

The  
Political Ideas  
of English  
Imperialism

*An Inaugural Lecture*

GIVEN IN THE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF  
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The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea—something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to . . .

JOSEPH CONRAD, *Heart of Darkness*

## THE POLITICAL IDEAS OF ENGLISH IMPERIALISM

I HAVE never had the good fortune to be a student of anthropology, but I understand it is the practice in almost every type of society, before installing a person into office, to impose on him some sort of endurance test in the form of an initiation ceremony. It was therefore with a strong bond of sympathy that I read in my paper this morning of the ordeal through which the new chief of the Rozwi tribe has passed before being recognized. I must confess, however, that there have been times when, rather than face you all here tonight, I would have preferred to have undergone a similar ordeal to that of Chief Samuriwo—to have sat naked in a cave all night with the bones of my predecessors (alas! there are none) in a lion-infested area.

I am fully conscious of the disadvantages under which this lecture is being given when compared with the recent performances of my colleagues. As true men of science they availed themselves of batteries of projectors throwing coloured pictures on the walls for your delight and instruction. I come with none of these supports. Perhaps I have been a little wanting in imagination over this. Perhaps, Principal, it would have been fitting in view of my subject if our entrance had been effected with a trifle more grandeur, if instead of that modest academic shuffle with which we advanced to this platform we had carried ourselves with more of a proconsular gait, in the Curzon manner, as though we had just dismounted from our elephant outside. And then perhaps Sir, as you left me alone here to face this rather intimidating audience, the whole of the

wall behind me might have been lit up with a panoramic three-dimensional film of the Sudan in 1885, showing Gordon beleaguered in Khartoum with the camera finally coming to rest on a page of his journal at that apposite entry: 'What holes do I not put myself into! And for what? So mixed are my ideas. I believe ambition put me here in this ruin.'

But, to strike a more serious note, there are difficulties beyond those of mere presentation. I am conscious that in trying to trace the interconnexions between political thought and political action I am venturing on dubious ground. For the prevailing view among contemporary philosophers and historians would suggest that political thought is merely an ordered statement of emotional beliefs and as such is a superficial and perhaps unimportant reflection of the deeper-seated forces which direct human action. 'It is impossible', declares Sir Lewis Namier, 'to attach to conscious political thought the importance which was ascribed to it a hundred, or even fifty, years ago. . . . What matters most', he says, 'is the underlying emotions, the music to which ideas are a mere libretto, often of a very inferior quality . . .' [1]. Theorizing on politics is for Sir Lewis an artificial and rather unnatural activity, to be explained by the curious psychological need of the human animal for self-justification and even self-deception. In a healthy state of society such theorizing is harmless enough because it has no practical effect, but in a society under strain where the ordinary practical and empirical approach seems to be failing it may have more dangerous consequences. For it breeds the illusion that success in politics is to be achieved by the application of abstract intellectual doctrines. The danger resides in giving to political doctrines the apparent sanction of reason and science when in truth

they conceal emotion in its most inflexible and tyrannical form. The disastrous results of political ideologies make up the history of our century. Sir Lewis Namier believes, then, that we are well rid of political thought, and that the ordinary English pragmatic approach, which uses the intelligence to deal with the immediate problem in hand, rather than to spin and apply artificial theories, has stood the test of time better than any other political method.

This reaction against political thought is understandable. The tough-minded, positivist post-war age in which we live seeks above all to be rid of illusion and myth. Hence no doubt the vogue of the Namier school with its attempt to penetrate behind the poses and formal gestures of public men and to discover the motives and assumptions by which they acted in their ordinary unguarded moments. It is not for me to enter into the controversy which has sprung up from Professor Butterfield's criticism that the Namier approach tends to take the mind out of history; except perhaps to remark that the technique which may be appropriate to the peculiar conditions of eighteenth-century England is unlikely to have the same validity for the later nineteenth century when the classes open to intellectual influences had a much closer hold on political power. I would assert, however, that whatever be the true relationship between ideas and events, to ignore the former entirely is to remove a whole dimension from the study of history. And, indeed, there can be no escaping ideas, or taking the mind out of history, for even if we attempt to ignore the action of ideas entirely we are ultimately left with a theory or hypothesis of how human nature works, that is we are left with a political theory such as the one Sir Lewis Namier holds.

At the same time one may acknowledge that English political thought since 1870 has been excessively academic,

abstract, and often pretentious. From the death of J. S. Mill in 1873 the professors took possession of political thought and removed it from the turbulence of the political arena to the quiet of the college cloister. T. H. Green, F. H. Bradley, Bosanquet, Caird, Ritchie, Sidgwick, L. T. Hobhouse, the names that stud the textbooks of political thought, all belonged to academic men, and moreover, to academic men who were primarily philosophers. The result was no doubt, as Sir Lewis Namier suggests, an exaggerated notion of the influence of conscious political thought, in the making of history, so that a historian like Lord Acton could exclaim, with characteristic hyperbole, that it would be easy to point out 'a paragraph in St. Augustine, or a sentence in Grotius that outweighs in influence the Acts of fifty Parliaments' [2]. Hence, too, the tendency to trace the line of descent through the classic works of genius rather than through the more representative if more workaday writings of men who used their pens as swords in the political battle.

These faults do not, however, vitiate the study of political ideas. They simply suggest that the level of reflection on politics has been wrongly chosen, that for the purposes of illuminating history it is more appropriate to consider what Professor Oakeshott has defined as political thought in contradistinction to political philosophy. For political philosophy treats of politics in their abstract and universal context; it deals with 'the relation between politics and eternity'. To apply a phrase of Hobbes, political philosophy excludes history, 'because such knowledge is but experience and not ratiocination'. Political thought, on the other hand, springs from, and has reference to, immediate political experience, so that it cannot be divorced from its historical setting.

Impatience with political thought has partly arisen no doubt because of the abstraction which has marked it since 1870, and, more perhaps, because of its apparent lack of relevance to the main political experience of the time. Now if any central thread can be picked out of the tangled skein of the political attitudes of the later nineteenth century, imperialism would appear to be the most prominent and representative. Dr. Trevelyan speaks of it as 'the dominant political creed' of the period after 1886 [3], Sir Ernest Barker recognized it as 'a widespread political theory which it is true hardly found any representative voice' [4]. By dissecting the mind of imperialism I would like to suggest that there is a plane of historical experience at which the workings of ideas and mental attitudes may be usefully studied. Moreover it is a plane, I would like to think, that in some ways overcomes the impasse created by modern philosophical objections to political thought. If political thought cannot pretend to the status of a science, if it can never get beyond the subjective value-judgement, there seems a case for considering it more closely in its historical context, and seeing how ideas stand up to the wear and tear of time. Not that I am suggesting that success should be the ultimate test of political values, but rather that there is an element in all political thinking which may properly be brought to the judgement of history. I mean that element which is based on a forecast of the action and strength of given historical forces. While there is no objective test by which we can judge the validity of a political ideal or attitude, we can properly comment on its historical appropriateness with the hindsight history affords. Such a study makes no pretence at producing exact scientific judgements, and historians have rarely surrendered to such vain hopes. But it does, I think,



render more accurate and precise our thinking on political values which would otherwise be left to be fashioned by raw prejudice working on rough and partial experience. Any such study is bound to serve principally as a critical instrument, more negative than formative in its conclusions. But if it cannot give much indication of the positive validity of past political ideals and attitudes, it can at least isolate and identify the element of illusion and unreality which inhered in them. And it would be false to ask more of any intellectual pursuit; for since life appears to be prompted by hunches, intuitions, and hopes springing from immediate experience, the task of reason can properly be no more than to discipline, restrain, and direct them.

Finally, I would suggest that a study of the political ideas of imperialism is not without relevance to Central Africa today. The gulf that divides informed opinion in England from the best type of conservative European opinion here is to be measured in mental and moral terms. While it would be wrong to identify the metropolitan outlook of imperialism with that of a European settler community, there is enough common ground to suggest that this mental and moral gulf has been created by the different rates at which the imperialist outlook has receded in the two countries. For imperialism was above all an unformulated philosophy of life and politics. At its heart was the belief that political power tended constantly to deposit itself in the hands of a natural aristocracy, that power so deposited was morally valid, that it was not to be tamely surrendered before the claims of abstract democratic ideals, but was to be asserted and exercised with justice and mercy. Against this belief has beaten the inexorable tide of events of the twentieth century,

demonstrating that such a belief cannot be permanently upheld without a degree of coercive power which European communities of the Western world have found themselves unable morally or materially to sustain.

The assertion that imperialism was primarily an emotional and moral attitude is not nowadays regarded as patently absurd. We appear to be past the stage when imperialism could be considered almost exclusively in economic terms. Even among the neo-Marxists, before Lenin's authority silenced their views, it was held by Bauer and Hilferding that imperialism was not an inevitable stage of capitalism but represented a conscious choice to exploit an extensive colonial market as against an intensive home market [5]. Seeing how little capital investment followed the scramble for Africa, even the exponents of the theory of economic imperialism, particularly Hobson, were forced to conclude that it was only a special and parasitic element of capitalism that was interested in the exploitation of fresh colonial markets. Recent studies have emphasized the relatively subordinate part played by economic interests in Britain's acquisition of African empire from the 1880s [6]. It seems that it was more the handiwork of the professional classes—the official, the explorer, the soldier, the missionary—than of the Birmingham manufacturer or the City financier.

The most suggestive and to my mind the most satisfying explanation of imperialism was made by Schumpeter. So far from regarding imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism Schumpeter argued that it was a transient aberration. For capitalism was in his view essentially pacific and cosmopolitan by nature, its chief characteristic being the absorption of the warlike emotions in modern business activity. (In the university world we have, of

course, a whole range of committees to absorb these emotions.) Imperialism was to be explained by the survival of certain elements from the pre-capitalist world, particularly the persistence of the landed gentry and officer class, which had infected part of the modern *bourgeoisie* with its outlook and had formed an alliance with certain special capitalist elements who were interested in colonial expansion [7]. Whatever may be the validity of Schumpeter's analysis in any scientific sense, it is useful for my purpose in suggesting that the imperialist mind wore a dual aspect, one side deriving from modern intellectual sources and the other from a non-intellectual conservatism that in part reflected the ethos of aristocracy. The imperial idea in its complex working amid the tangle of historical events has recently been traced with a fine acumen and insight by Professor Thornton, the Professor of History at our sister College of the West Indies [8]. In this lecture I merely propose to isolate what appear to me to be some of its fundamental thought-patterns, and to venture on what I freely admit are very hypothetical and tentative conclusions.

Despite the abstraction of their thought the Oxford Idealists would appear to supply the most obvious link between political ideas and empire. Balliol College, the 'Academy' of the Idealists—of Green, Toynbee, Bradley, Bosanquet, Nettleship, Caird, Ritchie—was also the nursery of many of the leading statesmen and publicists of imperialism—of Curzon, Milner, Grey, Asquith, L. S. Amery, and St. Loe Strachey. The other Oxford colleges followed in Balliol's wake. The connexion which might seem to link Idealism with imperialism was their subscription in some form to the Hegelian theory of the State. This theory

starts from a rejection of liberalism and of its distrust of political power. Instead of regarding the laws and institutions of society as a regrettable if necessary restraint on individual spontaneity (which for liberalism was the source of all progress), the Idealist attitude regarded political society as the instrument which raised men to freedom and a moral life. Instead of making the individual conscience the arbiter of political and social values, progressively bringing institutions into closer conformity with its abstract ideals, the Idealists taught generally that the institutions of society were themselves the concrete embodiment of moral ideals against which the deliverances of the individual conscience were visionary, wilful, and anarchic. In opposition to the notion that society should be placed under the rule of the critical intelligence they believed that politics should not be reduced to the cold abstractions of the rational and economic man but should be directed by the highest and noblest feelings. Likewise, in contrast to the cosmopolitanism and disinterested concern for humanity which men like J. S. Mill and Buckle proclaimed, they conceived morality to consist in the conscientious discharge of a man's duties in the narrow circle of societies in which he lived—his family, his work, the local group, the nation. Any wider loyalty than this was unreal since these were the limits of natural feeling; the disinterested love of humanity could be nothing but an intellectual abstraction.

All these notions, which have a respectable pedigree running back to Burke, are to be found in the celebrated essay, 'My Station and Its Duties', which F. H. Bradley published in his *Ethical Studies* in 1876, and which Bosanquet regarded as one of the great landmarks in the growth of the English Idealist movement. The argument is worth

elaborating even at the cost of some repetition. The contrast with the older liberalism is to be seen most pointedly in Bradley's attempt to overcome the dualism of the older ethical tradition. This had drawn a constant contrast between the actual and the ideal, assigning one to the sphere of blind instinct and force, and the other to the sphere of intelligence and spirit. The contrast was heightened by the Protestant religious tradition which assumed the sinfulness of the ordinary world of instinct and whose scheme of salvation was directed solely to rescuing the individual by a direct illumination of the conscience. Bradley rejected this outlook. So far from the individual being a self-made creature directed by his conscience, he was in fact the product of the society in which he lived. The laws, customs, and institutions of society not merely set bounds to human appetite—in the form of property, marriage, and ordered political arrangements—but they also moralized man's basic animal nature and were the source of his ideals. These ideals did not fall down fully fledged from heaven to enlighten the individual conscience. Rather were they the product of social evolution and were inseparably bound up with the particular stage of development reached. To dis sever the ideal from the limitations of its actual historical context, to impart to it the unlimited and universal character of an abstract ideal, and then to set it over against the actual world in condemnation of the latter, all this must breed illusion and disaster. Bradley's final conclusion was that of Burke and Hegel. So far from history being, as judged by the standard of the abstract ideal, a catalogue of violence and wrong, the historical process represented the working out of the Divine purpose—in Burke's words, it was the known march of Providence on earth.

Here one would suppose was the appropriate ethical philosophy for imperialism. The reverence for the product of history, for the state and its institutions, for a concrete existing political society which satisfied the ordinary instincts of men for wealth and power and yet transfused these instincts into an instrument of peace and beneficence, all this would seem to point to the juncture of Idealism with imperialism. So, too, would Bradley's wish to see the characteristic emotion of religion diverted from its concern with personal salvation and a future life, to inspire instead a man's daily work and his duties as a citizen. In 1937 an able German scholar, Klaus Dockhorn, asserted the close connexion between Idealism and imperialism to be an historical fact [9]. His evidence was, however, remarkably thin, consisting mainly of extensive quotations from the stock-in-trade of those who wish to connect imperialism with a quasi-Fascist political theory: Professor J. A. Cramb's *Origins and Destiny of Imperial Britain*. These lectures delivered by Professor Cramb at King's College, London, at the height of the imperialist fervour in 1900, are undoubtedly the most insane piece of mystical ranting that can ever have been inflicted on an English student audience. The only thing to be done when confronted with such monstrosities is to follow Max Beerbohm's example whenever his train passed the Crystal Palace: we must pull down the blind and avert our gaze. A movement is not to be judged by its lunatic fringe. Dockhorn was undoubtedly following up the much more guarded remarks of L. T. Hobhouse. In his book, *Democracy and Reaction*, Hobhouse contended that the Idealist philosophy had exercised a reactionary influence that was not perhaps generally appreciated. The Rhine had flowed into the Thames. He did not assert, however, that Idealism had directly promoted

imperialism, but rather that it had weakened resistance to it, since the effect of Idealism was 'to soften the edges of all contrasts between right and wrong, truth and falsity, to throw a gloss over stupidity, and prejudice, and caste, and tradition, to weaken the bases of reason, and disincline men to the searching analysis of their habitual ways of thinking' [10]. When the German bombs began to fall on London in 1915 he believed he witnessed 'the visible and tangible outcome of a false and wicked doctrine . . . the Hegelian theory of the God-state': and he turned to rend the Idealist political philosophy in its classic exposition, Bosanquet's *Philosophical Theory of the State* [11]. (I need hardly add that Professor Hobhouse was not at King's College, London. He was speaking at the New Jerusalem a little way down the road—the London School of Economics.)

The difficulty concerning this attempt to link the Idealists with imperialism is that for all their debt to Hegel they remained obstinately Liberal in their political leanings. T. H. Green was an exponent of 'three acres and a cow' radicalism, the form in which Gladstonian liberalism finally ossified and died. Green is said to have had a decisive influence on Arnold Toynbee, whom his friend Alfred Milner felt obliged to clear from the imputation of socialism. Nettleship, Green's biographer and successor at Balliol, maintained his loyalty to the Liberals despite the defection caused by the Irish Home Rule Bill in 1886. Bosanquet, who took the Hegelian theory to its highest point of development, was also a Liberal with radical sympathies, while D. G. Ritchie held pronounced socialist views. Bosanquet and his friend Edward Caird, who succeeded Jowett as Master of Balliol in 1893, were resolute opponents of the Boer War. Such instances may be

multiplied. On the other hand there is no doubt that many lesser figures used the arguments of Idealism, in combination with a popularized notion of Darwin's theory of natural selection, to uphold the claims of imperialism [12]. Hobhouse undoubtedly had these in mind when he made his attack, and Bosanquet was later forced to acknowledge that what he called 'the large and many-sided philosophy' had degenerated into a creed of violence and self-interest by 'its passage into the hands of ignorant and biased amateurs, soldiers, historians, politicians' [13]. But at this level it is difficult to speak of intellectual influence, in the sense of men acting from intellectual conviction. It would seem to be rather the case of popular opinion taking hold of intellectual theories which looked useful for its immediate purposes.

There seem few grounds for believing that the Idealists exercised pronounced influence on any of the leading imperialist figures. Curzon, Grey, and Asquith certainly passed through their hands, but they were not men to be greatly moved by intellectual theories. Asquith was perhaps nearest to the academic mind and dipped quite deeply into philosophy. But for all his admiration of T. H. Green he was the first to acknowledge that he never 'worshipped at the Temple's inner shrine' [14]. One ought perhaps to mention Rosebery, who for long was the leader of the Liberal Imperialists. While not a Balliol man and going up to Oxford before Green had made a name, his language on the Empire might appear to breathe the Idealist ethos:

How marvellous it all is! Built not by saints and angels, but the work of men's hands; cemented with men's honest blood and with a world of tears, welded by the best brains of the centuries past; not without the taint and reproach incidental to



all human work, but constructed on the whole with pure and splendid purpose. Human and yet not wholly human, for the most heedless and the most cynical must see the finger of the Divine [15].

Where Lord Rosebery acquired such thoughts is unknown. Philosophy was a closed book to him, though he had, of course, distinct historical talent. His ruling passion was, however, far removed from the world of ideas. At Oxford the Dean of Christ Church felt obliged to make him choose between his college and his race-horse, Ladas, which he had entered for the Derby. He chose Ladas and was sent down from the University. The blow was a bitter one for Ladas came absolutely last. Twenty-five years later the wound still rankled. By then he had risen to be prime minister, but he found the wine of supreme power sour to the taste. He was lonely, depressed, and racked with chronic insomnia. At last, on 6 June 1894, the day dawned which was to cancel out the bitterness of his youth. Out on the Downs since six, he drank a glass of champagne before the start, and there in the sight of the delirious multitude, with odds of 9-2, Ladas II cantered home to win the Derby. Lord Esher says: 'He was genuinely moved. All he could say was "At last!"'. Such a reception never was seen at Epsom' [16].

Haldane, more than any of the other Liberal Imperialists, combined Idealist metaphysics with politics, but his example serves to demonstrate that if the one had any effect upon the other it was in the direction of strengthening the sentimental conception of empire. Now this conception, which looked on the Empire as a group of self-governing nations held together simply by the tie of sentiment is to be sharply distinguished from what is properly understood as imperialism, which implies a

readiness to use, if necessary, coercive force to maintain the integrity of the Empire. The political theory of Idealism founded the moral basis of political power in the general will, that is, the steady settled convictions and sentiments of the people at large. Lionel Curtis and the Round Table group were steeped in the Oxford Idealist atmosphere, and Dockhorn quotes heavily from *The Round Table* to prove the connexion between Idealism and imperialist feeling [17]. Yet although this group followed their master Milner in holding that the sentimental tie of empire must be strengthened by the fashioning of solid political bonds, it is noticeable that they rejected the notion of coercion in a way that drew a clear line of division between Milner and themselves. To Milner the Union of South Africa Act appeared as the last in 'a perfect series of gigantic blunders' and signified the refusal of England to persist in the task of exerting her power over a period sufficiently long to secure the British character of South Africa in perpetuity. Curtis and his friends, on the other hand, looked on the Act of Union as a consummate triumph; and Curtis himself went on later to advocate a large measure of self-government for India, since his conception of the Commonwealth could not embrace a coerced or unwilling member.

Milner, then, for all his close association with Arnold Toynbee and the Balliol group, did not, it seems to me, draw his distinctive ideas from the Idealist school. Despite his German ancestry and upbringing, the hard, steely qualities of his mind were far removed from the cloudy metaphysical notions of empire which Curtis and even Amery (though an anti-Hegelian) sometimes betrayed in their language. The sharp clarity and concreteness of Milner's conception is much nearer, to my mind, to that other school of thought which preached scientific efficiency and

the planned development of society by an intellectual *élite*: Fabian socialism. It is not accidental that Milner should have had close associations with the early Fabian leaders, particularly the Webbs, and that he was prepared to go farther than any of the other Liberal notables, including Haldane, in his willingness to use coercive political machinery to effect reforms. This preparedness to use coercion as a morally valid instrument is, as I see it, the distinguishing mark of the imperialist outlook, but its intellectual origin stems from quite a different source than Idealism.

The Webbs stood in the Utilitarian intellectual tradition. They held to the notion that it was possible to establish a practical science of politics, but they, of course, reversed the general Benthamite assumption that this would postulate a society in which government intervention was kept to a minimum. When it came to the point, however, they acknowledged that all measures of coercion must have the broad support of the popular will, and their democratic leanings grew with the years [18]. Milner was more of a national socialist of the Bismarckian kind, and his growing belief in autocracy moved him in an opposite direction to the Webbs. Beatrice Webb later came to believe he was a Prussian Junker at heart [19]. (But then her diary is notable for its tart comments even on close political acquaintances. One recalls her comments on the Liberal Imperialists—‘Asquith is deplorably slack; Grey is a mere dilettante; Haldane plays at political intrigue and has no democratic principles; Perks is an unclean beast . . .’.) Milner’s support of tariff protection, conscription, and a formal federation of the Empire set him apart and helped to complete the political isolation that was so marked a feature of his career after the Boer War. In carrying State action to this extent, Milner, like the Fabians in

other directions, went beyond the general outlook of the school which inherited the authoritarian strain in the old Benthamism and which supplied perhaps the strongest intellectual ingredient of the imperialist outlook.

The contribution of the authoritarian Liberals to imperialism has been described by Dr. Roach of Cambridge, and I have myself traced the process elsewhere in connexion with India [20]. In contrast with Idealism which did not begin to take serious hold until the late 1870s, authoritarian liberalism had deeper historical roots, and, of more importance, possessed an intellectual content which had a much closer bearing on practical affairs. This type of liberalism did not become fully articulate until 1886 when the Home Rule crisis caused it to separate itself off from the Liberal Party, but as early as the 1860s Fitzjames Stephen had noted the incompatibility between what he called the liberalism of the intellect and the liberalism of sentiment. The defection of 1886 occurred most noticeably among men brought up in the Cambridge intellectual tradition, in which cool dispassionate logic and a contempt for cloudy metaphysics were chiefly prized. They numbered Sir Henry Maine, Fitzjames Stephen, Sidgwick, Seeley and, although an Oxford man, A. V. Dicey, who by family connexion and intellectual bent belonged to the same Utilitarian and Evangelical strain. They also numbered in a loose sense the leading men of the *Spectator*, R. H. Hutton, Meredith Townsend, St. Loe Strachey, and Edward Dicey, as well as commanding the support of Cromer and Sir Alfred Lyall. Their principal concern was to defend the reign of intelligence against the destructive onslaught of blind mass emotion. For them the Utilitarian teachings on logic, political economy, and jurisprudence laid down the iron

laws of social progress; and the democracy's flouting of these laws in the name of sentimental ideals appeared to them to threaten the whole edifice of civilized life. Gladstone's decision in favour of Irish Home Rule they regarded as a fearful portent, since it meant the abject surrender of scientific government to the forces of unreason. Their attitude was principally a defensive, defiant one. They passed through the age of imperialism looking at the other great colonial problems in the light of the Irish issue. Confronted by the claims of Egyptian, Indian, and Afrikaner nationalism (though there was hesitancy and division over the last), they resisted the demand for the relinquishment of British control, believing that without the *pax Britannica* the essentials of progress—the framework of order, impartial law, freedom of contract and trade—would quickly disappear. It was no accident that this school should have contained a strong contingent of lawyers, for these supplied the authoritarian mentality. In all other respects the exponents of a free society and a free economy, they saw the maintenance of law and order as a first precondition and recognized that this precondition could not always be obtained without the ultimate backing of military force. The age had taught its lesson. Germany had become united, and the United States saved from dismemberment, by military force. The establishment of law and order in India (and later Egypt) by a handful of soldiers and officials was showing itself to be the precursor of a great internal revolution that would rapidly raise these countries from a backward, stagnant condition to the level of modern states. Fitzjames Stephen had returned from his post as Law Member in India to expound the bearing of these truths for political thought in his book *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity*, published in 1873. And cooler minds,

like those of Sir Alfred Lyall and Sir Evelyn Baring (Lord Cromer), recognized the part played by political power in the advance of civilization, although with greater historical sensitivity they recognized that military force as such was only one element in imperial rule [21]. The strong Liberal element in their thought needs to be stressed. Lyall wrote to Morley, the high priest of mid-Victorian liberalism, in August 1892: 'Although we hold different opinions on the question of Irish Home Rule, I think we should find ourselves in virtual agreement on almost every other question.' Cromer's outlook, as he acknowledged, moved in close sympathy with Lyall's [22]. They distrusted the mass emotional imperialism of the late 1890s. As Lyall told Morley in 1900 he thought 'that the English folk have been swept too far by that stream of rash energetic activity which is commonly termed Imperialism. Yet the main difference is that whereas formerly we did our Imperialism quietly, so that people hardly knew what they were about, we now proclaim it upon the housetops' [23]. Their standpoint, as I said, was largely a defensive one. They were concerned to prevent the dissolution of British power before it had completed its civilizing mission. They were in no sense diehards, having a strong appreciation of the nature of historical forces, but they were against any premature abdication of authority.

Dr. Roach has termed their outlook old liberalism. The term is certainly appropriate in the sense that the majority of its exponents were born before 1850 and were from 1900 a dying force. Cromer said in 1913 that the mid-Victorian Liberals were a school of politicians whose ideas had now been swept into the limbo of forgotten things [24]. Milner could not be said to belong to this school although he probably derived much from it. He had broken away

from the premisses of the old liberalism, with its faith in a spontaneously self-acting society when once the framework of law and order had been established. To him this was simply a policy of drift which if left uncountered by a vigorous movement of conscious organization would result in the dissolution of the Empire into a number of independent communities. He, too, claimed to be acting on the defensive; the task of his generation of imperialists was as he said, 'to hold the fort during the long and indispensable process of education,—to try and prevent our Imperial heritage from being dissipated before its meaning and value could be generally understood' [25]. This task, however, required a positive effort, and meant a conscious use of the political instrument to give definite shape and body to the 'loose, uncompact material' which made up the Empire. One such beginning towards that single body politic of which Milner dreamed was the modification of England's free trade structure by a system of imperial preference. Now this issue, when formally championed by Chamberlain in 1903 caused the defection of an important section of the Liberal Unionists from Balfour's Conservative ministry, and so effectively split the imperialist ranks. It is significant that imperialism lost its most important intellectual support from this time.

But, of course, intellectual support is not everything, and what held imperialism together was something more deep-seated. A. V. Dicey, who opposed Home Rule and supported the Boer War on the supposedly logical grounds that Irish and Boer nationalism were irrational anachronisms in an age of great states, was compelled to admit that the faith of imperialism contained itself an irrational emotional element. It was, he said, 'a kind of sentiment which it is extremely hard to express in terms of utilitarian

philosophy. Imperialism is to all who share it a form of passionate feeling; it is a political religion, for it is public spirit touched with emotion' [26]. Many other imperialists expressed the same notion. W. A. S. Hewins, the economist and tariff reformer (and—for his sins—first Director of the London School of Economics) confessed to Bertrand Russell that although brought up in the Roman Catholic Church he had since replaced faith in the Church by faith in the British Empire [27]. Curzon seems to have been moved by a similar faith; and even the reticent Milner spoke of his need of help from a Higher Power to sustain his work [28]. Now this transference of religious emotion to secular objects was an important feature which I shall discuss later in connexion with Kipling. But like so much of English religion it was concerned with the moulding of individual character. The service of Empire appeared to provide the great safeguard against the possibility that in an increasingly overcrowded, urbanized society the Englishman's character would soften and deteriorate. 'As for the priceless asset of national character', argued Curzon, 'without a world to conquer or duty to perform, it would rot to atrophy and inanition' [29]. Dicey over Irish Home Rule expressed similar fears of the growing softness of the Englishman, his desire to avoid trouble and difficulty, and consequently his willingness to make concessions which his forefathers would have refused even under the threat of armed rebellion. Meredith Townsend of the *Spectator*, a Liberal who had spent much of his life in India and deserted Gladstone over Home Rule, spoke in a similar vein:

For whether for good or evil, a great change is passing over Englishmen. They have become uncertain of themselves, afraid of their old opinions, doubtful of the true teaching of their consciences. They doubt if they have any longer any moral



right to rule anyone, themselves almost included. An old mental disease, the love of approbation, has suddenly risen among them to the height of a passion. Instead of being content to rule well, to do justice and to love mercy, they are trying themselves by a new standard, a desire to rule so that the governed may applaud, or as they phrase it with a certain unctuousness, may 'love' them. That is the real root of the great change which has passed over the management of children, of the whole difficulty in Ireland, of the reluctance to conquer, and of the whole of the new philanthropic social legislation [30].

Sir Alfred Lyall, normally the coolest of men, wrote to Morley over England's apparent inability to put down lawlessness in Ireland that he would like to see 'a little more fierceness and honest brutality in the national temperament'. He voiced the fear that a great concentration of wealth and luxury among certain classes would produce 'a general indifference, relaxation of fibre, and a carelessness as to what went on in the outlying parts of the empire' [31].

This preoccupation with character was, of course, part of a wider concern to sustain a particular code of values and attitude to life. And here I think we touch upon what Schumpeter saw as the mystique of pre-capitalist society being projected into the modern world; certain sections of the middle class—particularly those connected with the Services and colonial administration—trying to perpetuate the ethos and outlook of aristocracy. By nature inarticulate and anti-intellectual it was never explicitly formulated. Psychologically it stood for an ordered hierarchical society in which relations between classes would depend on status rather than contract and be infused with a feudal sentiment of mutual obligation and respect. It looked for its example to the ancient community of the soil. At the same time the

new would-be aristocracy was self-made, so that its title-deeds were not prescription but natural ability.

Rudyard Kipling was, I think, its most representative voice. He combined the feeling for a stable, hierarchical social order with a Puritan ethic of individual self-development. His most impressionable experience had been India. There he believed he had looked on life in its essential immediacy and seen human and physical nature stripped of its disguises. In India the remorseless and pitiless struggle of human existence was watched over anxiously by a tiny undermanned corps of British officials and soldiers who at the price of exile, sickness, overwork, and scant recognition, strove to avert the threat of famine, disease, and anarchy [32]. The strenuous nature of the work tested each man to the full stretch of his powers, and humbled him by the knowledge of his own personal unimportance and insignificance before the magnitude of the work itself. It necessitated submission to authority, discipline, and the bridling of self-will. There was no occasion or inducement for a man to think up visionary schemes framed in the light of abstract ideals; all he could do was to pour his entire vision and energy into the immediate task in hand. In this way Kipling conceived of work as the means not only of self-fulfilment but of salvation. For it gave to human vision and aspiration their only tangible form of realization, while at the same time it saved man from himself, from conceit, illusion, self-pity, and nameless psychological fear. By forgetting himself in his work a man became a vessel for the workings of the power and vision that came from on high:

Good work has nothing to do with—doesn't belong to—the person who does it. It's put into him or her from outside. . . . A great deal depends on being master of the bricks and mortar

of the trade. But the instant we begin to think of success and the effect of our work—to play with our eye on the gallery—we lose power and touch and everything else. . . . [Success] isn't got at by sacrificing people— . . . ; you must sacrifice yourself, and live under orders, and never think for yourself, and never have real satisfaction in your work except just at the beginning when you're reaching out after a notion. . . [33].

For Kipling the nature of work, like all first-hand experience, was to be unreflecting and inarticulate. ““Make that young Leviathan speak,” said Cleaver [a London writer, referring to a young subaltern back from the Burmese War]. “How can he speak”, said I, “He's done the work. The two don't go together”” [34]. Kipling took Rhodes as another exemplar, of a ‘dreamer devout by vision led beyond our guess or reach’; and of the man himself as a mere vessel of the vision, ‘This Power that wrought on us and goes Back to the Power again’. Rhodes's great quality is seen as his inarticulateness:

The travail of his spirit bred  
 Cities in place of speech.  
 So huge the all-mastering thought that drove—  
     So brief the term allowed—  
 Nations, not words, he linked to prove  
 His faith before the crowd [35].

From Kipling's conception of the function of work, or rather craftsmanship, followed the rest of his distinctive ideas. It was of supreme importance that the world's work should be done well, and that society should be organized accordingly. This entailed specialization of function and an hierarchical social order, the true equality of men residing in each attending to his appointed task. Kipling was no blind defender of existing society. He was all too aware of the danger of an hereditary governing class becoming

effete, and of the observance of convention becoming a substitute for constant individual thought and exertion. Rather was he the advocate of an aristocracy of natural ability, of a dedicated leadership.

Here we again strike that distinctive feature of the imperialist mind, the transference of religious emotion to secular purposes. For Kipling saw his natural aristocracy in terms of a priesthood that was inevitably unpopular, misunderstood, doomed to sacrifice itself and to suffer in silence. Hence the almost blasphemous claims for the pro-consuls, which he made in a poem under that title dedicated to Milner:

*These at labour make no sign  
More than planets, tides or years  
Which discover God's design,  
Not our hopes and not our fears;  
Nor in aught they gain or lose  
Seek a triumph or excuse!*

*For, so the Ark be borne to Zion, who  
Heeds how they perished or were paid that bore it?  
For, so the Shrine abide, what shame—what pride—  
If we, the priests, were bound or crowned before it? [36]*

This daring, almost perverse, use of religious imagery runs through the whole of his writings, and is designed to enforce the truth that the Divine (or whatever one chooses to call it) is not a *deus absconditus* but is to be found active in the ordinary lives of men. The nature of a man's religious creed was of little consequence; indeed, doctrinal ideas might even get in the way if they led men to miss the substance for the shadow, the fact for the word. The true religion lay in service,

Not as a ladder from earth to Heaven, not as a witness to  
any creed,  
But simple service simply given to his own kind in their  
common need. [37]

The true service could only be performed by indirect means, by the example of self-sacrifice and by attending to men's bodily needs rather than trying to break through directly to their souls. So that the missionary, however courageous, was misguided compared with the district officer who kept the peace and looked to the crops [38]. Not an attempt to overleap the bounds of ordinary life, but the raising of ordinary life to an heroic level; not a scorning of the body and the physical world, but its being turned to a sacramental use; these convictions lie at the heart of the imperialist faith. In some ways it is a reversion to the Catholic conception of society—each order fulfilling its function by employing its appropriate gifts rather than the individual trying to ignore the limitations of his setting and aiming at some impossible perfection.

Such a view meant a conscious acceptance of imperfection, of the necessity of working with tainted hands.

Lesser men feign greater goals,  
 Failing whereof they may sit  
 Scholarly to judge the souls  
 That go down into the Pit  
 And, despite its certain clay,  
 Heave a new world toward the day.

Rosebery, it may be remembered, had spoken of the Empire in a similar manner, and Chamberlain in his blunter fashion had declared that you could not have omelettes without breaking eggs. Moberly Bell, editor of *The Times*, when defending Rhodes after the Jameson Raid, gave the argument a more philosophic and dangerous twist:

The curse of the present age is an overbelief in culture, civilisation and altruism. They are all excellent qualities, we

should cultivate them, we should choose our friends among those possessing them, we should educate our children up to them—but if the world consisted of them alone we should be in about as bad a way as if all horses were racehorses. We wear black cloth coats & top hats but we dont insist on employing only bricklayers who wear them. The rough & tumble everyday work of the world has to be done by people with other qualities. . . . When you want a man to build you a house you dont enquire into his moral or ethical qualities. Why should you when you want to build an empire? Do you think that Drake or Clive or Warren Hastings or Nelson were all faultless gentlemen. We have to use the tools that are to hand. . . [39].

Kipling drew a constant contrast between the cloistered, untested virtue of the stay-at-home critic and the practising if blemished virtue of men who did the world's work. The necessary co-presence of evil with good is, of course, a leading axiom of conservative thought, and may be found enunciated in the works of Burke, Hegel, and Bradley.

The whole of Kipling's outlook was oriented in conscious opposition to that of modern urbanized society, and of its distinctive creed, liberalism. The urban bourgeois was rootless, living in an atomized society bereft of order and natural leadership. Dwelling in an entirely artificial, man-made environment, he was sundered from immediate contact with the forces of nature and sheltered from the essential realities of life. Divorced from first-hand experience his knowledge was of a similar kind; it was—to use a distinction of Professor Price—'thought knowledge' in contrast to 'observation knowledge', not the inarticulate knowledge of the 'man on the spot' or the craftsman, but that second-hand or second-order knowledge when experience is reduced to words. Professor Oakeshott who likes to use the analogy of cooking would say that it is the

contrast between the knowledge of the chef and the knowledge of a recipe, between an instinctive code of behaviour and the knowledge derived from a book of etiquette. The mark of the intellectual was book-learning and his one tool, the use of words. The critical intelligence had been developed in him to a monstrous and unnatural degree, so that his instinctive life was 'sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought'. Not being in contact with immediate reality, not having to put himself to the test and to match thought by deed, he framed to himself an abstract scheme of values drawn out of reflection on book knowledge. The mark of this abstract scheme was its claim to establish a higher morality than the prevailing practice of the world. In consequence it condemned the existing order of things as the outcome of tyrannous restraints placed on the mass of the people whose nature it held to be fundamentally virtuous. While for Kipling power and force were part of the essential discipline required by human nature, for the liberal they were inherently evil. Kipling saw the liberal as the victim of the most dangerous form of illusion, hypocrisy. Claiming to be directed by a higher morality he was kept blinded to his own egotism. His creed was essentially a critical one that demanded no real sacrifice of himself. Kipling noted that liberals 'for all their unrest at the agonies of others . . . abandon no whit of soft living'. It was the creed of the comfortable and reflected their aversion to any form of discipline or restraint. And yet its result was fearful, because it had all the character and force of a religion—a religion in which men made god in their own image and delivered themselves anew to their ancient enemies, vanity and sloth [40].

From this class came the opposition to empire, since empire did not square with its abstract democratic ideals

and its abstract dislike of dominion and power. (It was no more than an abstract dislike because in practice like all demagogic sentiments it was insatiably power-hungry but disguised this by aiming at power in a different form.) Its typical representative was the censorious itinerant M.P. whom Kipling satirized in *Pageet M.P.* and the tale *Little Foxes*. But it would be superficial to think that he was simply opposed to one particular political view. His objection went much deeper—it extended to the whole race of politicians and all those who lived by trading in words and slogans. Nothing can match his scorn for the M.P. who came down to Westward Ho and lectured about patriotism and waved a Union Jack in their faces. For Kipling these were holy matters to be kept behind the veil. In his 'Song of the English' it is the dumb created things, the fruit of work, that are made to speak for the cause of empire—the lighthouses, the deep-sea cables, the cities. Above all, the ships:

Go, get you gone up-Channel with the sea-crust on your plates;

Go, get you into London with the burden of your freights!

Haste, for they talk of Empire there, and say, if any seek,

The Lights of England sent you and by silence shall ye speak!

The Empire then for Kipling represented not simply the appointed task bequeathed by history, it represented that type of life and work which would combat the deterioration of character brought about by an excessively urbanized and intellectualized civilization. Through emigration the balance between town and country population might be restored in the Empire as a whole, and the dissociation between reason and instinct repaired. Milner, too, held the same notion [41]. It lay behind the campaign for



compulsory military training and can be traced among the motives which led to the foundation of Baden-Powell's Boy Scout movement.

Kipling's outlook, it seems to me, stands in a recognizably conservative tradition. It is true that he had not the same balance as Burke, nor the same generosity of mind or philosophic reach. But by the intuitive nature of his temperament he was nearer to the instincts of his class, and expressed them undistorted by an intellectual medium. Edmund Wilson argued that his mind had the violence of suppressed fear. Whatever its psychological origins it is difficult to call his outlook, as Lionel Trilling does, 'a puny and mindless imperialism'. For it possessed all those ingredients which Burke fashioned into a profound philosophy of life and politics, and which must be met and answered before a man can properly call himself a liberal [42]. It is remarkable, I think, that the overt Hegelian movement of Oxford Idealism should in practice have been deflected to the liberal cause, and that it was left to Kipling to harness its basic assumptions to the cause of imperialism.

I said earlier in my lecture that the study of political thought in its historical context had the advantage of testing ideas against the wear and tear of time. The twentieth century has brutally revealed the illusions that inhered in the imperialist mind—its illusion about its own efficiency, its caricature of liberalism, its own full measure of hypocrisy, its woeful underestimate of the material and spiritual cost of the use of force, its failure to reckon with the strength of historical trends. In this last respect Kipling and Milner failed to take into their reckoning how strongly the tide was setting, not merely in England but in the dominions overseas, towards an urbanized, bureaucratic, levelling society. It was here that their view

was most deficient because it eluded the problem of the age—to find a philosophy of life and politics appropriate to urban man. Imperialists like Cromer and Lyall did not share this deficient historical sense, and were more aware that the action of historical forces—the progressive redistribution of economic and intellectual power throughout the world—required a policy of constant political adjustment. Kipling and Milner were left to fight a ‘last-ditch’ battle and to become allies of die-hard conservatism, of the ‘obese, unchallenged old things that stifle and overlies us’ which both had fought so strongly in their earlier career.

Yet if the verdict of the twentieth century has gone against imperialism, a philosophy of politics, as I have remarked, does not finally stand or fall by its failure or success in action. Inasmuch as imperialism stood in the line of descent of a permanent political tradition, the permanent elements remain, although they will receive another mode of expression.

On an occasion like this a man is expected to say something of the star by which he sets his course. I hope, whatever my obscurities, *that* at least shines through; for it is my personal belief that to inquire into the nature, and to observe the fate, of ideas and attitudes on which men stake their lives is to experience the highest illumination which the study of history is capable of yielding.

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