

READING BOOKLET

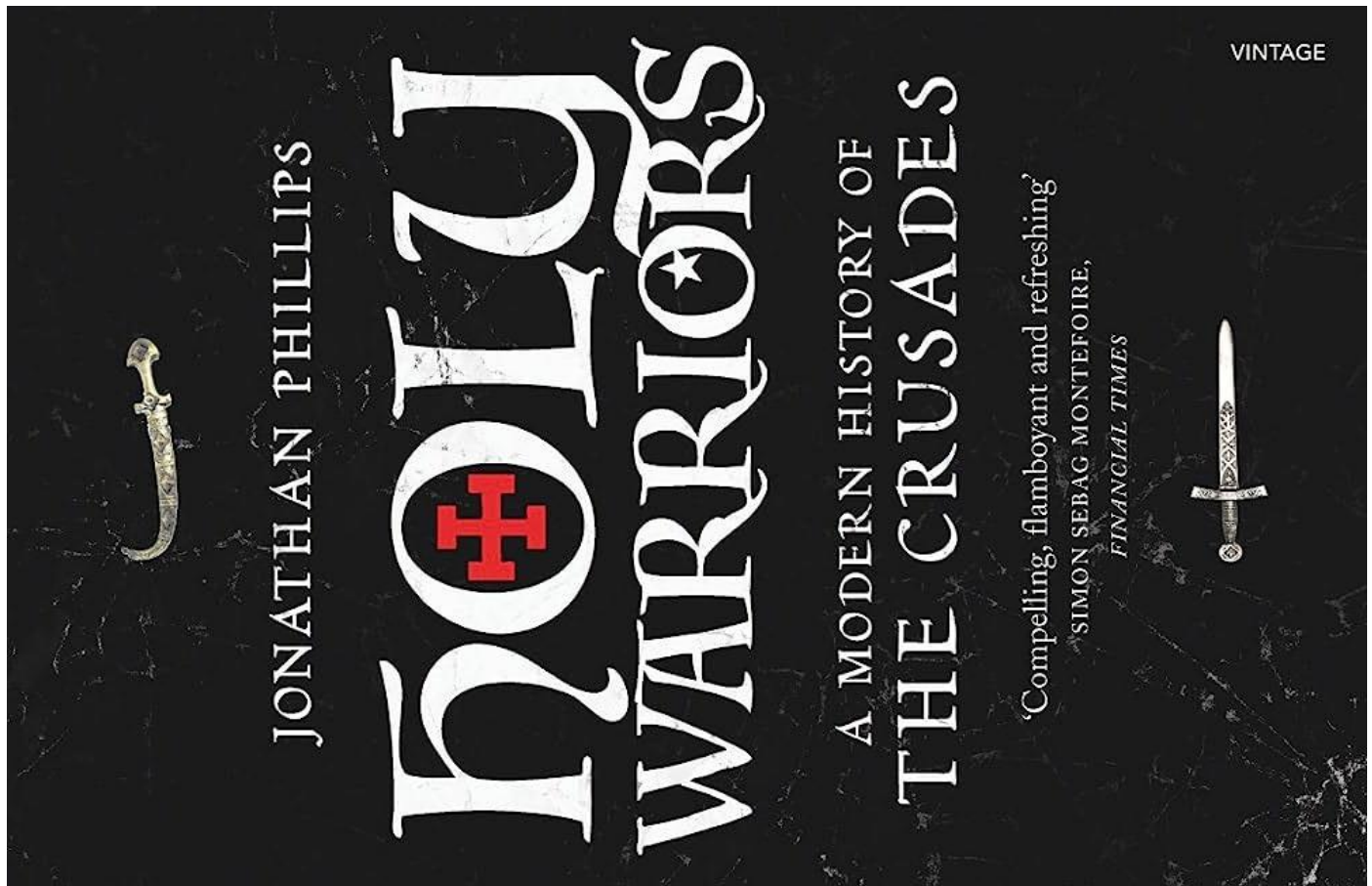


HISTORY READING BOOKLET

(for summer transition work)

OCR History Y203-Y233 (Crusades) & Y320 (British Empire)

Reading one: from *A Holy Warriors: A Modern History of the Crusades*,
Jonathan Phillips



I

‘Deus vult’: The First Crusade and the
Capture of Jerusalem, 1095–1099

“A grave report has come from the lands around Jerusalem . . . that a race absolutely alien to God . . . has invaded the land of the Christians . . . They have either razed the churches of God to the ground or enslaved them to their own rites . . . They cut open the navels of those whom they choose to torment . . . drag them around and flog them before killing them as they lie on the ground with all their entrails out . . . What can I say of the appalling violation of women? On whom does the task lie of avenging this, if not on you? . . . Take the road to the Holy Sepulchre, rescue that land and rule over it yourselves, for that land, as scripture says *floweth with milk and honey* . . . Take this road for the remission of your sins, assured of the un fading glory of the kingdom of heaven.” When Pope Urban had said these things . . . everyone shouted in unison: “*Deus vult! Deus vult!*”, “God wills it! God wills it!”

In this vivid – and hugely exaggerated – language, as reported by Robert of Rheims, Pope Urban II launched the First Crusade at Clermont in central France in November 1095. Four years later, having endured a journey of astounding hardship, the self-proclaimed ‘knights of Christ’ arrived at Jerusalem. On 15 July 1099 the crusaders stormed the walls and put its defenders to the sword to reclaim Christ’s city from Islam.

Pope Urban II and the Call to Crusade

While, 900 years later, a distant descendant of Pope Urban’s creation continues to cast its shadow on Christian–Muslim relations across the world, it is an irony that crusading was primarily intended to remedy

problems within western Europe. As the head of the Catholic Church, Urban was responsible for the spiritual well-being of everyone in Latin Christendom. Yet Europe was beset by a variety of evils: violence and lawlessness were rife and Emperor Henry IV of Germany, the most powerful secular ruler, was, at times, an excommunicate, cast out of the Church because he had challenged papal authority.² In Urban's mind, the fundamental cause of such chaos was a diminution of faith; it was his role to restore peace and stability. If this was to be achieved spiritual concern would have to be blended with canny political calculation; perhaps to a modern audience the second of these elements sits a little uneasily on a man in his position, but to Urban the two were indivisible; as pope he did everything that was necessary to further God's work.

It was Urban's genius that he conceived of a plan that offered benefits to the pope *and* to all of his flock. Perhaps he achieved this partly because of his family background: he was from the county of Champagne in northern France and was a man of noble blood. The combination of this high-born lineage and a successful career in the Church gave him a direct insight into the hopes and fears of the knightly classes and this, in part, explains why crusading satisfied the aspirations of so many. He linked several ingredients familiar to medieval society, such as pilgrimage and the idea of a holy war against the enemies of God, with an unprecedented offer of salvation, a combination almost guaranteed to enthuse the warriors of western Europe.

To persuade people – in any age – to leave their homes and loved ones, and to venture into the unknown it is usually necessary to convince them that the cause is worthwhile. As many modern conflicts reveal, propaganda can play a vital part in a build-up to war. Pope Urban II's address at Clermont used highly inflammatory images to provoke moral outrage in his audience. The Muslims were described in language that emphasised their 'otherness' and their barbarity towards innocent Christians. In reality, while it is true that pilgrims were occasionally maltreated, it was also the case that there had been no systematic persecution of Christians by the Muslims of the Holy Land for decades. Yet Urban's impassioned rhetoric demanded a response from the knights of France. He called for vengeance, a concept that was second nature to knights accustomed to correcting an injustice through force, supported by the weight of moral right.

Through references to authorities on Church law, such as St Augustine, Urban and his circle of advisers constructed a case whereby violence could, in certain circumstances, be seen as a morally positive act.³ This required a just cause – usually it was a reaction to the aggression of another party, in this case the alleged atrocities committed by the Muslims. It needed proper authority to proclaim the war; and also right intention – that is, pure motives in a conflict of proportional, but not excessive, force. To these 'just war' principles, crusading added the taking of a vow and an association with pilgrimage. Thus, because it was judged to be morally positive the crusade became an act of penance that merited a spiritual reward. Earlier attempts to restrict the violence that plagued eleventh-century Europe included the Peace of God movement in which the Church forbade fighting for a specific period of time under pain of ecclesiastical penalties. At Clermont, however, Urban urged the knights of France to cease their private wars and to begin a battle worthy of their noble status; to fight for God was to take service with the ultimate Lord, and to win forgiveness for their wicked lives was a prize immeasurably greater than any earthly riches could offer.⁴

Without doubt the violent warriors of the West had committed many acts displeasing to God and here Urban offered them a chance to avoid a terrible fate. Practically every church in the land had a sculpture or a fresco of hell: savage devils gouged out the eyes of screaming sinners; others were skinned or tortured with spears and pitchforks; impaled humans were roasted for eternity.⁵ The message from the Church was terrifyingly simple: there was no avoiding the consequences of sin; a knight, therefore, needed an escape route from Satan's fires. These same frescoes also showed heaven – a place of peace, tranquillity and everlasting safety. Making pilgrimages and giving donations to monastic houses could help to avoid hell, but Urban brilliantly presented what one contemporary described as 'a new way to attain salvation'.⁶ The pope judged – correctly – that the crusade would be a sufficiently arduous experience to deserve the remission of all penance; in effect it would wipe the slate clean and all the vicious, violent misdeeds of the medieval warrior – or anyone who took part – would be cleared. As far as the knightly classes were concerned, the neatest aspect of all was that they could continue fighting – only now their energies were directed towards the enemies:

of God, rather than their fellow Christians. Thus, the cause in which they fought meant the Church now blessed their activities, rather than condemned them.

Those who wished to take part in the crusade had to make a public statement of their commitment in the form of a vow and being marked with the sign of the cross. Often amidst hugely emotional scenes, enthusiastic recruits would surge forwards and demand to have a cloth cross pinned to their shoulder, desperate to bear the symbol that represented Christ's sacrifice and their own imitation of his suffering. Preachers adopted the words of Christ himself: 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.' If a crusader deserted his vows then he deserved eternal opprobrium; Urban 'commanded that . . . he should forever be regarded as an outlaw, unless he came to his senses and undertook to complete whatever of his obligation was left undone'.⁷ As an aside, the crusade also had the effect, temporarily at least, of bringing huge numbers of people under the control of the Church. Once again, we can see how Urban had found a way to enhance the standing of the papacy while offering something attractive to others.

The call to free the Holy Sepulchre and the Christians of the East was shaped in a familiar form; namely, a pilgrimage. This was a fundamental feature of medieval life; the notion of turning to a saint for help was an everyday experience and people sought the assistance of these heavenly beings in health, harvests, fertility, protection and forgiveness for sins. The presence of a saint was manifested by relics, parts of a saint's body, or objects associated with his or her life, that were believed to retain their holy power and to offer a conduit to divine help. The veneration of relics often required a journey and some saints became associated with particular causes: St Leonard of Noblat, for example, was the patron saint of prisoners. People in captivity prayed to him and when their incarceration ended they made a pilgrimage to Noblat (in central France) and, as a mark of gratitude, placed their chains on the church altar. While many pilgrimages were simply processions or visits to local churches, longer journeys to important shrines, such as that of St James at Santiago de Compostela in north-western Spain, grew in popularity during the eleventh century. The ultimate pilgrimage destination was the Holy Land – the place where Christ had lived and died. Because He had

ascended to heaven there was no body to venerate and so the focus was on places touched by His presence and His death, most particularly His tomb, the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. The Holy Land, and this particular site above all, became the principal goal of the First Crusade. For the crusaders, a journey there deserved the greatest reward of all – the remission of all sins. This was integral to the hearts and minds of medieval man and the notion of regaining Christ's land for Christianity lay at the core of Urban's appeal.

Even though the papacy advanced spiritual motives as the prime reason for the crusade it is clear that more worldly factors also played their part. Robert of Rheims' account (written c.1106–7) of Urban's speech pointed this up when he claimed the pope spoke of a land of milk and honey – an alluring prospect for people troubled by poor harvests and in search of a change from the drudgery of village life. While the desire to liberate Christ's city had to be paramount – otherwise God would not favour the expedition – some crusaders would need to remain in the Levant to hold the territory; there was very little point in taking Jerusalem if everyone then returned home. The First Crusade was in part, therefore, a war of Christian colonisation, as well as Christian liberation. For those prepared to take a chance it offered a new life. However, as it turned out, while huge numbers were willing to become crusaders, relatively few people chose to stay in the East afterwards. If the hope of plunder and riches helped to draw people towards this great adventure, in the event, the acquisition of wealth proved far harder than it had appeared beforehand.

Notwithstanding Urban's desire to restore the spiritual well-being of western Europe it was an external trigger that prompted him to launch the crusade. In March 1095 envoys arrived from Emperor Alexius of Constantinople to appeal for help against the Muslims of Asia Minor. Alexius ruled the Byzantine Empire, the successor to the old Roman Empire, and had, until recent years, controlled territories that stretched across Asia Minor to Antioch in northern Syria, as well as modern-day Greece, Bulgaria and Albania. By 1095, much of Asia Minor had been lost, although ongoing troubles within the Muslim world gave him an opportunity to fight back.⁸ For many years he had sent requests for groups of well-armed knights to help his cause and there was, by now, a strong tradition of western mercenaries serving

in the imperial army. In 1095, however, Alexius, understandably, failed to anticipate that Pope Urban would use this opportunity to make a far wider appeal to the people of Latin Christendom and launch the crusade.⁹ Pope Urban himself also had an agenda with regard to Alexius. In 1054, disputes over doctrinal matters and, more pertinently, the relative authority of the pope to the patriarch of Constantinople had provoked a schism between the Catholics and the Orthodox Church: a situation that still exists today. In spite of this split, the two camps maintained contact and Urban saw the crusade as an opportunity to foster better relations – although from his perspective Rome was the senior partner because the Catholics were the people offering help to their Orthodox brothers. In fact, Urban cast himself in the role of a father to his ‘son’ the Byzantine emperor, and saw Rome as a mother to Constantinople.

Recruitment, Pogroms and Preparations for the Crusade

Urban and his circle considered how best to broadcast the crusade appeal. In an era before mass communications it was vital to make as big a visual impact as possible. This meant staging numerous public ceremonies: the Council of Clermont was carefully publicised with invitations sent to churchmen across France, Spain and parts of Germany. Urban chose Clermont for its central location and the meeting attracted thirteen archbishops, eighty bishops and cardinals and over ninety abbots. For about a fortnight the pope laid down a legislative programme for the spiritual recovery of Christendom. On the penultimate day he unveiled the centrepiece of his agenda: the crusade. Urban knew that his own presence was crucial and to this end he then embarked upon a huge tour that took him hundreds of miles northwards to Le Mans and Angers, down to Bordeaux, Toulouse and Montpellier in the south.¹⁰ This was no casually arranged ramble, however; no pope had been north of the Alps for fifty years. Even in today’s Internet age the appearance of a celebrity – be it at a supermarket opening or a major political rally – attracts crowds of people eager to see or hear a famous individual for themselves. The arrival of such a powerful figure was bound to excite attention and Urban did his utmost to exploit this. Time and again, for example, at

Saint-Gilles, Le Puy, Chaise-Dieu, Limoges, Tours and Poitiers, the pope would appear on the feast day of the local saint, or else he would consecrate a new building or attend an important festival. In other words, he was careful to choose an opportunity which allowed him to address the biggest crowd possible. The arrival of the papal entourage was a truly splendid sight; the wealth and splendour of Pope Urban and his court were dominated by the successor of St Peter who wore a conical white cap with a circlet of gold and gems around the base.

It was not just through his personal appearances that Urban recruited crusaders. The audience at Clermont carried the call back to their homes and, even though the response to his speech had been rapturous, the pope had little sense of the extraordinary zeal with which his words would be taken up. News of the expedition surged across Europe and saturated the Latin West with crusading fervour. The pope’s appeal to the knights of France soon spread to encompass parts of Spain and Germany as well.

One immediate, if undesired, side effect was a series of attacks against the Jews.¹¹ The rabble-rousing sermons of a preacher named Folkmar incited audiences to turn against the non-Christians in their midst. Jewish communities had peacefully existed in western Europe for many centuries. Folkmar took Urban’s theme of alien peoples and, instead of directing Christian violence towards the Muslims, he chose to emphasise the Jews’ history as the killers of Christ and to suggest that they therefore deserved punishment. One contemporary Hebrew source wrote: ‘the princes and nobles and common folk in France took counsel and set plans to rise up like eagles and to battle and to clear the way for journeying to Jerusalem, the holy city, and for reaching the sepulchre of the crucified, a trampled corpse who cannot profit and who cannot save for he is worthless. They said to one another: “Behold we travel to a distant land to do battle with the kings of that land. We take our souls in our hands in order to kill and to subjugate all those kingdoms which do not believe in the crucified. How much more so should we kill and subjugate the Jews who killed and crucified Him.”’¹² Of comparable importance was the Jews’ wealth – many people owed them money (secured by the sin of usury – the charging of interest on loans), and the crusaders needed large sums of cash to set out. In spite of enjoying the nominal protection of local bishops,

in the late spring of 1096 the Jewish quarters in Cologne, Speyer Mainz and Worms were besieged and stormed. The army of Count Emicho of Leiningen was especially culpable. He was described as a wicked man: 'our chief persecutor. He had no mercy on the elderly, on young men and young women, on infants and sucklings, nor on the ill. He made the people of the Lord like dust to be trampled. Their young men he put to the sword and their pregnant women he ripped open.'¹³ The Christian chronicler Albert of Aachen suggested that there was an effort to convert the Jews – often forcibly.¹⁴ Hebrew sources echo this in reporting the crusaders' attitude: 'Let us take vengeance first upon them. Let us wipe them out as a nation; Israel's name will be mentioned no more. Or else let them be like us and acknowledge the child born of menstruation.'¹⁵ Beyond these terrible episodes in the Rhineland, however, the attacks were limited; this was not a Europe-wide or systematic persecution of the Jews. The ecclesiastical authorities tried to calm matters; the Bible forbade the killing of Jews. The need to prevent major civil unrest was another reason to bring these events to a close; the Jews' payment of bribes to local bishops also helped and order was duly restored.

Crusaders from the Rhineland – often known as the Peasants' Crusade – set out for the East as early as the spring of 1096, led by the charismatic preacher, Peter the Hermit. Historians have shown that this group included a number of nobles and it is no longer, as previously thought, regarded as an army made up of rustics; it has now been renamed the People's Crusade. These adventurers reached Constantinople in August 1096 where their dismal levels of discipline horrified Alexius. The emperor took harsh measures to preserve the safety of his city while the fear and animosity generated by this group contributed much towards subsequent tensions between the crusaders and the Greeks. Alexius persuaded the Rhinelanders to cross the Bosphorus into Asia Minor and then he abandoned them, providing little support in terms of guides or supplies. Within a few weeks the crusaders encountered the armies of Kilij Arslan, the Seljuk Turkish sultan of Asia Minor. In October 1096 his forces slaughtered the vast majority of the Christians, although Peter the Hermit managed to escape. As Albert of Aachen observed, it was just punishment for the crusaders' ill-treatment of the Jews. This was scarcely an auspicious start to the First Crusade.¹⁶

While these events unfolded in the East, the main armies began to finalise their preparations. The first good harvest in years seemed to signify divine approval and across Europe people raised money for their great adventure. Many individuals have left traces of their preparations in charters – documents that detail the sale or mortgage of their lands and the acquisition of money and provisions. In subsequent centuries material of this sort becomes bland and formulaic, an efficient record of the practical details of a transaction. Back in the late eleventh century, however, such bureaucratic conformity was blissfully ill-developed and charters often contained long and elaborate stories that explained why an individual had taken a particular course of action. This material can give a vivid insight into the mindset of the contemporary nobility, not least because the charters were made prior to the expedition's departure and are not clouded by the knowledge of its subsequent success.¹⁷ A document of the castellan Nivelon of Fréteval related: 'Whenever the impulse of warlike fierceness roused me, I would gather about myself a band of mounted men and a crowd of followers. I would descend upon the village and freely give the goods of the men of St Père of Chartres to my knights for food. Now, therefore, I am going as a pilgrim to Jerusalem, which is still in bondage with her sons, to secure the divine pardon that I seek for my misdeeds.'¹⁸ We can see in this the violence and chaos so troublesome to Pope Urban; in this instance a church had been targeted for the knightly depredations. Yet with the call for the crusade, Nivelon saw a chance to redeem himself and to make good his sins as a pilgrim warrior fighting to liberate Jerusalem. The fusion of pilgrimage and holy war is neatly displayed in a Provençal charter for Guy and Geoffrey of Signes, who took the cross 'on the one hand for the grace of pilgrimage and on the other, under the protection of God, to wipe out the defilement of the pagans and the immoderate madness through which innumerable Christians have already been oppressed, made captive and killed with barbaric fury.'¹⁹

Who were the First Crusaders?

In the autumn of 1096 the main crusading armies set out on the 3,000-mile journey from northern Europe to Jerusalem. It has been

estimated that about 60,000 people took part in the expedition. The population of western Europe may have been around 20 million; self-evidently the vast majority of people stayed at home; if, however, one considers ties of family, friendship and trade then the crusade touched the lives of millions. Fulcher of Chartres wrote: 'whoever heard of such a mixture of languages in one army since there were French, Flemings, Frisians, Gauls, Allobroges [Savoyards], Lotharingians, Allemani [southern German and Swiss], Bavarians, Normans, English, Scots, Aquitainians, Italians, Danes, Apulians, Iberians and Bretons.'²⁰ While recent episodes such as the Norman Conquest of England in 1066 gave some indication of the resources required for a large military campaign, the crusade was on a far greater scale. It has been estimated that the expedition cost four times a knight's annual income and so loans, gifts and mortgages were essential.²¹ Families gave what they could; often they had to support more than one individual because brothers, or fathers and sons went together. Gifts of horses and mules were particularly welcome, as were precious stones, gold and silverware. The currency of the time was of such a small denomination that it was utterly impractical to try to carry the necessary cash, otherwise the crusader army would have consisted of countless treasure-carrying carts. While we know that at least seven different currencies (coins from Lucca, Chartres, Le Mans, Melgueil, Le Puy, Valence and Poitou) were in circulation amongst the Provençal contingent alone, the better option was to take precious objects to trade with local money-changers en route.²² Yet Urban's offer of salvation struck a deep chord with the wider populace – who would not want to have all their sins wiped clean? Thus, men and women, young and old, the poor and the infirm joined the expedition as pilgrims. Many were utterly unsuited to the rigours of the campaign and in the course of the crusade the majority of this anonymous mass perished through disease or starvation, or deserted.

Two particular groups were not represented on the crusade. One body of people who wished to take part were banned, namely monks. Their vows required them to remain in the cloister; they were to fight the Devil through prayer, rather than with the sword. As Urban wrote: 'we do not want those who have abandoned the world and vowed themselves to spiritual warfare either to bear arms or to go on this

journey; we forbid them to go.'²³ The fact that Urban had to issue letters making such points explicit shows that many monks were attracted to the concept. Probably the most noticeable absentees from amongst the First Crusaders were kings. Monarchs could have provided an obvious focus of command and resource, yet none became involved. In large part, this was a matter of circumstance, although their absence undoubtedly suited Urban because it meant the papacy retained a dominant position in the campaign. King William Rufus of England was in perpetual conflict with his churchmen; Emperor Henry IV of Germany was never likely to participate on account of the long-running conflict between his empire and the papacy, while King Philip of France was also cast out of the Church, albeit for more carnal reasons. He had pursued a relationship with Bertrada of Anjou, who was already married to Count Fulk IV of Anjou ('*le Réchit*' – Fulk 'the Repulsive', a name acquired because of his hideously deformed feet). Clearly this was a situation the Church could not sanction. Philip refused to end the affair (he too was already married) and he was duly excommunicated; it would be unacceptable for the 'Knights of Christ' to be headed by an adulterer.

Without the presence of kings it was left to members of the senior nobility to provide leadership, and five individuals stand out particularly. Godfrey of Bouillon ruled the duchy of Lorraine, a region on the border between France and Germany, although it was to the ruler of the latter that he owed obedience.²⁴ Godfrey was a deeply religious man who, contrary to Urban's strictures, brought a group of monks with him to provide spiritual support. He was also a fearless soldier, famed for his ability in single combat. Generous, gracious and affable, this tall, bearded man was a model holy warrior. His younger brother Baldwin began his career as a cleric but he set aside his habit and became a soldier. Also tall, with brown hair and a beard, he was serious in dress and speech; those who did not know him well took him to be a bishop. Baldwin was married to an Englishwoman, Gothehilde, who accompanied him on the campaign. He was a fine horseman and fighter, although as events reveal, he had a harsh, pragmatic streak too. Count Stephen of Blois was a charming, well-educated man who wrote poetry and sent back letters to his wife Adela, a daughter of William the Conqueror.²⁵ He was an individual of high standing and at one point seems to have been made

commander of the army, although as we will see, this was not a task he carried out with any distinction or dignity. Count Raymond of Saint-Gilles was an Occitan-speaking noble whose territory was based around Toulouse in southern France.²⁶ He was an older man, in his sixties at the time of the crusade, who had committed himself to support Pope Urban's appeal prior to the Council of Clermont. Raymond actually sold his lands in Europe as a sign that he was wholehearted in his wish to forge a new life in the Holy Land or die in the attempt. He was a strong-willed, pious individual, although rather arrogant and overbearing in his manner; in fact, his lack of diplomatic skills ultimately cost him the throne of Jerusalem. Finally, there was Bohemond of Taranto, arguably the most controversial figure on the crusade.²⁷ He was a Norman-Sicilian whose father had already passed over him in his choice of successor; he was in consequence not especially wealthy, but possessed a fierce determination to advance his standing. Bohemond was a formidable warrior, tall, fair-haired and blue-eyed; clean-shaven unlike most of his colleagues, he had the bravery required of a champion of Christ. As a Norman-Sicilian he was a traditional enemy of the Byzantines and had taken part in an unsuccessful invasion of the empire in the 1080s.

As the crusaders set out in late 1096, chroniclers recorded the tearful scenes of departure. Fulcher of Chartres wrote of the overwhelming emotional turmoil at this traumatic moment: 'Oh what grief there was! What sighs, what weeping, what lamentation among friends when husband left his wife so dear to him, his children, his possessions however great, his father, his mother, brothers and many other relatives! But . . . none flinched from going because for love of God they were leaving . . . firmly convinced that they would receive a hundredfold what the Lord promised to those who loved Him. Then husband told wife the time he expected to return, assuring her that if by God's grace he survived he would come back home to her. He commended her to the Lord, kissed her lingeringly, and promised her as she wept that he would return. She, though, fearing that she would never see him again, could not stand but swooned to the ground, mourning her loved one whom she was losing in this life as if he were already dead. He departed . . . with firm resolution.'²⁸ Onward, Christian Soldiers.

anti-imperialism, according to the extension or contraction of the formal empire and the degree of belief in the value of British rule overseas. Ironically enough, the alternative interpretation of 'imperialism', which began as part of the radical polemic against the Federationists, has in effect only confirmed their analysis. Those who have seen imperialism as the high stage of capitalism and the inevitable result of foreign investment agree that it applied historically only to the period after 1880. As a result they have been led into a similar preoccupation with formal manifestations of imperialism because the late-Victorian age was one of spectacular extension of British rule. Consequently, Hobson and Lenin, Professor Moon and Mr Woolf¹ have confirmed from the opposite point of view their opponents' contention that late-Victorian imperialism was a qualitative change in the nature of British expansion and a sharp deviation from the innocent and static liberalism of the middle of the century. This alleged change, welcomed by one school, condemned by the other, was accepted by both.

For all their disagreement these two doctrines pointed to one interpretation; that mid-Victorian 'indifference' and late-Victorian 'enthusiasm' for empire were directly related to the rise and decline in free-trade beliefs. Thus Lenin wrote: 'When free competition in Great Britain was at its height, i.e. between 1840 and 1860, the leading British bourgeois politicians were... of the opinion that the liberation of the colonies and their complete separation from Great Britain was inevitable and desirable.'² Professor Schuyler extends this to the decade from 1861 to 1870: '... for it was during those years that tendencies toward the disruption of the empire reached their climax. The doctrines of the Manchester school were at the height of their influence.'³

In the last quarter of the century, Professor Langer finds that 'there was an obvious danger that the British [export] market would be steadily restricted. Hence the emergence and sudden flowering of the movement for expansion... Manchester doctrine had been belied by the facts. It was an outworn theory to be thrown into the discard.'⁴ Their argument may be summarized in this way: the mid-Victorian formal empire did not expand, indeed it seemed to be disintegrating, therefore the period was anti-imperialist; the later-Victorian formal empire expanded rapidly, therefore this was an era of imperialism; the change was caused by the obsolescence of free trade.

The trouble with this argument is that it leaves out too many of the facts which it claims to explain. Consider the results of a decade of 'indifference' to empire. Between 1841 and 1851 Great Britain occupied or annexed New Zealand, the Gold Coast, Labuan, Natal, the Punjab, Sind and Hong Kong. In the next twenty years British control was asserted over Berar,

¹ J. A. Hobson, *Imperialism* (1902); V. I. Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (Selected Works, (n.d.), v); P. T. Moon, *Imperialism and World Politics* (New York, 1926); L. Woolf, *Empire and Commerce in Africa* (n.d.).

² Lenin, *op. cit.*, v, 71.

³ R. L. Schuyler, *The Fall of the Old Colonial System* (New York, 1945), p. 45.

⁴ W. L. Langer, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1890-1902* (New York, 1935), i, 75-6.

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THE IMPERIALISM OF FREE TRADE

BY JOHN GALLAGHER AND RONALD ROBINSON

I

It ought to be a commonplace that Great Britain during the nineteenth century expanded overseas by means of 'informal empire'¹ as much as by acquiring dominion in the strict constitutional sense. For purposes of economic analysis it would clearly be unreal to define imperial history exclusively as the history of those colonies coloured red on the map. Nevertheless, almost all imperial history has been written on the assumption that the empire of formal dominion is historically comprehensible in itself and can be cut out of its context in British expansion and world politics. The conventional interpretation of the nineteenth-century empire continues to rest upon study of the formal empire alone, which is rather like judging the size and character of icebergs solely from the parts above the water-line.

The imperial historian, in fact, is very much at the mercy of his own particular concept of empire. By that, he decides what facts are of 'imperial' significance; his data are limited in the same way as his concept, and his final interpretation itself depends largely upon the scope of his hypothesis. Different hypotheses have led to conflicting conclusions. Since imperial historians are writing about different empires and since they are generalizing from eccentric or isolated aspects of them, it is hardly surprising that these historians sometimes contradict each other.

The orthodox view of nineteenth-century imperial history remains that laid down from the standpoint of the racial and legalistic concept which inspired the Imperial Federation movement. Historians such as Seeley and Egerton looked on events in the formal empire as the only test of imperial activity; and they regarded the empire of kinship and constitutional dependence as an organism with its own laws of growth. In this way the nineteenth century was divided into periods of imperialism and

¹ The term has been given authority by Dr C. R. Fay. See *Cambridge History of the British Empire* (Cambridge, 1940), II, 399.

Outh, Lower Burma and Kowloon, over Lagos and the neighbourhood of Sierra Leone, over Basutoland, Griqualand and the Transvaal; and new colonies were established in Queensland and British Columbia. Unless this expansion can be explained by 'fits of absence of mind', we are faced with the paradox that it occurred despite the determination of the imperial authorities to avoid extending their rule.

This contradiction arises even if we confine our attention to the formal empire, as the orthodox viewpoint would force us to do. But if we look beyond into the regions of **informal empire**, then the difficulties become overwhelming. The normal account of South African policy in the middle of the century is that Britain abandoned any idea of controlling the interior. But in fact what looked like withdrawal from the Orange River Sovereignty and the Transvaal was based not on any *a priori* theories about the inconveniences of colonies but upon hard facts of strategy and commerce in a wider field. Great Britain was in South Africa primarily to safeguard the routes to the East, by preventing foreign powers from acquiring bases on the flank of those routes. In one way or another this imperial interest demanded some kind of hold upon Africa south of the Limpopo River, and although between 1852 and 1877 the **Boer Republics** were not controlled formally for this purpose by Britain, they were **effectually dominated by informal paramouncy and by their dependence on British ports**. If we refuse to narrow our view to that of formal empire, we can see how steadily and successfully the main imperial interest was pursued by maintaining supremacy over the whole region, and that it was pursued as steadily throughout the so-called anti-imperialist era as in the late-Victorian period. But it was done by shutting in the Boer Republics from the Indian Ocean: by the annexation of Natal in 1843, by keeping the Boers out of Delagoa Bay in 1860 and 1868, out of St Lucia Bay in 1861 and 1866, and by British intervention to block the union of the two Republics under Pretorius in 1860.¹ Strangely enough it was the first Gladstone Government which Schuyler regards as the climax of anti-imperialism, which annexed Basutoland in 1868 and Griqualand West in 1871 in order to ensure 'the safety of our South African Possessions'.² By informal means if possible, or by formal annexations when necessary, British paramouncy was steadily upheld.

Are these the actions of ministers anxious to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire? Do they look like 'indifference' to an empire rendered superfluous by free trade? On the contrary, here is a continuity of policy which the conventional interpretation misses because it takes account only of formal methods of control. It also misses the continuous grasp of the West African coast and of the South Pacific which British sea-power was able to maintain. Refusals to annex are no proof of reluctance to control. As Lord Aberdeen put it in 1845: '... it is unnecessary to add that Her Majesty's Government will not view with indifference the

¹ C. J. Uys, *In the Era of Shepstone* (Lovedale, Cape Province, 1933); and C. W. de Kiewiet, *British Colonial Policy and the South African Republics* (1929), *passim*.

² De Kiewiet, *op. cit.* p. 224.

assumption by another Power of a Protectorate which they, with due regard for the true interests of those [Pacific] islands, have refused.'¹

Nor can the obvious continuity of imperial constitutional policy throughout the mid- and late-Victorian years be explained on the orthodox hypothesis. If the granting of responsible government to colonies was due to the mid-Victorian 'indifference' to empire and even a desire to be rid of it, then why was this policy continued in the late-Victorian period when Britain was interested above all in preserving imperial unity? The common assumption that British governments in the free-trade era considered empire superfluous arises from over-estimating the significance of changes in legalistic forms. In fact, throughout the Victorian period responsible government was withheld from colonies if it involved sacrificing or endangering British paramouncy or interests. Wherever there was fear of a foreign challenge to British supremacy in the continent or sub-continent concerned, wherever the colony could not provide financially for its own internal security, the imperial authorities retained full responsibility, or, if they had already devolved it, intervened directly to secure their interests once more. In other words, **responsible government, far from being a separatist device, was simply a change from direct to indirect methods of maintaining British interests**. By slackening the formal political bond at the appropriate time, it was possible to rely on economic dependence and mutual good-feeling to keep the colonies bound to Britain while still using them as agents for further British expansion.

The inconsistency between fact and the orthodox interpretation arises in yet another way. For all the extensive anthologies of opinion supposedly hostile to colonies, how many colonies were actually abandoned? For instance, the West Africa Committee of 1865 made a strong and much quoted case for giving up all but one of the West African settlements, but even as they sat these settlements were being extended. **The Indian empire, however, is the most glaring gap in the traditional explanation. Its history in the 'period of indifference' is filled with wars and annexations.**

Moreover, in this supposedly *laissez-faire* period **India, far from being evacuated, was subjected to intensive development as an economic colony along the best mercantilist lines**. In India it was possible, throughout most of the period of the British Raj, to use the governing power to extort in the form of taxes and monopolies such valuable primary products as opium and salt. Furthermore, the characteristics of so-called imperialist expansion at the end of the nineteenth century developed in India long before the date (1880) when Lenin believed the age of economic imperialism opened. **Direct governmental promotion of products required by British industry, governmental manipulation of tariffs to help British exports, railway construction at high and guaranteed rates of interest to open the continental interior—all of these techniques of direct political control were employed in ways which seem alien to the so-called age of *laissez-faire*.** Moreover, they had little to do, particularly in railway finance, with the folk-lore of rugged individualism. 'All the money came from the English

¹ Quoted in J. M. Ward, *British Policy in the South Pacific, 1786-1833* (Sydney, 1948), p. 138.

capitalist' as a British official wrote, 'and, so long as he was guaranteed five per cent on the revenues of India, it was immaterial to him whether the funds which he lent were thrown into the Hooghly or converted into bricks and mortar.'¹

To sum up: the conventional view of Victorian imperial history leaves us with a series of awkward questions. In the age of 'anti-imperialism' why were all colonies retained? Why were so many more obtained? Why were so many new spheres of influence set up? Or again, in the age of 'imperialism', as we shall see later, why was there such reluctance to annex further territory? Why did decentralization, begun under the impetus of anti-imperialism, continue? In the age of *laissez-faire* why was the Indian economy developed by the state?

These paradoxes are too radical to explain as merely exceptions which prove the rule or by concluding that imperial policy was largely irrational and inconsistent, the product of a series of accidents and chances. The contradictions, it may be suspected, arise not from the historical reality but from the historians' approach to it. A hypothesis which fits more of the facts might be that of a fundamental continuity in British expansion throughout the nineteenth century.

II

The hypothesis which is needed must include informal as well as formal expansion, and must allow for the continuity of the process. The most striking fact about British history in the nineteenth century, as Seeley pointed out, is that it is the history of an expanding society. The exports of capital and manufactures, the migration of citizens, the dissemination of the English language, ideas and constitutional forms, were all of them radiations of the social energies of the British peoples. Between 1812 and 1914 over twenty million persons emigrated from the British Isles, and nearly 70 per cent of them went outside the Empire.² Between 1815 and 1880, it is estimated, £1,187,000,000 in credit had accumulated abroad, but no more than one-sixth was placed in the formal empire. Even by 1913, something less than half of the £3,975,000,000 of foreign investment lay inside the Empire.³ Similarly, in no year of the century did the Empire buy much more than one-third of Britain's exports. The basic fact is that British industrialization caused an ever-extending and intensifying development of overseas regions. Whether they were formally British or not, was a secondary consideration.

Imperialism, perhaps, may be defined as a sufficient political function of this process of integrating new regions into the expanding economy; its character is largely decided by the various and changing relationships between the political and economic elements of expansion in any particular

¹ Quoted in L. H. Jenks, *The Migration of British Capital to 1875* (1938), pp. 221-2.

² Sir W. K. Hancock, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs* (1940), II, pt. 1, 28.

³ A. H. Imlah, 'British Balance of Payments and Export of Capital, 1816-1913', *Econ. Hist. Rev.* 2nd ser. v (1952), pp. 237, 239; Hancock, *op. cit.* p. 27.

region and time. Two qualifications must be made. First, imperialism may be only indirectly connected with economic integration in that it sometimes extends beyond areas of economic development, but acts for their strategic protection. Secondly, although imperialism is a function of economic expansion, it is not a necessary function. Whether imperialist phenomena show themselves or not, is determined not only by the factors of economic expansion, but equally by the political and social organization of the regions brought into the orbit of the expansive society, and also by the world situation in general.

It is only when the politics of these new regions fail to provide satisfactory conditions for commercial or strategic integration and when their relative weakness allows, that power is used imperialistically to adjust those conditions. Economic expansion, it is true, will tend to flow into the regions of maximum opportunity, but maximum opportunity depends as much upon political considerations of security as upon questions of profit. Consequently, in any particular region, if economic opportunity seems large but political security small, then full absorption into the extending economy tends to be frustrated until power is exerted upon the state in question. Conversely, in proportion as satisfactory political frameworks are brought into being in this way, the frequency of imperialist intervention lessens and imperialist control is correspondingly relaxed. It may be suggested that this willingness to limit the use of paramount power to establishing security for trade is the distinctive feature of the British imperialism of free trade in the nineteenth century, in contrast to the mercantilist use of power to obtain commercial supremacy and monopoly through political possession.

On this hypothesis the phasing of British expansion or imperialism is not likely to be chronological. Not all regions will reach the same level of economic integration at any one time; neither will all regions need the same type of political control at any one time. As the British industrial revolution grew, so new markets and sources of supply were linked to it at different times, and the degree of imperialist action accompanying that process varied accordingly. Thus mercantilist techniques of formal empire were being employed to develop India in the mid-Victorian age at the same time as informal techniques of free trade were being used in Latin America for the same purpose. It is for this reason that attempts to make phases of imperialism correspond directly to phases in the economic growth of the metropolitan economy are likely to prove in vain. The fundamental continuity of British expansion is only obscured by arguing that changes in the terms of trade or in the character of British exports necessitated a sharp change in the process.

From this vantage point the many-sided expansion of British industrial society can be viewed as a whole of which both the formal and informal empires are only parts. Both of them then appear as variable political functions of the extending pattern of overseas trade, investment, migration and culture. If this is accepted, it follows that formal and informal empire are essentially interconnected and to some extent interchangeable. Then

not only is the old, legalistic, narrow idea of empire unsatisfactory, but so is the old idea of informal empire as a separate, non-political category of expansion. A concept of informal empire which fails to bring out the underlying unity between it and the formal empire is sterile. Only within the total framework of expansion is nineteenth-century empire intelligible. So we are faced with the task of re-fashioning the interpretations resulting from defective concepts of organic constitutional empire on the one hand and Hobsonian 'imperialism' on the other.

The economic importance—even the pre-eminence—of informal empire in this period has been stressed often enough. What was overlooked was the inter-relation of its economic and political arms; how political action aided the growth of commercial supremacy, and how this supremacy in turn strengthened political influence. In other words, it is the politics as well as the economics of the informal empire which we have to include in the account. Historically, the relationship between these two factors has been both subtle and complex. It has been by no means a simple case of the use of gunboats to demolish a recalcitrant state in the cause of British trade. The type of political lien between the expanding economy and its formal or informal dependencies, as might be expected, has been flexible. In practice it has tended to vary with the economic value of the territory, the strength of its political structure, the readiness of its rulers to collaborate with British commercial or strategic purposes, the ability of the native society to undergo economic change without external control, the extent to which domestic and foreign political situations permitted British intervention, and, finally, how far European rivals allowed British policy a free hand.

Accordingly, the political lien has ranged from a vague, informal paramountcy to outright political possession; and, consequently, some of these dependent territories have been formal colonies whereas others have not. The difference between formal and informal empire has not been one of fundamental nature but of degree. The ease with which a region has slipped from one status to the other helps to confirm this. Within the last two hundred years, for example, India has passed from informal to formal association with the United Kingdom and, since World War II, back to an informal connexion. Similarly, British West Africa has passed through the first two stages and seems to-day likely to follow India into the third.

III

Let us now attempt, tentatively, to use the concept of the totality of British expansion described above to restate the main themes of the history of modern British expansion. We have seen that interpretations of this process fall into contradictions when based upon formal political criteria alone. If expansion both formal and informal is examined as a single process, will these contradictions disappear?

The growth of British industry made new demands upon British policy. It necessitated linking undeveloped areas with British foreign trade and,

in so doing, moved the political arm to force an entry into markets closed by the power of foreign monopolies.

British policy, as Professor Harlow has shown,¹ was active in this way before the American colonies had been lost, but its greatest opportunities came during the Napoleonic Wars. The seizure of the French and Spanish West Indies, the filibustering expedition to Buenos Aires in 1806, the taking of Java in 1811, were all efforts to break into new regions and to tap new resources by means of political action. But the policy went further than simple house-breaking, for once the door was opened and British imports with their political implications were pouring in, they might stop the door from being shut again. Raffles, for example, temporarily broke the Dutch monopoly of the spice trade in Java and opened the island to free trade. Later, he began the informal British paramountcy over the Malacca trade routes and the Malay peninsula by founding Singapore. In South America, at the same time, British policy was aiming at indirect political hegemony over new regions for the purposes of trade. The British navy carried the Portuguese royal family to Brazil after the breach with Napoleon, and the British representative there extorted from his grateful clients the trade treaty of 1810 which left British imports paying a lower tariff than the goods of the mother country. The thoughtful stipulation was added 'that the Present Treaty shall be unlimited in point of duration, and that the obligations and conditions expressed or implied in it shall be perpetual and immutable'.²

From 1810 onwards this policy had even better chances in Latin America, and they were taken. British governments sought to exploit the colonial revolutions to shatter the Spanish trade monopoly, and to gain informal supremacy and the good will which would all favour British commercial penetration. As Canning put it in 1824, when he had clinched the policy of recognition: 'Spanish America is free and if we do not manage our affairs sadly she is English.'³ Canning's underlying object was to clear the way for a prodigious British expansion by creating a new and informal empire, not only to redress the Old World balance of power but to restore British influence in the New. He wrote triumphantly: 'The thing is done... the Yankees will shout in triumph: but it is they who lose most by our decision... the United States have gotten the start of us in vain; and we link once more America to Europe.'⁴ It would be hard to imagine a more spectacular example of a policy of commercial hegemony in the interests of high politics, or of the use of informal political supremacy in the interests of commercial enterprise. Characteristically, the British recognition of Buenos Aires, Mexico and Colombia took the form of signing commercial treaties with them.

In both the formal and informal dependencies in the mid-Victorian age there was much effort to open the continental interiors and to extend the

¹ V. T. Harlow, *The Founding of the Second British Empire, 1763-1788* (1955), pp. 62-145.

² Quoted in A. K. Manchester, *British Pre-eminence in Brazil* (Chapel Hill, 1933), p. 90.

³ Quoted in W. W. Kaufmann, *British Policy and the Independence of Latin America, 1804-1828* (New Haven, 1951), p. 178.

⁴ Quoted in J. F. Rippey, *Historical Evolution of Hispanic America* (Oxford, 1946), p. 374.

British influence inland from the ports and to develop the hinterlands. The general strategy of this development was to convert these areas into complementary satellite economies, which would provide raw materials and food for Great Britain, and also provide widening markets for its manufactures. This was the period, the orthodox interpretation would have us believe, in which the political arm of expansion was dormant or even withered. In fact, that alleged inactivity is seen to be a delusion if we take into account the development in the informal aspect. Once entry had been forced into Latin America, China and the Balkans, the task was to encourage stable governments as good investment risks, just as in weaker or unsatisfactory states it was considered necessary to coerce them into more co-operative attitudes.

In Latin America, however, there were several false starts. The impact of British expansion in Argentina helped to wreck the constitution and throw the people into civil war, since British trade caused the sea-board to prosper while the back lands were exploited and lagged behind. The investment crash of 1827 and the successful revolt of the pampas people against Buenos Aires¹ blocked further British expansion, and the rise to power of General Rosas ruined the institutional framework which Canning's strategy had so brilliantly set up. The new regime was unco-operative and its designs on Montevideo caused chaos around the Rio de la Plata, which led to that great commercial artery being closed to enterprise. All this provoked a series of direct British interventions during the 1840's in efforts to get trade moving again on the river, but in fact it was the attractive force of British trade itself, more than the informal imperialist action of British governments, which in this case restored the situation by removing Rosas from power.

British policy in Brazil ran into peculiar troubles through its tactless attempt to browbeat the Government of Rio de Janeiro into abolishing slavery. British political effectiveness was weakened, in spite of economic predominance, by the interference of humanitarian pressure groups in England. Yet the economic control over Brazil was strengthened after 1856 by the building of the railways; these—begun, financed and operated by British companies—were encouraged by generous concessions from the government of Brazil.

With the development of railways and steamships, the economies of the leading Latin American states were at last geared successfully to the world economy. Once their exports had begun to climb and foreign investment had been attracted, a rapid rate of economic growth was feasible. Even in the 1880's Argentina could double her exports and increase sevenfold her foreign indebtedness while the world price of meat and wheat was falling.² By 1913, in Latin America as a whole, informal imperialism had

¹ M. Burgin, *Economic Aspects of Argentine Federalism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1946), pp. 55, 76-111.

² J. H. Williams, *Argentine International Trade under Inconvertible Paper Money, 1880-1900* (Cambridge, Mass., 1920), pp. 43, 103, 183. Cf. W. W. Rostow, *The Process of Economic Growth* (Oxford, 1953), p. 104.

become so important for the British economy that £999,000,000, over a quarter of the total investment abroad, was invested in that region.¹

But this investment, as was natural, was concentrated in such countries as Argentina and Brazil whose governments (even after the Argentine default of 1891) had collaborated in the general task of British expansion. For this reason there was no need for brusque or preemptory interventions on behalf of British interests. For once their economies had become sufficiently dependent on foreign trade the classes whose prosperity was drawn from that trade normally worked themselves in local politics to preserve the local political conditions needed for it. British intervention, in any case, became more difficult once the United States could make other powers take the Monroe doctrine seriously. The slackening in active intervention in the affairs of the most reliable members of the commercial empire was matched by the abandonment of direct political control over those regions of formal empire which were successful enough to receive self-government. But in Latin America, British governments still intervened, when necessary, to protect British interests in the more backward states; there was intervention on behalf of the bond holders in Guatemala and Colombia in the 'seventies, as in Mexico and Honduras between 1910 and 1914.

The types of informal empire and the situations it attempted to exploit were as various as the success which it achieved. Although commercial and capital penetration tended to lead to political co-operation and hegemony, there are striking exceptions. In the United States, for example, British business turned the cotton South into a colonial economy, and the British investor hoped to do the same with the Mid-West. But the political strength of the country stood in his way. It was impossible to stop American industrialization, and the industrialized sections successfully campaigned for tariffs, despite the opposition of those sections which depended on the British trade connexion. In the same way, American political strength thwarted British attempts to establish Texas, Mexico and Central America as informal dependencies.

Conversely, British expansion sometimes failed, if it gained political supremacy without effecting a successful commercial penetration. There were spectacular exertions of British policy in China, but they did little to produce new customers. Britain's political hold upon China failed to break down Chinese economic self-sufficiency. The Opium War of 1840, the renewal of war in 1857, widened the inlets for British trade but they did not get Chinese exports moving. Their main effect was an unfortunate one from the British point of view, for such foreign pressures put Chinese society under great strains as the Taiping Rebellion unmistakably showed.² It is important to note that this weakness was regarded in London as an embarrassment, and not as a lever for extracting further concessions. In

¹ J. F. Rippy, 'British Investments in Latin America, end of 1913', *Inter-American Economic Affairs* (1951), v, 91.

² J. Chesnaux, 'La Révolution Taiping d'après quelques travaux récents', *Revue Historique*,

fact, the British worked to prop up the tottering Peking regime, for as Lord Clarendon put it in 1870, 'British interests in China are strictly commercial, or at all events only so far political as they may be for the protection of commerce'.¹ The value of this self-denial became clear in the following decades when the Peking government, threatened with a scramble for China, leaned more and more on the diplomatic support of the honest British broker.

The simple recital of these cases of economic expansion, aided and abetted by political action in one form or other, is enough to expose the **inadequacy of the conventional theory that free trade could dispense with empire.** We have seen that it did not do so. Economic expansion in the mid-Victorian age was matched by a **corresponding political expansion** which has been overlooked because it could not be seen by that study of maps which, it has been said, drives sane men mad. It is absurd to deduce from the harmony between London and the colonies of white settlement in the mid-Victorian age any British reluctance to intervene in the fields of British interests. The **warships at Canton** are as much a part of the period as responsible government for Canada; the battlefields of the Punjab are as real as the abolition of suttee.

Far from being an era of 'indifference', the mid-Victorian years were **the decisive stage in the history of British expansion overseas**, in that the combination of commercial penetration and political influence allowed the United Kingdom to command those economies which could be made to fit best into her own. A variety of techniques adapted to diverse conditions and beginning at different dates were employed to effect this domination. A paramountcy was set up in Malaya centred on Singapore; a suzerainty over much of West Africa reached out from the port of Lagos and was backed up by the African squadron. On the east coast of Africa British influence at Zanzibar, dominant thanks to the exertions of Consul Kirk, placed the heritage of Arab command on the mainland at British disposal.

But perhaps the most common political technique of British expansion was the **treaty of free trade and friendship made with or imposed upon a weaker state.** The treaties with Persia of 1836 and 1857, the Turkish treaties of 1838 and 1861, the Japanese treaty of 1858, the favours exacted from Zanzibar, Siam and Morocco, the hundreds of anti-slavery treaties signed with crosses by African chiefs—all these treaties enabled the British government to carry forward trade with these regions.

Even a valuable trade with one region might give place to a similar trade with another which could be more easily coerced politically. The Russian grain trade, for example, was extremely useful to Great Britain. But the Russians' refusal to hear of free trade, and the British inability to force them into it, caused efforts to develop the grain of the Ottoman empire instead, since British pressure at Constantinople had been able to hustle the Turk into a liberal trade policy.² The dependence of the

commercial thrust upon the political arm resulted in a general tendency for **British trade to follow the invisible flag of informal empire.**

Since the mid-Victorian age now appears as a time of large-scale expansion, it is necessary to revise our estimate of the so-called 'imperialist' era as well. Those who accept the concept of 'economic imperialism' would have us believe that the annexations at the end of the century represented a sharp break in policy, due to the decline of free trade, the need to protect foreign investment, and the conversion of statesmen to the need for unlimited land-grabbing. All these explanations are questionable. In the first place, the tariff policy of Great Britain did not change. Again, British foreign investment was no new thing and most of it was still flowing into regions outside the formal empire. Finally the statesmen's conversion to the policy of extensive annexation was partial, to say the most of it. Until 1887, and only occasionally after that date, party leaders showed little more enthusiasm for extending British rule than the mid-Victorians. Salisbury was infuriated by the 'superficial philanthropy' and 'roguey' of the 'fanatics' who advocated expansion.¹ When pressed to aid the missions in Nyasaland in 1888, he retorted: 'It is not our duty to do it. We should be risking tremendous sacrifices for a very doubtful gain.'² After 1888, Salisbury, Rosebery and Chamberlain accepted the scramble for Africa as a **painful but unavoidable** necessity which arose from a threat of foreign expansion and the irrepressible tendency of trade to overflow the bounds of empire, dragging the government into new and irksome commitments. But it was not until 1898 that they were sufficiently confident to undertake the reconquest of so vital a region as the Sudan.

Faced with the prospect of foreign acquisitions of tropical territory hitherto opened to British merchants, the men in London resorted to one expedient after another to evade the need of formal expansion and still uphold British paramountcy in those regions. British policy in the late, as in the mid-Victorian period **preferred informal means of extending imperial supremacy rather than direct rule.** Throughout the two alleged periods the extension of British rule was a last resort—and it is this preference which has given rise to the many 'anti-expansionist' remarks made by Victorian ministers. What these much quoted expressions obscure, is that in practice mid-Victorian as well as late-Victorian policy makers **did not refuse to extend the protection of formal rule over British interests when informal methods had failed to give security.** The fact that informal techniques were more often sufficient for this purpose in the circumstances of the mid-century than in the later period when the foreign challenge to British supremacy intensified, should not be allowed to disguise the basic continuity of policy. Throughout, British governments worked to establish and **maintain British paramountcy by whatever means best suited the circumstances of their diverse regions of interest.** The aims of the mid-Victorians were no more 'anti-imperialist' than their successors', though they were more often able to achieve them informally; and the late-

¹ Quoted in Cronner, *Modern Egypt* (1908), I, 388.

² Hansard, 3rd Series, cccxxviii, col. 559, 6 July 1888.

¹ Quoted in N. A. Pelcovits, *Old China Hands and the Foreign Office* (New York, 1948), p. 85.

² V. J. Puryear, *International Economics and Diplomacy in the Near East* (1935), pp. 216-17.

Victorians were no more 'imperialist' than their predecessors, even though they were driven to annex more often. British policy followed the principle of extending control informally if possible and formally if necessary. To label the one method 'anti-imperialist' and the other 'imperialist', is to ignore the fact that whatever the method British interests were steadily safeguarded and extended. **The usual summing up of the policy of the free trade empire as 'trade not rule' should read 'trade with informal control if possible; trade with rule when necessary.'** This statement of the continuity of policy disposes of the over-simplified explanation of involuntary expansion inherent in the orthodox interpretation based on the discontinuity between the two periods.

Thus Salisbury as well as Gladstone, Knutsford as well as Derby and Ripon, in the so-called age of 'imperialism', exhausted all informal expedients to secure regions of British trade in Africa before admitting that further annexations were unavoidable. One device was to obtain guarantees of free trade and access as a reward for recognizing foreign territorial claims, a device which had the advantage of saddling foreign governments with the liability of rule whilst allowing Britons the commercial advantage. This was done in the Anglo-Portuguese Treaty of 1884, the Congo Arrangement of 1885, and the Anglo-German Agreement over East Africa in 1886. **Another device for evading the extension of rule was the exclusive sphere of influence or protectorate recognized by foreign powers.** Although originally these imposed no liability for pacifying or administering such regions, with changes in international law they did so after 1885. The granting of charters to private companies between 1881 and 1889, authorizing them to administer and finance new regions under imperial licence, marked the transition from informal to formal methods of backing British commercial expansion. Despite these attempts at 'imperialism on the cheap', the foreign challenge to British paramountcy in tropical Africa and the comparative absence there of large-scale, strong, indigenous political organizations which had served informal expansion so well elsewhere, eventually dictated the switch to formal rule.

One principle then emerges plainly: **it is only when and where informal political means failed to provide the framework of security for British enterprise (whether commercial, or philanthropic or simply strategic) that the question of establishing formal empire arose.** In satellite regions peopled by European stock, in Latin America or Canada, for instance, strong governmental structures grew up; in totally non-European areas, on the other hand, expansion unleashed such disruptive forces upon the indigenous structures that they tended to wear out and even collapse with use. This tendency in many cases accounts for the extension of informal British responsibility and eventually for the change from indirect to direct control.

It was in Africa that this process of transition manifested itself most strikingly during the period after 1880. Foreign loans and predatory bankers by the 1870's had wrecked Egyptian finances and were tearing holes in the Egyptian political fabric. The Anglo-French dual financial

control, designed to safeguard the foreign bondholders and to restore Egypt as a good risk, provoked anti-European feeling. With the revolt of Arabi Pasha in 1881, the Khedive's government could serve no longer to secure either the all-important Canal or the foreign investors' pound of flesh.

The motives for the British occupation of 1882 were confused and varied: the desire, evident long before Disraeli's purchase of shares, to dominate the Canal; the interests of the bondholders; and the over-anxiety to forestall any foreign power, especially France, from taking advantage of the prevailing anarchy in Egypt to interpose its power across the British road to India. Nearly all Gladstone's Cabinet admitted the necessity of British intervention, although for different reasons, and, in order to hold together his distracted ministry, the Prime Minister agreed.

The British expedition was intended to **restore a stable Egyptian government under the ostensible rule of the Khedive** and inside the orbit of informal British influence. When this was achieved, the army, it was intended, should be withdrawn. But the expedition had so crushed the structure of Egyptian rule that no power short of direct British force could make it a viable and trustworthy instrument of informal hegemony and development. Thus the Liberal Government following its plan, which had been hastily evolved out of little more than ministerial disagreements, drifted into the prolonged occupation of Egypt it was intent on avoiding. In fact, the occupying power became directly responsible for the **defence, the debts and development** of the country. The perverse effect of British policy was gloomily summed up by Gladstone: 'We have done our Egyptian business and we are an Egyptian government.'¹ Egypt, then, is a striking example of an informal strategy misfiring due to the undermining of the satellite state by investment and by pseudo-nationalist reaction against foreign influence.

The Egyptian question, in so far as it was closely bound with the routes to India and the defence of the Indian empire itself, was given the highest priority by British policy in the 'eighties and 'nineties. In order to defend the spinal cord of British trade and empire, tropical African and Pacific claims were repeatedly sacrificed as pawns in the higher game. In 1884, for example, the Foreign Office decided that British vulnerability in Egypt made it unwise to compete with foreign powers in the opening scramble for West Africa; and it was therefore proposed '... to confine ourselves to securing the utmost possible freedom of trade on that [west] coast, yielding to others the territorial responsibilities... and seeking compensation on the east coast... where the political future of the country is of real importance to Indian and imperial interests.'² **British policy was not one of indiscriminate land-grabbing.** And, indeed, the British penetration into Uganda and their securing of the rest of the Nile Valley was a highly selective programme, in so far as it surrendered some British West African claims to France and transferred part of East Africa to Germany.

¹ Quoted in S. Gwynn and G. M. Tuckwell, *Life of Sir Charles Wentworth Dilke* (1917), II, 46.
² F.O. Confidential Print (East Africa), 5037.

IV

Thus the mid-Victorian period now appears as an era of large-scale expansion, and the late-Victorian age does not seem to introduce any significant novelty into that process of expansion. The annexations of vast undeveloped territories, which have been taken as proof that this period alone was the great age of expansion, now pale in significance, at least if our analysis is anywhere near the truth. That the area of direct imperial rule was extended is true, but is it the most important or characteristic development of expansion during this period? The simple historical fact that Africa was the last field of European penetration is not to say that it was the most important; this would be a truism were it not that the main case of the Hobson school is founded on African examples. On the other hand, it is our main contention that the process of expansion had reached its most valuable targets long before the exploitation of so peripheral and marginal a field as tropical Africa. Consequently arguments, founded on the technique adopted in scrambling for Africa, would seem to be of secondary importance.

Therefore, the historian who is seeking to find the deepest meaning of the expansion at the end of the nineteenth century should look not at the mere pegging out of claims in African jungles and bush, but at the successful exploitation of the empire, both formal and informal, which was then coming to fruition in India, in Latin America, in Canada and elsewhere. **The main work of imperialism in the so-called expansionist era was in the more intensive development of areas already linked with the world economy,** rather than in the extensive annexations of the remaining marginal regions of Africa. The best finds and prizes had already been made; in tropical Africa the imperialists were merely scraping the bottom of the barrel.

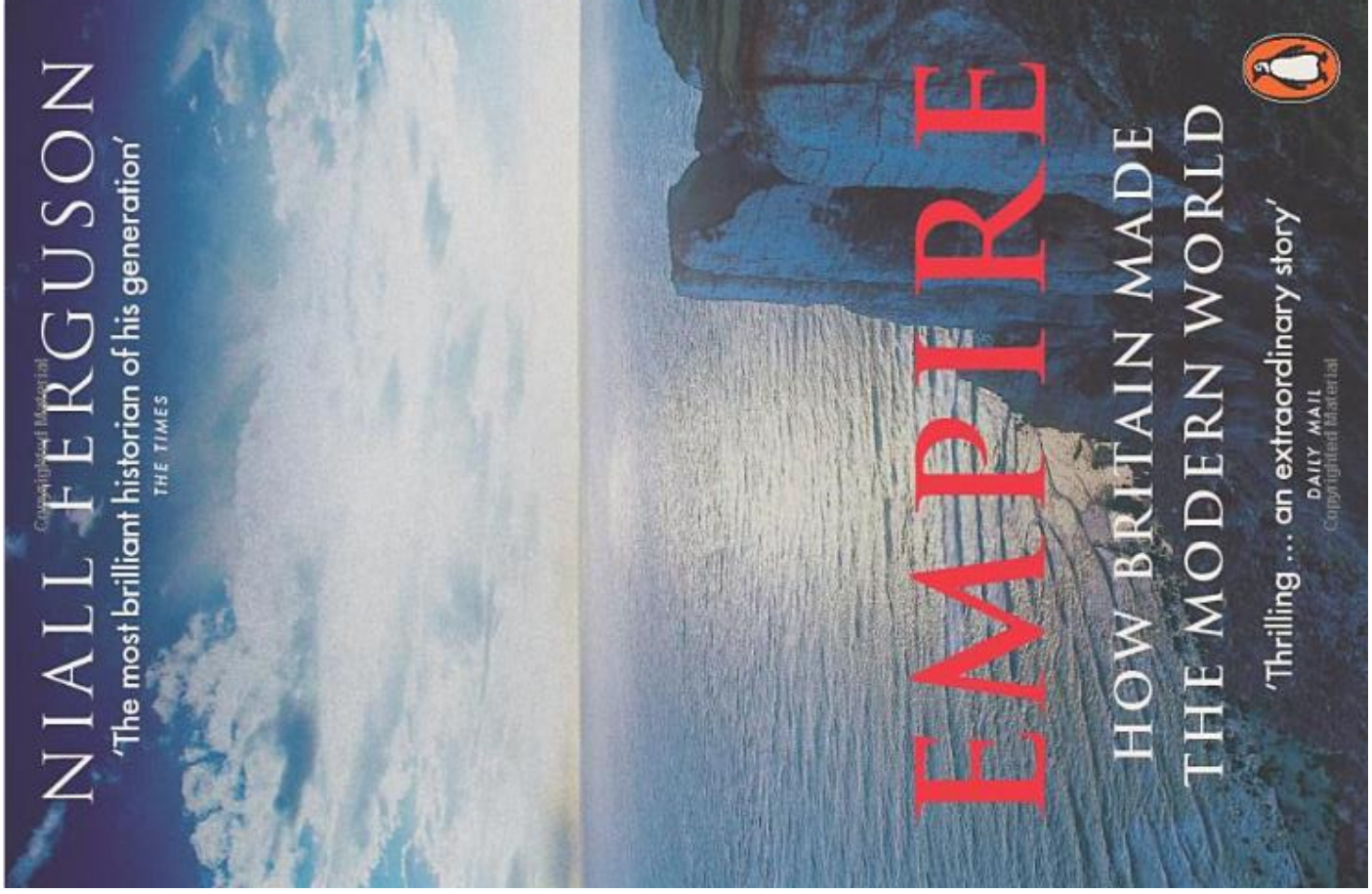
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Empire and Globalization

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Anglobalization

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

INTRODUCTION

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