A Vaccinator asked me to inspect his cleaned out wells.<sup>1</sup>*

In Ceylon they even had Natives playing cricket for the colony, and in 1894 Alan Raffel took 14 for 97 against the visiting M.C.C. Arrogance, indeed!

## 11

Steevens's unspeakable conceit might speak for the New Imperialism, as it spoke for the *Daily Mail*: 'This sort of creature has to be ruled, for his good and our own.' An older conception of Empire, and one likely to prove more resilient in the end, had been expressed seventy years before, by Stamford Raffles, the founder of Singapore, and still had its adherents throughout the Pax Britannica: 'Let it still be the boast of Britain to write her name in characters of light; let her not be remembered as the tempest whose course was desolate, but as the gale of spring reviving the slumbering seeds of mind and calling them to life from the winter of ignorance and oppression. If the time shall come when her empire shall have passed away,

<sup>1</sup> At Como this infatuated servant of the Raj thought he saw a headquarters revenue official (*Sadr Kanungo*), with his clerks, bringing the land ownership records to be inspected; at Avignon the spectre of an Indian watchman, holding his incident notebook, grinned cheerfully at him on the railway station; at Monaco he ordered ten days in the lock-up (*das roz tak bawalat*) for the prosecuted gamblers. 'Maxim's new machine' was presumably the steam-driven flying machine which, in 1894, Hiram Maxim persuaded to rise a few inches from the ground at Bexley in Kent. Maxim (1840-1916), a British-naturalized American, was an imperial figure himself, for his machine-gun was the standard automatic weapon of the British Army: he was knighted in 1901.

## Caste

these monuments will endure when her triumphs shall have become an empty name.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> And when Kipling spoke of those 'lesser breeds', if we are to believe George Orwell, it was not the coloured peoples that he meant. The phrase, Orwell thought, 'refers almost certainly to the Germans, and especially the pan-German writers, who are "without the Law" in the sense of being lawless'. Certainly in the context of the verse, from the poem *Recessional*, it is hard to see how Kipling could have had powerless subject peoples in mind:

*If, drunk with sight of power, we loose  
Wild tongues that have not Thee in awe,  
Such boastings as the Gentiles use,  
Or lesser breeds without the Law—  
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,  
Lest we forget—lest we forget!*