

Morris. Pax Britannica

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Imperial Effects

*In our Museum galleries
Today I lingered o'er the prize
Dead Greece vouchsafes to living eyes—
Her Art forever in fresh wise*

*From hour to hour rejoicing me.
Sighing I turned at last to win
Once more the London dirt and din;
And as I made the swing-door spin
And issued, they were hoisting in
A winged beast from Nineveh.*

*And as I turned, my sense half shut
Still saw the crowds of curb and rut
Go past as marshalled to the strut
Of ranks in gypsum quaintly cut.*

*It seemed in one same pageantry
They followed forms which had been erst:
To pass, till on my sight should burst
That future of the best or worst
When some may question which was first,
Of London or of Nineveh.*

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

PASSPORTS' (said Baedeker, 1887): 'These documents are not necessary in England, though sometimes useful in procuring delivery of registered and *poste restante* letters. A *visa* is quite needless.'

With such an indulgent ease did England admit her visitors in those days, and the foreigner from more shuttered and suspicious States must have felt he was entering an imperially spacious kingdom. Once inside, however, he would find surprisingly little physical evidence that this was an imperial kingdom at all. The only two imperial events mentioned in Herr Baedeker's *Outline of English History* are 'Foundation of the East India Company' and 'Canada Taken from the French'. His bibliography includes no book about the Empire, and even his separate volume on London lists the great imperial offices only *en passant*, and does not bother to mention, for instance, that the laws passed by the House of Commons might govern the affairs of a couple of hundred million people who had never set foot on English soil.

The imperial venture had not much marked the British. They were still far more an island than an imperial race. If the visitor found his way to one of Frith's immense genre pictures—*Derby Day*, *The Railway Station*, or *Ramsgate Sands*—which were consciously intended to be epitomes of the time, he would find that nothing imperial showed at all (unless you count ostrich feathers—up to nine guineas a fan in 1897): not a bronzed face, not a blackamoor page, not even a Maharajah instructing his jockey.¹ In its most penetrating degree

¹ W. P. Frith (1819–1909) had long endured the sneers of the *avant-garde*, but the public loved his work, and it was lavishly reproduced. I have a strong fellow-feeling for a craftsman who said of his most successful work, *Derby Day*, that 'the acrobats, the nigger minstrels, gypsy fortune tellers, to say nothing of carriages filled with pretty women, together with the sporting element, seemed to offer abundant material for the line of art to which I felt obliged—in the absence of higher gifts—to devote myself'.

British imperialism had been active for hardly more than a decade: in a kingdom moulded by a thousand years of historical continuity, it was only paint on the façade.

2

Let us ourselves, guide in hand, wander around London, this heart of the world, and see how much imperial gilding shines on its ancient structure. Then as now it was the city of all cities, giving to its visitors a Shakespearean sense of the universal—as if all the foibles, glories, riches and miseries of the human condition were concentrated there. Greater in area and population than any other capital, it lay there vast and blackened along the Thames, the smoke of ships and factories swirling perpetually among its towers. More often than not its skies were obscured with grey cloud, and the river flowed through it sluggishly, thick with filth. Far around the capital the Victorian suburbs extended, from slum to respectable terrace to detached villa, mile after mile into the blighted countryside: in the centre, lapped by the most rollicking night life in Europe, the offices of State rose grave and grey, Gothically pinnacled, and attended by that arcane shrine of the English, Westminster Abbey.

We are in the heart of the British Empire. The obvious place to start our inspection is Thomas Cook's in Ludgate Circus: but it is disappointing to find that its doorman, who has until recently worn a kind of white topee, intended to evoke the liveliest East-of-Suez images, has already reverted to a plain blue cap, after 'prolonged and embarrassed protests' from the staff. The great monuments of London are hardly less reticent about their imperial connections. In the Tower they show us a few old guns from Aden. In St Paul's and Westminster Abbey a handful of imperial heroes, Gordon, Henry Lawrence, Livingstone, Havelock, are altogether swamped by the mass of kings and queens, legislators, scientists, philanthropists, artists, or soldiers and sailors made celebrated by long centuries of war in Europe. Perhaps as we wander down Whitehall we may see one or two authentic men of Empire, sunburnt young men looking a little awkward in their stiff white collars, or shuffling with portentous wheeze up the steps of the India Office: but the imperial offices

are embedded indistinguishably in the warren of Whitehall, and nobody seems to know which is which. No Dyaks or Zaptiehs mount guard outside St James's Palace; no pagoda roofs or African caryatids stand in imperial symbol; among all the bright frescoes of the Houses of Parliament we shall find only one with an imperial motif—and that concerned with seventeenth-century India.

A few deliberately imperial institutions may be pointed out to us. The Imperial Institute in South Kensington is a showcase of Empire, partly an exhibition of raw materials and manufactures, partly a club for people interested in imperial affairs, partly a commercial bureau—*rich in symbol and ornament*, Tennyson had written of it, *which may speak to the centuries*: but it is too big, or too solemn, for the available enthusiasm, and if we venture through its elaborate halls, towered and vaulted like an Indian railway station, we shall find it depressingly echoing and deserted. At the Victoria and Albert Museum we shall see the collection of Indian art first assembled by the East India Company, but its rooms, too, are unlikely to be overcrowded, and if any members of the public are showing a marked interest in anything, they are sure to be looking at Tipu Sultan's famous Tiger-Man-Organ, an ingenious toy which represents an Indian tiger eating an Englishman, the tiger growling and the sahib feebly gurgling from an interior mechanism. If we are male, and well introduced, we may look in at the Oriental Club, originally for 'noblemen and gentlemen associated with the administration of our Eastern Empire'. We may be invited to the East India Club, where the talk is all of pigsticking and well-remembered subhadars, or even attend a session of the Omar Khayyam Club, dedicated to the pleasures of oriental literature, whose membership is limited to fifty-nine because the FitzGerald translation was published in 1859.¹

Observe, as we walk down Victoria Street, the new offices of the several Colonial Agents, New South Wales, Victoria, the Dominion of Canada, all advertising their opportunities in window-posters,

¹ Imperial preoccupations, and the taste for exotica that accompanied the New Imperialism, certainly contributed to the running success of the English *Rubaiyat*, but Edward FitzGerald himself (1809–83) had nothing imperialist to his make-up, and lived almost his entire life as a kind of recluse in Suffolk.

and pointing big cardboard fingers towards their Immigration Offices. Here are the Albany Rooms, much frequented by people from the Cape and Rhodesia (the Count de la Panouse, 'sang bleu and a great gentleman', had met his wife Billy there—she was one of the housemaids). Here is the Royal Academy, that unchallengeable arbiter of colonial taste, among whose admired exhibits, in the summer show of 1897, is *A Wee Rhodesian*, by Ralph Peacock, in which a very small, very white baby lies in the arms of a very black smiling houseboy, against a background of tropical blossom. The bookshops of the capital are well stocked with imperialist matter, recent reprints of Dilke, Seeley and Marcus Clarke, Henty and Kipling everywhere, Baden-Powell defying the Salisbury reviewers, Slatin Pasha's popular *Fire and Sword*, just off the presses and dedicated to the Queen-Empress. The British Museum shows surprisingly little in the way of imperial loot, but its library, we are assured, has a right to a copy of every book published anywhere in the Empire.

Here and there among the billboards, the brass plates, the advertisements plastered across the face of London, in the backs of guide-books thumbed through after luncheon, in prospectuses left lying around the club smoking-room, are hints of the existence of those immense possessions in the sunshine. *The Homeward Mail* is on sale at a few bookstalls—it comes out weekly to coincide with the arrival of the Indian mail—and so is *The British Australasian* (incorporating the *Anglo-New-Zealander*). Thresher and Glenney are advertising a new Jungra cloth shooting-suit ('impervious to thorn and spear grass'—*vide The Field*). Bessom and Co., with their depots in Poona and Calcutta, assure us that their Reeds for Military Bands are the *only* ones for use in tropical climates, and L. Blankenstein and Co. announce themselves, with a honky-tonk panache, as Colonial Pianoforte Manufacturers. Rose's Lime Juice get their juices from the Finest Lime Plantations in the World, at Roseau, Dominica; Ship and Turtle Ltd, of Leadenhall Street, make their soups from West Indian Live Turtle Only. In premises at 22 Oxford Street are Messrs Ardeshir and Byramji, whose head office is in Hummum Street, Bombay, and down the road Henry Heath boasts that his Shikaree Tropical Hat is now patronized by nine royal families. Newman

Newman the paint people offer a special selection of slow-drying water-colours for hot climates. It is satisfactory for imperialists to know that 'thousands who tried SALADA Ceylon tea as an experiment now use it altogether, and could not be induced to go back to the commonplace adulterated Teas of China and Japan'.

Up alleys off the Strand, among the bank signs of the City, around the corner from the India Office, are the Colonial Merchants, the Colonial Bankers, the Colonial Exchanges. Henry S. King, the East India Agents in Pall Mall, will book you servants in India. Grindlays in Parliament Square will advise you on Colonial Bonds. The Chartered Bank will issue you a draft on their branches in Rangoon or Hong Kong. The National Bank of India in Threadneedle Street will assume full responsibility for the collection of Indian pensions. William Watson's at Waterloo Place will ship wine at wholesale prices to Mauritius. The Union Line is only too anxious to convey you to the Gold and Diamond Fields of South Africa, but a huge placard above 21 Cockspur Street brags that THE RICHEST GOLD AND SILVER MINES ARE TO BE FOUND IN BRITISH COLUMBIA AND THE CANADIAN KOOTENAI—APPLY WITHIN.

3

And if, like every other visitor, we finally strolled down the Mall, to end up with our noses poking through the railings of Buckingham Palace, as the guardsmen stamped through their sentry-go with little clouds of white clay billowing from their belts—then we might feel that we really were in an imperial presence at last. The trappings of the British Crown did suggest something bigger than an offshore island, and in the years since Victoria's promotion to Queen-Empress the pageantry of her throne had been injected with imperial symbols. She herself, though she thought of England as a European country, had a taste that way. She loved signing herself V.R. & I.—Victoria Regina et Imperatrix—and much enjoyed entertaining exotic imperial visitors at Windsor or Buckingham Palace ('One does not really notice it,' she once observed, contemplating the fact that a visiting group of Red Indians, war-painted

and encrusted with beads, were in fact naked to the waist). On her favourite walking-stick, said to be made from a branch of Charles II's oak, was fixed a little Indian idol, part of the loot of Seringapatam when that Mysore fortress was taken by Lord Cornwallis in 1792. She it was who popularized the pink and yellow glassware, ornamented with lily patterns of vaguely oriental outline, which became known as Queen's Burmese: and she gave her title, too, to Her Majesty's Blend, a mixture of Indian and Ceylon teas prepared for her by Ridgeway's in the days when the imperial teas were challenging China tea for popularity. Kashmir shawls, all the rage in 1897, were chiefly famous because each year the Queen-Empress graciously accepted one from the Maharajah of Kashmir.

Victoria liked to greet her Indian guests in halting Hindustani, and her attachment to her Indian clerk, the Munshi, who succeeded the ghillie John Brown in her affections, edged towards the scandalous—she once asked her Viceroy in India to obtain a grant of land for him at Agra, and sometimes she even allowed him to answer letters for her. At the big dinner in Buckingham Palace on the eve of her Jubilee she wore a dress embroidered in gold that had been specially worked in India ('dreadfully hot'). Her Ministers knew that the old lady's sharp experienced eyes were focused on any imperial episode—Salisbury himself once had to apologize for calling Indians black men. A shimmer of imperial consequence hung around Victoria's throne, and thus by osmosis around the purlieus of her palace: from the large white donkey which Lord Wolseley had sent her from Egypt (white donkeys were royal there) to the Koh-i-Noor diamond, a legendary wonder of the East since the fourteenth century, which was taken by the British from Ranjit Singh the Sikh, and was now the splendour of the Queen's crown. Whoever possessed the Koh-i-Noor, ran the legend, possessed India: just the kind of legend Queen Victoria liked.

4

The New Imperialism was too new, and too sudden, to have changed the look of London. The public had only recently acquired its passionate interest in Empire, and Waterloo and Trafalgar still

meant far more than any number of far frontier skirmishes. The Imperial Jubilee was mostly froth, whipped up for the occasion by Press and politicians.

Yet in quieter colours, not to be observed by the casual visitor, the imperial experience did form a strand in the national tapestry. Among the middle classes especially thousands of families cherished imperial souvenirs, or aspired to imperial décors: Benares brass and trinkets from the Gold Coast, lengths of Indian silk waiting to be made up, a line of ebony elephants on the mantelpiece, a group of suntanned officers posed in careful asymmetry outside a sun-bleached bungalow, coloured shells from the orient cemented to a summer-house.¹ In many a sewing desk were kept young Harry's letters, sent home faithfully month by month, telling dear Mama and the girls all about last week's soiree at Government House, and the trouble he was having choosing curtain materials for the bungalow, and what a ripping time he had upcountry, and affectionate regards to dear Papa from their Ever-Loving Son.

Here we may eavesdrop, through the study door, upon Uncle James explaining to his brother the rector just how much money young Bob will need, if he really wishes to enter the Indian Army—he can live on his pay in a Mountain Battery, perhaps, but he must realize that the Cavalry would be *quite* beyond his means. Here dear little Miss Cartwright, who has always seemed so unlikely a spinster, confides in us at last, while we await the gentlemen after dinner, that were it not for a certain person she had been, well *particularly* fond of—in the Mutiny—he was buried, she believed, somewhere near Meerut—but there, all that was long ago, and we must tell her all *our* news. . . .

This house seems to be African all over, prints of kraals and jungle caravans, masks and shields and monkey-skins; this seems to smell faintly of spices or perhaps incenses, and a tinkle of temple bells comes from its garden, near the bird-table, and those gourds on the butler's tray have a Polynesian, or Malayan, look to them—

¹ At least one great fortune was based upon this finicky enthusiasm. Marcus Samuel (1853–1927) began as an importer of oriental shells, extended his trade to rice and curios, became interested in petroleum and called his oil company, founded in 1897, after his original commodity: Shell.

Burma Forestry, do you think, or could he have been British Guiana? And sometimes, in the list of recent wills in *The Times*, there appears a name dimly and not always enthusiastically remembered from the past—'Great God, that's Hawkins the rubber man, a perfect pest, treated his natives like dirt and never stopped complaining about port dues—eighty thousand he left, bless my soul—a perfect blackguard.'

5

Half without knowing it, the British had picked up thousands of words from their subject peoples, and enriched their own language with them. A few were South African Dutch (*laager, veldt, trek*) and at least one was Red Indian—*toboggan*: but most of them came to England out of the East. Perhaps the most delightful imperial book of all was *Hobson-Jobson*, a dictionary of Anglo-Indian words and phrases compiled by Sir Henry Yule in the 1880s.¹ There were at least sixteen other Anglo-Indian glossaries, but this instantly became the most famous, and there was no Englishman with Indian connections who would not know what you meant, if you said half a minute, I'll look it up in *Hobson-Jobson*.

'Considering the long intercourse with India,' wrote Arthur Burnell, who expanded the book after Yule's death, 'it is noteworthy that the additions which have thus accrued to the English language are, from the intellectual standpoint, of no intrinsic value. Nearly all the borrowed words refer to material facts . . . and do not represent new ideas.' This was perhaps because so few Englishmen, under the influence of Macaulay and his school, had taken the native civilizations seriously: the word *Hobson-Jobson* itself, a flip-pant Anglo-Indianism for any sort of native festivity, was taken from the terrible wailing cry of the Shia Muslims—*Ya Hussein, Ya Hassan!*—when they grieve for the death of Ali's sons at Karbala.

¹ Nobody could be much more Anglo-Indian than Yule (1820–89). The son of an East India Company soldier, he served in the Bengal Engineers and married first the daughter of a Bengal civilian and second the daughter of an Anglo-Indian general. He transferred to the Indian political service, and when he came home to England in 1875 was appointed to the Council of India. One of his brothers became British Resident at Hyderabad, the other was killed while commanding the 9th Lancers in the Indian Mutiny.

Many Anglo-Indian words—caste, cuspidor, mosquito—had been inherited by the British from their Portuguese predecessors in the East. When the planter bawled '*Boy!*' sending an indignant shiver down the spine of the visiting liberal, who was generally not quite outraged enough, all the same, to forgo his chota-peg for his principles—when that hunting-cry of sahibs went up in the club, the thirsty imperialist was really only shouting, as the Portuguese had before him, '*Bhoi!*'—the name of a Hindu caste of palanquin- and umbrella-bearers. *Char*, the British soldier's name for tea, reached the army via the East India Company, but really originated in Japan, where the early British merchant venturers transcribed the Japanese word for tea as *tcha*. Rickshaw came via India from Japan, too, and was originally *jin-ri-ki-sha*—'man-force-car', the name the Japanese gave to a conveyance invented for them by an ingenious missionary, W. Goble, about 1870. The word gymkhana appears to have been coined by the British in Bombay, and was based upon the Hindustani *gend-khana* or ball-house—what the Indians called an English squash court. The word catamaran was simply the Tamil for 'tied trees', and the original Juggernaut was Krishna, the eighth avatar of Vishnu, who was dragged in hideous image through the streets of Puri in Orissa, its devotees throwing themselves beneath its wheels to be crushed. British soldiers in India had their own cheerful use of Hindustani. A thief was a loose-wallah, a nail-wallah was a manicurist, the Good Conduct Medal ('for 20 years of undetected crime') was called the Rooty Gong, meaning the Bread-and-Butter Medal. Old India hands pride themselves on their ability to 'sling the crab-bat'—swear in the vernacular.

An astonishing number of Indian words had slipped into the language without anybody much noticing, as the following self-conscious sentence shows: 'Returning to the *bungalow* through the *jungle*, she threw her *calico* bonnet on to the *teak* table, put on her *gingham* apron and slipped into a pair of *sandals*. There was the tea-*caddy* to fill, the *chutney* to prepare for the *curry*, *pepper* and *cheroots* to order from the *bazaar*—she would give the boy a *chit*. The children were out in the *dinghy*, and their *khaki dungarees* were sure to be wet. She needed a *shampoo*, she still had to mend Tom's *pyjamas*, and she

Imperial Effects

never had finished those *chintz* hangings for the *veranda*. Ah well! she didn't really give a *dam*, and putting a *shawl* around her shoulders, she poured herself a *punch*.¹

A little slang had come bouncing back to Britain from the Antipodes—'up a gum tree', for instance—and perhaps the oddest adaptation of all was *cooe*! which was originally the signal-cry of Australian aborigines, imitative perhaps of the dingo, perhaps of the wonga pigeon, but was by the nineties the habitual call of the Kensington Garden nannies, when they wished to recall recalcitrant charges from the Round Pond—'keep within *cooe*, dear', they used to say, as they settled for a gossip on the bench. Charles Thatcher, the Australian poet, once wrote a poem about a digger who had made his fortune in Australia and brought his wife to London, leaving her at 'Hodge and Lowman's splendid shop' while he strolled down the street:

*She laid out fourteen pounds or more
And the shopman saw her to the door.
Down Regent Street she cast her eye,
But his old blue shirt she couldn't spy.*

*Says the shopman he's gone, I do declare,
Will you step inside and take a chair?
Oh no! I'll find him soon, says she,
And she puts up her hand and cries Cooe!*

*At this extraordinary cry
He ran up in the twinkling of an eye
And to the wondering crowd did say,
That slews you, and then they toddled away.*

6

In 1882 there appeared in the lists of English cat breeds an elegant and patrician new-comer called the Abyssinian. Its genesis was mysterious. Cynics were of the opinion that it was not Abyssinian

¹ She sounds a disagreeable woman, but she was not really cursing, nor am I bowdlerizing her soliloquy: a *dam* was a small Indian coin, as Wellington knew when he popularized the phrase 'a twopenny dam'.

Imperial Effects

at all, but only a rarified British tabby, and some people preferred to call the breed the British Tick or the Bunny Cat. The truth seems to be, though, that this beautiful creature was first brought to Britain by soldiers returning from Lord Napier's expedition to Ethiopia in 1867. The troops had passed near the ancient Ethiopian capital of Axum, where numbers of sacred cats were kept as acolytes to the cathedral of St Mary, and it is likely that some enterprising fancier whisked one into his kit-bag and shipped it, Amharically mewling, home.¹

Exotic animals had traditionally figured in the trains of conquerors, and in the second half of the nineteenth century the zoos and private collections of Britain had been wonderfully enlivened by spoils of Empire. Within the confines of the Pax Britannica almost all zoological regions were represented. Every living kangaroo was born a British subject. So was every kiwi, every koala, every duck-billed platypus—and every Dodo, if any sad survivor still lurked in the forests of Mauritius. There were British tapirs and British okapis, and even the giant panda was almost within a British sphere of influence.²

The London Zoo was accordingly much the best in the world, and possessed a grander collection of weird living trophies than ever pranced in a triumph of the Romans. Lions, tigers, monkeys, snakes, elephants, rare bats and unimaginable birds were sent home to London by every expedition, spluttering and spitting in their crates, and whenever a royal personage visited some tropical possession he came home with a little menagerie of his own. When the Prince of Wales returned from a visit to India in 1876 the cruiser *Raleigh* accompanied the royal yacht with a cargo of two tigers (Moody and Sankey), a leopard (Jummoo), and large numbers of smaller animals and birds: as the royal squadron steamed up the Solent, to the cheers of crowds lining the shore, this collection of animals howled in response to the signal guns, and on each paddle-

¹ There are still sacred cats at Axum, and their character is recognizably akin to that of the English Abyssinian—which is now popularly supposed in the cat fancy to be descended from the mummified cats of ancient Egypt.

² Nothing symbolized the end of Empire more poignantly than the announcement, with the withdrawal from Uganda in 1962, that there were no more British gorillas.

box of the royal yacht itself there was to be seen standing an Indian elephant.

7

A shifting population of colonials moved through London. The white colonials were unobtrusive. The dialects of England were so varied then, and the impress of colonial origin was generally so recent, that an Australian, a Canadian or a South African could often merge into English life unremarked. Numbers of Australians and New Zealanders still came to England to be educated: many Englishmen who had spent half a lifetime in the colonies came home in the end to die. It was difficult still to know just where a colonial began and an Englishman ended. All carried the same passport, and while many British people thought of the self-governing colonies as extensions of the Mother Land, many colonials thought of themselves simply as Britons overseas.

People from the coloured empire were rarer and mostly grander. The coloured servant, once so common in England, was now almost unknown, and most of the coloured people to be seen about were rich or powerful, courted by Authority for political reasons or sent to be moulded in the manners of the ruling race. For years there had been a small Indian community in London, with an active and often dissident intelligentsia: from 1892 to 1895 there had even been an Indian member of Parliament—Dadabhai Naoroji, the Parsee member for Central Finsbury, formerly Prime Minister of Baroda. Ranjitsinjhi Vibhaji, claimant to the throne of Nawanagar, was one of the most popular and successful cricketers in England, playing for Sussex, and for thousands of Englishmen his quick and stylish batting offered a first comprehensible image of the dream that was India. The Hindu ban on sea travel still limited the numbers of young Indians coming to English schools and universities, but since 1890 fourteen undergraduates with Indian or African names had been admitted to Oxford—two were princes, one was a sheikh, and six were at Balliol, adding substance to the legend that all black men preferred that college. When Queen Victoria drove home through Windsor after her Jubilee junketings, waiting in attendance

at a ceremonial arch were four Etonians—the sons of the Maharajah of Kutch Bihar, the Prince of Gondal and the Minister of Hyderabad, all resplendent in Indian dress.¹

8

If the physical imprint of Empire was slight, in 1897 its gusto was inescapable. A vigorous kind of brain-washing was in full swing, conducted by the popular Press, the Government and several active pressure groups. Imperial monuments might be hard to find, but imperial sentiments were deafening. All the energies of the nation seemed at that moment to be directed towards imperial ends; almost no subject of public interest was discussed outside an imperial context; the Empire was an infatuation.

It must have been almost impossible for the untravelled Englishman to resist this ceaseless publicity, and it is easy to see why men like Elgar, in the tractable society of the English provinces, uncritically absorbed it. The vast new readership of the *Daily Mail* was intoxicated by stuff like this piece from Steevens (himself then 28 years old): 'We send a boy out here and a boy there, and the boy takes hold of the savages of the part he comes to, and teaches them to march and shoot as he tells them, to obey him and believe him and die for him and the Queen . . . and each one of us—you and I, and that man in his shirt-sleeves at the corner—is a working part of this world-shaping force.' Over and over again the bulk and wealth of the Empire was emphasized, from soap-box and from pulpit, day after day in the newspapers and edition after edition in the popular imperialist books. The weekly full-page feature of the *Illustrated London News* was repeatedly devoted to imperial topics: The

¹ How different it all looks now! Australians and New Zealanders may still assimilate themselves easily enough, but most Canadians and South Africans are unmistakably alien in England. The Rhodes scholarships still bring hundreds of young 'colonials' to Oxford, but there were no Indians at Eton in 1967, and only one African. An occasional Indian and West Indian cricketer still brings grace or gaiety to the county cricket championships, and there is scarcely a city in England that does not have its community of Indians, Pakistanis or West Indians—giving the country a far more imperial look today than it ever had in the age of Empire, and posing problems the Empire-builders never thought of.

Punitive Expedition to Benin, The Massacre in the Niger Protectorate, The Indian Famine, The Plague in Bombay, Lord Roberts on his Arab Charger, Prospecting for Gold in British Columbia, Dervish Fugitives Fleeing Down the Nile, On the Way to the Klondike, Fighting in a Nullah on the Tseri-Kandao Pass.

Since 1868 the Royal Colonial Institute¹ had been assiduously grinding imperial axes. So were the Royal Geographical Society, the Imperial Federation League, the United Empire Trade League. In the schools the glory of Empire shone through every curriculum, interspersed with All Things Bright and Beautiful: it was the duty of every father and school manager, Sir Howard Vincent² once said with a genuinely imperial turn of phrase, to 'inculcate the study of Empire on all within their spheres of influence'. In the very month of the Jubilee a schoolboy ran away from Haileybury, the former college of the East India Company, and committed suicide, apparently because the other boys were persecuting him for his opinions about Crete. He disapproved of British intervention in the affairs of the island, where imperial troops were committed to keep the Turks out, and the newspapers dwelt at length upon a tragedy caused by such quixotic views. 'That anyone with our present knowledge of Turks and Cretans should be enthusiastic about them', commented the *Illustrated London News*, 'is amazing. . . It is probable that his mind was unhinged.'

9

The New Imperialism was potent politics. The Conservative-Unionist Government certainly owed its confidence to its staunch imperial views, even Salisbury paying lip-service to the cause, and the ringmaster of the Jubilee was Joe Chamberlain, 'Minister for Empire'.

¹ A society nothing if not resilient: originally the Colonial Society, in 1928 it turned itself into the Royal Empire Society, and it is now the Royal Commonwealth Society, its premises occupying the same London site throughout.

² Successively soldier, journalist, policeman and politician, Vincent (1849-1908) was the first director of criminal investigation at Scotland Yard, but was as widely known for the Howard Vincent Map of the British Empire, which ran into nineteen editions.

Fifteen years before Seeley had observed with satisfaction that the political influence on Britain of India was nil. In those days the Empire was not an electoral issue, and the wise politician did not bother his head with it. Seeley was delighted that this was so. He had in mind the situation which might have arisen if Warren Hastings had not been impeached for alleged corruption in India in 1788¹—an unhealthy domination of Parliament by wealthy vested interests of the Empire. In 1782 Pitt had said, during a debate on Parliamentary reform, 'We now see foreign princes not giving votes but purchasing seats in this House, and sending their agents to sit with us as representatives of the nation. No man can doubt what I allude to. We have sitting among us the members of the Rajah of Tangore and the Nawab of Arcot, the representatives of petty Eastern despots.'

The worst, though, had never happened, and by 1883, when Seeley wrote, it was unthinkable. On very few occasions in the nineteenth century had imperial affairs vitally affected domestic politics. The Afghan War of 1878 contributed to Disraeli's fall, the failure to relieve Gordon, coupled with the Irish issue, in the end defeated Gladstone. Ireland was a running sore, Egypt was once described by Milner as 'the football of English politics'—during the three years after Tel-el-Kebir there were ninety-eight Blue books about the country. But it was only now, in the late nineties, that imperial affairs much mattered at the hustings. Now even Liberals found it necessary to beat the drum, and poor Gladstone, who once told a confused audience that the Liberal Party was opposed to imperialism but devoted to Empire, watched sadly from his last retirement in Hawarden as member after member of his shattered party fell into the moral error he himself had dubbed jingoism.

Now, in hindsight, imperialists began to claim that Britain owed all her success to the existence of her Empire. 'Our great Empire,' Lord Rosebery once declared with satisfaction, 'has pulled us out of the European system. Our foreign policy has become a colonial

¹ Hastings (1732-1818), Governor-General of Bengal under the Company, was accused of a variety of offences—breaking treaties, selling whole Indian districts, hiring out British troops to a local despot. He was acquitted of all the charges but ruined anyway, *pour encourager les autres*.

policy.' The spirit of the nation, it was said, depended upon the responsibilities of Empire: Britain's triumphant position in the world was a response to the imperial challenge. Having our heroes in India, reasoned Sir Charles Crosthwaite, elevated every Briton, and indeed without the Anglo-Indian champions of the Victorian era there would not have been many. The grandest military funeral since Wellington's had been given to Lord Napier, who never fought a European enemy, and the other exemplars Crosthwaite offered were Henry and John Lawrence, John Nicholson, John Jacob, Herbert Edwardes, Donald Stewart and 'Bobs'—few of them likely to remain for long in the upper ranks of the British pantheon.

With Chamberlain at the Colonial Office, and this temper of thought politically fashionable, the official attitude to Empire was distinctly braced. A series of new institutions was planned or founded, intended to apply the latest British technology and scholarship to the colonial possessions—the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, the London School of Oriental Languages, the Imperial College of Science. Oriental scholarship in England, long overshadowed by German work, began to revive. Imperial development was considered systematically, as a whole. New life was breathed into the old idea, and all its buds, shy or gaudy, were bursting into flower.

10

But cause and effect were often muddled: some of the buds were unseasonable, and some went instantly to seed. Nobody had yet made any thorough study of the advantages of Empire, and the general hullabaloo of 1897 was in some ways deceptive. In particular the assumption that the Empire made Britain rich, that the more imperially she behaved the wealthier she would be, was a misconception. It was partly an honest delusion, based upon insufficient evidence, and partly a kind of fraud, devised by men who stood to gain from aggressive national policies.

The colonial trade, which looked so heart-warming portrayed in thick black arrows on diagrammatical maps, was not so important as it seemed. It was arguable that the original flow of imports from

India, under the East India Company, had contributed some of the capital for the Industrial Revolution a century before. It was obviously true that individual firms and families, like Hawkins the rubber man, had been enriched by imperial enterprise. But the staggering wealth which was being celebrated in 1897 had been accumulated above all by Free Trade—that economic philosophy, amounting almost to a dogma, for which the British had abandoned their old system of tariffs and trade restrictions half a century before.

For the Empire had once been virtually a British mercantile monopoly. Preferential tariffs protected the colonial trade, foreign ships were banned from colonial ports, colonies might only export their products to Britain, and in British bottoms. This system had been progressively destroyed during the first half of the century, as Free Trade ideas gathered strength. The repeal of the Corn Laws had preceded by three years the repeal of the Navigation Acts—the one repeal admitting foreign corn into Britain without duty, the other ending the British monopoly of direct shipping routes within the Empire. Free Trade had triumphed, and the old economic meaning of Empire was lost.

To the really dedicated free trader any restriction on commerce with any nation was almost irreligious. Imperial favouritism was incompatible with the creed at its most fervent, and the narrower cause of imperialism seemed almost petty beside the transcendent virtue of the Open Door. Besides, it worked. The British adopted the doctrine more whole-heartedly than anyone, and stuck to it longer, and it could be demonstrated by statistics that Free Trade rather than imperial expansion had made them rich. The Empire was in no way an economic unity, and it was far from self-sufficient. In 1896 Britain had imported 64 million hundredweight of wheat—30.7 million from the United States, 17.2 million from Russia, and only 3.6 million from Canada. Only in potatoes, cheese, apples and fresh mutton was the Empire Britain's chief food supplier: other foodstuffs came overwhelmingly from foreign countries, the Empire generally providing less than 10 per cent. The Empire's total foreign trade in 1896 was worth £745 million: the total inter-imperial trade was worth £183 million. What was more, even in that

Imperial Effects

high summer of imperialism, while trade with foreign countries was increasing still, trade with the Empire was almost static. The explosion of the British Empire in the preceding twenty years had little effect on Britain's prosperity. Trade scarcely flourished in the enormous new African territories: in 1897 the whole of tropical Africa took only 1.2 per cent of British exports. Each year the colonies bought a larger proportion of goods in foreign countries, and a smaller from Britain. The horse-drawn trams of Bombay were made in New York, and ships of all nations profited from the imperial trade, as Kipling recognized in his ballad of a Calcutta boarding-house:

*And there was Salem Hardieker,
A lean Bostonian be—
Russ, German, English, Halfbreed, Finn,
Yank, Dane and Portugee,
At Fultab Fisher's boarding-house
They rested from the sea.*

What increases there had been in imperial trade had mostly been with the self-governing colonies, whose economic policies were almost as independent as France's or Germany's, and were certainly not designed to benefit the Old Country. Some people thought, indeed, that the possession of the dependent Empire actually blunted British commercial initiative, offering the feebler salesmen a comfortable feather-bed, tempting the less aggressive firms to rely on British power for their profits. Salesmen were said to study foreign tastes with reluctance, and Steevens reported from one of his journeys 'the usual weary story—foreigners content with smaller profits, excessive rates of interest charged by English agents, inelastic terms of credit, incompetent travellers'.

Even the immense overseas investments of the British were no longer primarily imperial investments. Far more British capital was sunk in the United States than in India, and the disparity was rising. Loans within the Empire might be less liable to default, but loans to foreigners were much better gambles. Indian Government loans returned an average of 3.87 per cent: foreign loans were averaging 5.39 per cent. Nor were colonial loans necessarily better for the

Imperial Effects

nation as a whole than foreign loans: much of the money that went to India was used to build factories, cotton mills and jute mills which eventually displaced British exports.

Of course the Empire was not just so much needless extravagance. There were obvious advantages, as we have already seen, in controlling the sources and prices of one's raw materials, and in governing one's own markets. India cost the imperial treasury nothing, the Indians paying not only for their own administration and army, but even for part of the cost of the British troops stationed in their country. Some £16 million in Indian gold went to England annually from India, in payment for services and capital—the nearest thing the Crown received to tribute in the Roman tradition. As for the self-governing colonies, their only drain upon the resources of the Mother Country was the cost of imperial defence, while their outpouring of gold, silver, diamonds, wheat, wool and nickel gave strength to the London money market, the centre of it all.

The adventures of the New Imperialism were quite another matter. Trade was *not* following the flag into Uganda, Upper Nigeria, Bechuanaland and the Ashanti country. Burma had to be subsidized. Even Rhodesia had so far drawn a blank. Yet a phenomenal amount of money had been spent, during the past twenty or thirty years, in acquiring these unpromising domains. Wars were fought all over the place, roads and railways were expensively constructed, vast commitments of defence and administration had been added to the imperial burden. British ambitions in South Africa had already snared the Empire into the farcical humiliation of the Jameson Raid, and were now leading it inexorably towards war with the most formidable tribe in Africa, the Boers. Africa, the land of the New Imperialism, was like a quagmire, leading the British ever more deeply into trouble, bringing closer every year a clash between the rival imperialists—if not with the French, whose exploratory parties were then advancing across the continent towards the Nile, then with the Germans, only precariously kept in check by Salisbury's elegant diplomacy. Out of those steamy hinterlands little of value came, and into the kraals of those incomprehensible cultures few British manufactures found their way. In most of the jumble of protectorates and spheres of influence there was

Imperial Effects

very little government, even under the One Flag, and few British investors were tempted to send their capital down so crooked a drain.

There were critics even then to point out these unpalatable truths. J. A. Hobson based his case upon these very statistics. Dilke, one of the high prophets of the New Imperialism, thought that by deceiving themselves on the economic aims of the Empire the British would be diverted from more practical purposes of 'common nationality and racial patriotism'. Salisbury and his advisers well knew that the drive behind the new British Empire in Africa was mostly defensive—keeping others out, securing older possessions, acquiring bargaining stakes. Lesser breeds without the law of Free Trade were setting the pace now, and the activists of the African scramble were the Germans and the French: the British, who really had quite enough Empire already, grabbed by reaction.

This is not how it seemed to the public at large, nor how the newspapers presented the case. In ten years Britain had acquired new territories fifty times as large as the United Kingdom—what else could that be but profitable enterprise, to make the richest of countries richer yet? It would have been almost inconceivable for the enthusiastic reader of the *Daily Mail* that summer, scanning the list of imperial acquisitions since, say, that year they all went down to Brighton with Aunt Flora, to suppose that all those exotic new names, those Kadunas and Lusakas, those Bulawayos and Bugandas, did not mean hard cash in the imperial till. The idea that it might all be losing money would have shocked him. The suggestion that money might be better spent on schools, hospitals, pensions, would probably have seemed unpatriotic. The thought that it might all be a colossal error of judgement, and that the British might be better off without any Empire at all, would probably have struck him as quite lunatic.

11

So the foreigner's first impression was right in a way. London was not, like Rome, paved with the spoils and trophies of Empire, because this was only incidentally an imperial capital. The New

Imperial Effects

Imperialism was too new to have planted its own monuments—and too insubstantial, for it was a gusty sort of movement, a sudden gale of emotion, swooping suddenly out of that leaden London sky. It was like a fad: as everybody sang Dan Leno's songs, or copied Marie Lloyd's hair, or went bicycling on summer evenings, so they talked excitedly of Greater Britain and the White Man's Burden, thrilled to Sullivan's settings of Newbolt's *Songs of the Sea*, and dreamt with the Poet Laureate of British victories, land and sea alternately, like schoolboys in bed imagining endless triumphs at the wicket. Beneath this fizz the affairs of England tremendously proceeded, the statesmen practised their delicate art and the Empire-builders did their best.