REAPPRAISALS IN
BRITISH IMPERIAL HISTORY
CAMBRIDGE COMMONWEALTH SERIES

Published in association with the Managers of the Cambridge University Smuts Memorial Fund for the Advancement of Commonwealth Studies

General Editor: E. T. Stokes, Smuts Professor of the History of the British Commonwealth, University of Cambridge

Titles published by the Cambridge University Press
John S. Galbraith: Mackinnon and East Africa, 1878–1895
G. Andrew Maguire: Toward 'Uhuru' in Tanzania
Ged Martin: The Durham Report and British Policy
Ronald Robinson (editor): Developing the Third World

Titles published by Macmillan
Roger Anstey: The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition, 1760–1810
Partha Sarathi Gupta: Imperialism and the British Labour Movement, 1914–1964
Ronald Hyam and Ged Martin: Reappraisals in British Imperial History
REAPPRAISALS IN
BRITISH IMPERIAL
HISTORY

Ronald Hyam
and
Ged Martin

61927
Contents

Preface vii
List of abbreviations ix

1 Introduction : personal and impersonal forces and the continuity of British imperial history. 1

2 Imperial interests and the Peace of Paris (1763) (R.H.) 21

3 The foundation of Botany Bay, 1778–90: a reappraisal (G.W.M.) 44

4 The influence of the Durham Report (G.W.M.) 75

5 ‘Anti-imperialism’ in the mid-nineteenth century and the nature of the British empire, 1820–70 (G.W.M.) 88

6 The idea of ‘Imperial Federation’ (G.W.M.) 121

7 The partition of Africa : a critique of Robinson and Gallagher (R.H.) 139

8 The myth of the ‘Magnanimous Gesture’ : the Liberal government, Smuts and conciliation, 1906 (R.H.) 167

9 The politics of partition in southern Africa, 1908–61 (R.H.) 187

10 The Irish Free State and the evolution of the Commonwealth, 1921–49 (G.W.M.) 201

Index 225
Preface

Reappraisals in British imperial history has been written partly in Cambridge and partly in Canberra. The difficulties experienced in collaborating at such a distance give us, we feel, a qualification we previously lacked to write about the way in which the British empire operated. We both owe thanks to the Master and Fellows of Magdalene College Cambridge, among whose number we were at one time included together. One of us currently owes a debt of gratitude to the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University, which provides a chance to write in superlative circumstances.

We wish to acknowledge our thanks collectively to the staffs of libraries and archives in many different parts of the world. We are grateful to have been able to use a number of manuscript collections, and our thanks go to the copyright owners of family papers. All material from Crown copyright records in the Public Record Office is published by permission of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office.

Our aims and assumptions are set out at some length in the first chapter, but our intention, stated briefly, is to challenge historical myths, both old and new, and to suggest some fresh viewpoints on traditional problems of imperial history. Five of the chapters incorporate material which has previously appeared in journal articles written by us individually. In their original form, two of these essays appeared in the Historical Journal: chapters 6 (xvi, 1973), and 7 (viii, 1964). Chapter 3 draws on material published in the University of Newcastle (NSW) Historical Journal, the Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society, and Acadiensis (University of New Brunswick). Part of chapter 5 utilises an essay which appeared in the Australian National University Historical Journal. An earlier version of chapter 9 was contributed to the inaugural number of the Joernal vir die Eisteddys Geskiedenis/Journal for Contemporary History (Bloemfontein, 1974).

We are grateful to our colleagues in Cambridge and Canberra for the stimulus and encouragement they have given us. We also take
pleasure in recording our debt to a number of Visiting Fellows brought to Cambridge under the auspices of the Smuts Memorial Fund for the Advancement of Commonwealth Studies.

December 1974

Ronald Hyam
Cambridge

Ged Martin
Canberra
Abbreviations

AHR  American Historical Review
Aust.EcHR  Australian Economic History Review
BM  British Museum
CAB  Cabinet Office Records: minutes and memoranda
CHBE  Cambridge History of the British Empire
CHR  Canadian Historical Review
CO  Colonial Office Records
CJ  Journals of the House of Commons
DO  Dominions Office Records
EcHR  Economic History Review, 2nd series
EHR  English Historical Review
HJ  Historical Journal
HS  Historical Studies
HRNSW  Historical Records of New South Wales (ed. F. M. Bladen, 7 vols, 1892–1901)
JAH  Journal of African History
JBS  Journal of British Studies
JCPS  Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies
JICH  Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History
JMH  Journal of Modern History
JRAHS  Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society
PAC  Public Archives of Canada
PD  Hansard's Parliamentary Debates (preceding number denotes series)
PSQ  Political Science Quarterly
PRO  Public Record Office
THRA Papers  Tasmanian Historical Records Association, Papers of . . .
TRHS  Transactions of the Royal Historical Society
ULC  University Library, Cambridge
1 Introduction: personal and impersonal forces and the continuity of British imperial history

Let it be agreed then that the theory of ‘economic imperialism’ is dead, and that there is no further point in trying to discuss British imperial history within the framework it has created. Whatever the motives for British empire and expansion in the nineteenth century, they cannot in the main be ascribed to an ‘economic taproot’ of powerful interests seeking to find markets for ‘their surplus goods and their surplus capital’. Hobson’s theory has collapsed before numerous and notable onslaughts. Time and time again it has been shown not to fit the facts; Lenin’s extension of it does not even attempt to explain territorial acquisitions before 1914.¹

The reappraisals of empire which we seek to make here are not concerned with this kind of theory, but with a more specific, detailed and realistic level of history. One broad generalisation about empire is dead, and it is too early for the academic community to agree on the proclamation of a successor and to wish it long life. Attempts at an alternative theory are of course being made. Robinson has sketched a theory of ‘non-European collaboration’ as the necessary foundation of empire; and in Britain’s Imperial Century 1815–1914 one of the present authors has advanced a hypothesis that the ‘export of surplus emotional energy’ was (as indeed Lugard suggested) the basic dynamic of empire and expansion.² Moreover, the argument about the motives for territorial empire goes on, though the emphasis has shifted to discussion of the importance of strategic considerations. Meanwhile, following Low’s pioneering study, Lion Rampant, closer investigation is needed into the exact nature of the empire and into the way in which it was run. Four main problems in particular seem currently to exercise imperial historians. First, there is the question of continuity of motive and method, possible changes in the relative balance of formal and informal control, of personal and impersonal forces in shaping the development of the empire and Commonwealth. Second, there is the problem of the strength of central control, the gap between policy and practice, the
extent to which Whitehall could determine the actual power of imperial rule on the spot, at the various levels from district upwards; the question, in fact, of how far the realities of the indigenous situation could dispose of what the proconsuls proposed—a question being examined in depth for India by many of the ablest imperial historians at work today. Third, there is the need to determine the extent and purpose of humanitarian concern for non-European peoples, the degree to which metropolitan doctrine could mitigate harsh colonial practice; important revisions in this direction have recently been undertaken by Anstey (on the slave trade and its abolition) and Tinker (on the ‘new system of slavery’, the export of Indian indentured labour, which replaced it). Fourth, the decolonisation period after 1947 has made it much plainer that the transfer of power is a major and constant part of the history of empire. This is partly because the illusion of power was always greater than the force to sustain it (and the cohesiveness of British settler communities weaker than it seemed); when challenged, Britain could seldom for long hold what she had because she did not really have what she thought she held. Hence the problems surrounding this continual process of transferring power (economical pressures for disengagement, timing, designation of a successor elite, protection for minorities and so forth) are seen to require ever more sophisticated analysis; here too Indian history leads the way.

Our aim is to contribute something to each of these four areas of debate, chiefly to aspects so far rather neglected. The subjects of our essays range over three centuries; invariably we disagree either with the inherited historiography or with the conclusions of recent historians. It is worth recalling the inherited picture of British empire history since the mid-eighteenth century as it stood in the early 1950s. It may be baldly summarised as follows. The ‘first’ British empire closed with a war of independence in America which disillusioned the British with the idea of colonial rule. A ‘second’ empire, based more on trade than dominion, shifted the focus of British interest to Asia. New dependencies were acquired in a fit of absence of mind, but were regarded as millstones and deadweights which, especially with the growth of free trade, would drop from the imperial tree like ripe fruit at just the moment when they ceased to be so troublesome. However, round about 1870 there came a dramatic change, as Disraeli ushered in the ‘new imperialism’. Efforts to promote organic political and economic unity were coupled with a territorial expansion characterised by surplus capital pushing the flag into new areas, while trade followed dutifully behind. Early Victorian indifference to empire was replaced by a bellicose jingo hysteria culminating in the Anglo-Boer War. Meanwhile, the old empire was subtly beginning to be transformed into the new Commonwealth. Lord Durham’s Report of 1839 had created a brilliant
vision of a community of nations which might be both united and free. Acting on such principles, strengthening the empire by conceding local self-government to white colonists, Gladstone tried to redress wrongs in Ireland, and Campbell-Bannerman was inspired by Smuts to repeat the success of Canada in South Africa, in circumstances constituting a 'magnanimous gesture of reconciliation' between the white communities— but at the price of sacrificing black African interests. Anglo-Saxon racial partnership with the United States was also promoted, with Rhodes financing and Kipling hymning attempts to persuade the Americans to share the white man's burden with the now weary Titan. In the twentieth century these imperial headwaters flowed together into a great Commonwealth stream, to the direction of which the overseas members, from Canada, the Irish Free State and South Africa, increasingly contributed.

The generation of historians who synthesised and celebrated the history of the empire as a whole has tended to give way to one whose studies concentrate on a single area; if they are working in England, this tends to be India or Africa. Some of these new 'area study' historians would deny the need for an overall revision of imperial history: to them the imperial factor was evanescent and superficial. They sneer at the need to reassess the traditional account outlined above, dismissing it as a myth which no one now accepts, and therefore as a phoney subject of reappraisal. Conveniently they overlook the extent to which parts of that myth still appear in textbooks, general works and parochially limited regional studies. They also overlook the danger that historical truth may become the property of an academic priesthood while remaining largely obscured from undergraduates and the reading public; and they are often unaware of how far their own research is influenced by the myths which they affect to have rejected. The proliferation of detailed regional studies has made an overall imperial synthesis more difficult to create, but it has not reduced the need for a fundamental pattern to which new research may be related. Too often there is the worst of compromises, as, for want of any other pattern, modern research is related to traditional historiography.

The traditional interpretation in whole or part, then, still leaves its mark. Its inadequacies are patent. It was repeatedly based on statements taken out of their context. Shetburne's preference for trade over dominion did not refer to the whole empire, or even to its Asian section, but only to the United States. Seeley's fit of absence of mind was an aside referring to the eighteenth century and mainly to India. Disraeli's colonial millstones amounted to little more than Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Hobson's strictures on the irrational nature of government's backing capitalists were more concerned with the threat of an empire developing in China than with the tendency of imperial South
African policy. Not only were so many key statements ripped from their context, but there has also been an uncritical reliance on the pronouncements of hero-figures. Disraeli’s *imperium et libertas*, Chamberlain’s ‘trade follows the flag’, Smuts’s ‘miracle of trust and magnanimity’, and Churchill’s ‘special relationship with the United States’ are all examples of questionable claims which have been elevated into explanatory texts.

Some of these myths and slogans have been challenged in recent work and may now be regarded as discredited. Most notably the relationship between imperial activity and economic motive has been attacked at almost every conceivable point. The work of Stenbridge, McIntyre, Koebner and Blake has effectively downgraded the importance of Disraeli’s work for the empire, while Robinson and Gallagher have made it difficult to think any longer of the ‘new imperialism’ either as novel or as the climax of late nineteenth-century optimism. Yet much remains untouched, and the business of demolition even on a small scale is protracted. Seeley, whose theory of the growth of empire went well beyond attributing it to the depredations of a sleepwalker, remains misunderstood. His famous aside was directed at pointing the contrast between the ‘mighty phenomenon’ of British expansion and the ‘indifference’ with which it was regarded by the public. (Had he made the latter comment in the 1850s instead of in the 1880s it would have been added to the file on ‘anti-imperialism’.) ‘We seem, as it were’, Seeley observed—and the qualifying phrase is significant—‘to have conquered and peopled half the world in a fit of absence of mind’. Evidently referring mainly to India he added: ‘While we were doing it, that is in the eighteenth century, we did not allow it to affect our imagination or in any degree to change our ways of thinking’—a comment obviously inspired by pondering the parallel with the acquisition of an empire by the Roman Republic, an experience which had a vital impact on the metropolitan government of Rome. If the phrase ‘fit of absence of mind’, when referred back to context, seems a fair and justified aside, the same cannot be said of the notion that ‘trade follows the flag’. This was, as Andrew Carnegie recognised, ‘one of the great fallacies’ of economics and empire:

Trade follows the lowest price current. If a dealer in any colony wished to buy Union Jacks he would order them from Britain’s worst foe if he could save sixpence. Trade follows no flag.

Carnegie may indeed be regarded as a better authority in this matter than Chamberlain. Born in Scotland, the flag he had followed to wealth had been the Stars and Stripes.

Having cast doubts upon the traditional mythology, we must next ask exactly what the British empire was; whether, even, there was an empire at all. How far was there any central control over the territories
which allegedly 'belonged' to Britain? Was there a uniform relationship between Britain and the 'dependencies' which makes it possible to generalise about a single empire? Historians from Seeley to Low have been exercised to assess how far Britain 'possessed' its dependencies. Seeley thought the term possession inappropriate for the white colonies and only a little less so for India. True, British rule in India rested on conquest, but the British themselves took care not to appeal to this embarrassing origin, and had not enforced their conquest either by confiscation of land or by levy of tribute. 'We must therefore', wrote Seeley, 'dismiss from our minds the idea that India is in any practical sense of the word a possession of England'. In fact, as Harnetty's research suggests, British manipulation of the Indian economy and fiscal system amounted to a levy in the interests of British commercial and manufacturing interests, but Seeley's point still leads naturally to Low's. In India, Low observes, a tiny administrative garrison—760 British members of the Indian Civil Service in 1939—could govern 378 million Indians only by allying with, rather than by expropriating, powerful groups within local societies. However, once established on top of an administrative pyramid, the British became to a large degree dependent upon the structure which supported them. Yet even administrative regulation could have fundamental and unforeseen effects. Two of the bases of political power in India were law and land-ownership. All that seemed necessary for both law and land was codification to eliminate anomalies, and the introduction of some improving features from Britain. But in setting out to wind an Asian clock, the British seriously upset the balance of the mechanism. Land settlements in Bengal in 1793 and the Punjab in 1900 altered the rural power-structure, while the anglicisation of Hindu law not only introduced rigidity into flexible conventions, but strengthened the trend towards personal, rather than family or communal, rights to property—itself a step towards 'western' political activity which eroded the foundations of the Raj. It was one thing to claim that the British ruled India, another to argue that they controlled what happened. For in certain crucial respects 'empire' was a myth, an illusion based on a gigantic confidence trick perpetrated by rulers and accepted by the ruled. If the post-independence regimes of today are ruled by black men with white masks, as Fanon suggests, then the empire was even more certainly a system in which white men wore white masks, the masks of omniscience and infallibility. The argument should not, however, be carried too far. The 379 Indians who died at Amritsar in 1919 were not victims of an illusion. They died when a British general ordered soldiers, trained to kill, to fire into a demonstrating crowd. Behind the paraphernalia of paper sovereignty (and bolstering the acquiescence of local auxiliaries in imperial rule), there lay military force. And yet force itself could only
be selectively used to create another illusion, that of power. In Kinglake's *Eothen* a Turkish pasha believed that

whenever the Irish, or the French, or the Indians rebel against the British, whole armies of soldiers and brigades of artillery are dropped into a mighty chasm called Euston Square, and, in the biting of a cartridge, they rise up again in Manchester or Dublin, or Paris, or Delhi, and utterly exterminate the enemies of England from the face of the earth.

Without this convenient belief among subject peoples, the empire could hardly have functioned at all. In reality, Britain had neither the will nor the means to repeat Amritsar, and those nationalists who bawdily observed that if the Indian people urinated in unison they could flush the British out of the sub-continent were men who had deflated the empire's impressive façade. Perhaps the realisation saddened them; at any rate they did not press their advantage. In any case, the mystique of British power rested more on the prestige of the navy than on the ambit of the army. Hence the special significance of the sinking of the *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse* by Japanese air attack on 10 December 1941. An empire without battleships meant an emperor without clothes.*

In the essays which follow we say little about India. This is not from any wish to banish India to the imperial back-kitchen. We acknowledge the central importance of India to the empire, but give little space to it for more than one reason. In an era of specialisation we are rather reluctant to enter more minesfields of study than we can manage. Another and more important reason is that many historians better qualified are already offering the stimulating reassessment of Indian questions which we seek for the empire as a whole. Scholarly reactivation and reappraisal is now needed most in the study of Whitehall policy and of the white colonial empire. And from this point of view we are not convinced that the localised historical analysis of Indian politics so far offered by that notable school of Indianists, the Cambridge Brahmins, can be transferred in its entirety to the white colonies. Responsible government is no doubt a species of 'informal control', and Canada's Macdonald, Australia's Parkes and southern Africa's Rhodes versions of local 'collaborators', but we wonder whether such sweeping concepts will prove permanently illuminating in detail when applied beyond their original context. Forthcoming work, however, may possibly offer more detailed opportunities for comparison. Jeffrey's analysis of the decline of Nayar dominance in Travancore might, for example, prove capable of suggesting a possible comparison with the downfall of the 'British party' in Canada or the Transvaal.*

Attempting an analysis of the white colonies under the same heading as the non-European territories has never been an easy task. Where
similar patterns exist, they seem to be almost mirror images. Robinson and Gallagher argued, primarily with respect to Africa, that the British used informal control where possible and only resorted to formal control when necessary. In the white colonies the order was apparently reversed: formal control for as long as possible, succeeded by responsible government when it broke down or seemed likely to do so. Nevertheless, the problems of maintaining the illusion of control in both were similar, and compounded by a much livelier disrespect among colonists than subject peoples for the likelihood of metropolitan coercion. Governors of course evaded, disregarded or even disobeyed orders, and they frequently got away with defiance, but so too did viceroy of India. Distance was a barrier to close supervision from Whitehall, although the spread of the telegraph offered at least a potential check on the late Victorian growth of proconsular autonomy. Colonial assemblies were more adept at evading imperial supremacy. British views on fiscal policy were politely ignored, and the threat of a British veto on legislation was treated as bluff. In rare instances where a local act was overridden (‘disallowed’), colonial legislatures retorted by passing annual measures to achieve the same end. By the time the veto had arrived, the offending act had expired, only to be replaced by another. The problem of maintaining a façade of imperial rule over white colonists, then, could be as troublesome as in India or Africa. The key to the problem, as with non-European peoples, was not simply power but the comforting illusion of power. The difference lay in the belief of colonists not that British power would chastise them but that it could protect them. In southern Africa this meant that imperial power operated in different ways towards the white and black communities, and the situation became more complicated in the twentieth century as a desire developed increasingly to shift the emphasis so as to protect the blacks from the whites—chapter 9 discusses this situation. In general, however, the illusion of imperial power was a comfort rather than a check to colonists. Canadians, both British and French, anchored themselves most firmly to the empire at times of American challenge; New Zealanders and Australians quarrelled most loudly over alleged imperial shortcomings when it was a question of finding protection against Maori inhabitants or Asian immigrants. We by no means discount the force of an empire sentiment, as chapters 5 and 10 will show, but it has always been stronger in war than peace, and fixed upon the throne rather than the mother of parliaments; while the experience of Rhodesia in the 1960s and Ulster in the 1970s indicates that any loyalty does not long survive a challenge to self interest. While the white Dominions believed in British protection, they accepted their own subordinate status. Their confidence was shaken by the First World War, and in chapter 10 we suggest that the confused formula-seeking
of the inter-war years stemmed from a need both to redefine and to reassure. The Second World War compounded their disillusion: three white Dominions turned to the protection of the United States, and the fourth retreated into a traditional laager of self-reliance.

Describing the negotiations between Britain and France for the coolie convention of 1861, Cell wrote of 'two unwieldy, global collections of outright possessions and areas of informal interest very inadequately called empires'. So far as the British empire is concerned, we agree with this description, subject to a large reservation about the term 'outright possessions'. The empire is perhaps better seen as a loose association with elements of a deferential local collaborative system and a wider federal system. Within the former of these two characteristics, the local magnate supported the British and was in turn supported by them within his own area. Imperial rule was intended to guarantee peace, and it operated more through deferential obligations between individuals than abstract relations between political societies. Local leaders deferred to the district commissioner, governor or viceroy, who in turn deferred to the distant queen- or king-emperor in London. The survival in the British constitutional monarchy of some of the trappings associated with the divinity which hedged a king probably made the Crown a valuable asset in this imperial chain of deference culminating in a royal allegiance, although the example of the French republican empire warns against overstressing this point. The line between non-European and European levels of authority within the hierarchy could be vague. The white rajas of Sarawak, a private dynasty, maintained their rule for a century. Low has argued that the Ndebele recognised Rhodes as their paramount chief by right of conquest over Lobengula. Lugard in Northern Nigeria and the Lawrences in the Punjab are other examples of a deferential personal attachment to individuals within the larger system of empire. A similar deference existed to some degree in the white colonies, even though colonial governors had nothing like the hold on settlers which pro-consuls sometimes exercised over preliterate peoples fascinated by the concept of the Great White Queen. Of course 'deference' as a bond of empire had its limits, and it is a concept requiring cautious application, but it helps to explain how imperial rule acquired legitimacy in the eyes of non-European subjects, and it illustrates how an empire could include both a queen of Tonga and a dame of Sark. It could also include kabakas of Buganda and white rajas of Sarawak who did not use their privileged, even regal, status to challenge the hierarchy which embraced them, with the Crown at its apex. What the empire could not tolerate was a 'king' of Swaziland who used the title as a symbol for asserting a rival or alternative sovereignty within the empire but independent of its ordinary hierarchy; thus from 1922 until
1967 Sobhuza II’s claim to the traditional title of king was unequivocally dismissed on the argument that there could only be one king in the empire – Sobhuza was told to call himself merely ‘paramount chief’.

A ‘federal’ analysis of the empire represents a characteristic also requiring careful handling, not only because a federal system is highly complex and can be closely defined, but because, as chapter 6 seeks to show, so many men of the empire used the idea loosely, being fascinated by the American system of government, which they only imperfectly understood. In its practical working, the empire embodied one vital feature of a federal system – a division of authority into local and central spheres. Responsible government for the white colonists was the most obvious example of this, but it would almost equally apply to the wide measure of autonomy enjoyed by British administrators in India and Africa. The patent weakness of the federal analogy as used by the Victorians was that there was in the empire no central legislative body in which all the units could be represented. The deeper problem was that while the empire could function federally in practice, it could not do so in theory. ‘Great Britain and its dependencies form not a Federal Republic but an Empire’, wrote Sir Federic Rogers of the Colonial Office in 1868, defending the right of parliament to coerce Nova Scotia into the Canadian Confederation. The Times in 1852 thought that ‘the greatest obstacle to federation is the relation in which the colonies severally stand to the mother country’. The empire was not an Olympian and uniform association, but a bundle of individual bilateral relationships between Britain and a host of weaker units. Britain’s relationship with the units of empire could vary radically between territories even within the same region, and it could change from decade to decade. Low has traced seven different relationships with local powers in Uganda, beginning with influence, moving through sway to ascendency, and then either to phases of predominance and control where the British were accepted peacefully, or to phases of mastery and dictation where they were not. Such categories can be applied to white colonies, except that the order of events was generally in inverse sequence. The essence of the situation was this: within the framework of a single empire, relationships of different intensity could exist between centre and periphery. In the mid-1860s the British exercised influence in Canada but sway in the Maritime Provinces. The phase of ascendency lasted in Western Australia for thirty years after it had finally vanished in Victoria. Hyderabad, Buganda and Barotseland were examples of territories enjoying some form of special status within India, Uganda and Northern Rhodesia respectively.²

Once it is acknowledged that the intensity of British involvement varied as between different units within the empire, two conclusions
follow. One is that policies applicable to one area did not necessarily apply universally. The other is that ‘the imperial factor’ remained important.

Empire history abounds with analogies, many of which obscured more than they illuminated. For example, people asked ‘whether southern Africa was a white man’s country or another India?’ If the former, could Britain make it into another Canada before the Afrikaners turned it into another United States? In the 1870s Carnarvon tried to force South Africa into a federation consciously modelled on that recently established in Canada. In Cape Colony John X. Merriman was prominent among the politicians who resisted the scheme as inapplicable to local conditions. Merriman was an intelligent and informed man who distrusted all federal systems as obstacles to the political fusion which he believed necessary to the security of white South Africa. Yet during the Anglo-Boer War he pleaded with British ministers to offer a ‘Canadian’ solution as an alternative to complete union. After the war Merriman was prominent among those working for closer union. Again he pressed for the Canadian model, rejecting the alternative loose federal system adopted by Australia in 1901. But in 1908, as the Durban convention approached, Merriman found that the Canadian constitution also made too many concessions to the particularist tendencies of the local units and was something to improve upon rather than to imitate. Thus, without conscious dishonesty, Merriman made diametrically opposed uses of the Canadian analogy over a forty-year period, but always in support of a consistent aim of South African closer union. He never visited Canada, drawing his information about the workings of its government from the highly tendentious writings of Goldwin Smith. Chief Justice de Villiers, who made a brief visit to Quebec City in 1907, was also clear about what he was looking for:

My visit to Canada would give me a good opportunity of enquiring into the workings of the federal constitution. I am particularly anxious to ascertain whether it would be possible to work a constitution which allotted to the Provincial Legislatures even smaller powers than those conferred on the Canadian Provinces.

It was no surprise, therefore, when de Villiers returned to Cape Town announcing that the Canadian constitution erred in leaning too far towards provincial autonomy, and similarly no surprise when ‘closer union’ leaders took care not to publish Laurier’s protests at this interpretation. Analogy could be formidable when used by men who knew what they wanted to prove. It became less fruitful when policymakers themselves failed to see its limitations. The 1935 Government of India Act reflected a British belief that a programme of responsible government plus federation had disposed of the problem of the white
colonies and could be transferred bodily to India. It was an unfortunate belief.10

The second conclusion which follows from regarding the British empire not as a multilateral association but as a series of bilateral relationships between a strong power and a host of weaker units, is that the 'imperial factor' could still be important. Decisions which applied the force of that strong British power to one or more of the component units of the empire might have far-reaching effects, even if they were not always those planned by British 'rulers', and despite the fact that local circumstances often meant that the 'dependency' helped to shape the decision taken. These reservations do not invalidate the contention that decisions taken in Britain could have important repercussions in individual parts of the empire. It has to be said with emphasis that this impact had little if anything to do with the existence of the empire as such.

To stress the imperial factor while discounting the empire is to raise the whole question of the relationship between economic and political domination, 'informal' and 'formal' control. Our primary plea here is that the division between informal and formal British empires should not be so sharp as to obscure the range of different relationships existing within the areas painted red on the map. Indeed, in their pioneering article of 1953, Gallagher and Robinson seemed to leave it open as to whether so important a case as Canada should be classed in the formal or informal sphere. We do not enter into the main controversy which has stemmed from their general thesis, since it has been comprehensively commented on by historians.11 However, the debate has been in our generation so central to any understanding of the empire that no book seeking to stimulate controversy in the field can ignore it. In chapters 2 and 7 we discuss the relationship between economic and strategic factors, first in the 1760s, then in the 1880s, while chapter 5 explores the balance between selfish and selfless elements in the mid-nineteenth century case for retaining the colonies.

This type of investigation in turn leads to the question of how much concern there was for non-European peoples, and whether such concern ever conflicted with the imperatives of Britain's policy as a world power. We have not attempted to draw up a moral balance-sheet for the empire, not least because too many difficult value judgements are involved; if the empire brought peace, it was no doubt often (as Nehru alleged) the peace of the grave. Again, politics is not generally about moral principles considered in the abstract, but about rational methods of realising state interests, which ought to be pursued objectively and coolly, but the more strictly ethical criteria are extraneous. It is useless to minimise the fact that systematic and selfish (if not altogether successful) attempts were made to prevent industrial develop-
ment in India (and Egypt to a lesser extent) from challenging domestic manufacturing interests in Britain. There were, however, on the other hand, some humanitarian motives behind imperial policy. Slavery was abolished in most of the empire in 1833, and the foreign slave trade was campaigned against almost continuously thereafter until it was ended; neither policy was dictated solely by economic self interest. Sections of the public were later outraged by the brutality of the Belgians in collecting Congo rubber, and, for different reasons, by the conditions of Chinese indentured labour in the Rand mines after 1904; and government was persuaded to act. It is possible to go beyond these negative policies of protest. Most historians would accept the existence of some positive humanitarian motives at some periods, but are rarely prepared to believe that such motives could override economic or strategic factors. For much of imperial history this is true – the humanitarian policies of the 1830s (which left their mark on New Zealand as well as South Africa and the West Indies) remain characteristic of a brief interlude – but in chapter 9 we offer a challenge to the view that in the twentieth century the British have consistently sacrificed the South African blacks to ensure that the whites would tolerate the strategically vital Cape naval base. Trusteeship was an area where the imperial factor remained important enough to infuriate the settler community; it simply is not true either that African interests were ignored in London in the years leading up to Union, nor that local pressures exercised through the high commissioner brought about the retention of the High Commission Territories of Basutoland, the Bechuanaland Protectorate and Swaziland after 1910. This was a decision taken by a concerned imperial government of its own motion – as one of us tried to demonstrate in reply to Alan Booth’s contrary theory. Moreover, the record of negotiations after that date with the South African leaders, including Smuts, indicates that Britain would not have given way to threats, while the influence which the British could hope to exercise by a ‘strategic’ retention of the Territories was really confined to possible leverage over improving the Union’s policy towards their own Africans. Power, both military and economic, constituted the only real relationship between Britain and the units of the empire, but humanitarian motives could influence and soften the exercise of that power.

The essays in this book cover a long time-span. Certain general conclusions about the nature of the empire are suggested by the perspective of this study. We reject the idea that there was any such monolithic association as the word ‘empire’ strictly implies, and we reaffirm basic continuities. The traditional efforts to delimit distinct ‘second’, ‘third’, and even ‘fourth’ British empires can probably be partly explained by a standard practice of historians: that of trying to
INTRODUCTION

reduce disorder to chronological periods. In terms of the history of expansionist interest and informal influence the distinction performs no useful function and is probably meaningless. The tendency today is to try to see the whole history of empire and expansion as a single process, and even to interpret decolonisation as in effect a shift of emphasis in trying to realise basic and continuing objectives. But even as a framework within which to discuss constitutional developments, a recognition of overall and inherent diversity would have provided a better starting-point for understanding the imperial experience. Having jettisoned the idea of a monolithic empire, governed at a nod from London, the reality behind the imperial factor can thus be more clearly approached. We reassert the need to consider the empire from the centre. The bureaucracy became increasingly influential, and domestic political pressures helped to frame decisions: a crowding of people in Newgate or Exeter Hall could have effects at the ends of the earth. While dismissing the Olympian magnificence of the empire as a myth, we do not forget that it exercised a powerful grip on Victorians and thus itself became a factor behind 'decision-making'. In chapters 5 and 6 we examine some of the ideas, current especially in the nineteenth century, about imperial relationships and how they might develop. Taking a broad historiographical view, it is plain that it has become necessary to reverse one of Seeley's complaints. He castigated historians of eighteenth century England for concentrating on petty domestic politics, when so much of the country's real history was occurring overseas, especially in Asia. Whilst Seeley's remark unhappily remains true of some writing about British history, for the empire the historiographical wheel has come full circle. It is now possible to write the history of India or Africa, Canada or Australia, and to write it well, with hardly a mention of Britain at all. Yet surely the past of these countries may still be illuminated by the 'petty politics' of the distant interfering power whose influence encircled the globe?

Within this imperial experience of global diversity, elements of continuity may be strongly emphasised—continuity of motives, methods, metaphors and mistakes—stubborn continuity even of belief in the impracticable ideal of organic imperial unity. The thesis adumbrated in chapters 5 and 6 ought perhaps to be underlined. We see no break in imperial continuity between a 'first' and 'second' British empire in 1783. One of us has already published a critique of Harlow's *Founding of the second British empire* 1763–93. Recent research by Marshall and by Mackay has reinforced our doubts about Harlow's view of 'new themes' emerging after American independence, particularly because eighteenth-century government simply did not have the machinery to bring about changes in the direction and purpose of imperial policy, or even to achieve the sustained conceptualisation which Harlow's
themes implied or necessitated. Furthermore, we see no discontinuity around the year 1870. Chapter 5 argues that colonial possessions were strongly valued in the mid-nineteenth century, and chapter 6 tries to show that the late Victorian debate over 'imperial federation' can only really be understood in the light of empire federalist discussions before 1870. Nor do we share Platt's view that major changes in the method of promoting British interests can be discerned in the mid-1880s. It may be allowed that there were cyclical movements and shifts in the popularity of the empire. Imperial union was most popular in times of colonial or international crisis, and phases of authoritarian hysteria behind popular belief in the empire can be discerned in the 1770s and again in the 1880s. In a perspective of a few years or even decades it is easy to label these changes as 'turning points'. In a longer view, however, it is continuity which is more striking. A change of government, which might mark an epoch in domestic politics, could have remarkably little impact on imperial policy, especially as the principle of a bipartisan foreign, and then imperial, policy became more attractive in the later nineteenth century. In Chapter 2 we suggest that Guadeloupe would have been returned to France at the peace even if Bute had not succeeded Chatham in 1761. The arrival and departure of Disraeli in 1874 and 1880, and the change from Ripon to Chamberlain at the colonial office in 1895, have recently been shown to have brought fewer changes in imperial policy than used to be believed. It may even be questioned whether the replacement of Lyttelton and Balfour by Elgin and Campbell-Bannerman in 1905 marked a sharp break in continuity; at any rate, chapter 8 presents a view of Liberal policy in South Africa as guided not by magnanimity but by a continuing search for imperial supremacy. Milestones can be detected, but usually on a one-way journey. Thus the beginnings of an explicit recognition of Dominion status in the decade before the First World War made imperial federation less likely - but had it ever been practicable? Tracing continuity within a diffuse organism may be less spectacular than seeking for watershed in the development of a monolithic organisation, but it offers a sounder basis for the understanding of British imperial history. The theme of chapter 6 covers 200 years.

To stress continuity is to raise the problem of the contribution of individual influence, because it implies that impersonal forces have operated above and outside the control of personal options. Is then the empire to be regarded as run by inherited notions of administration, guided by an impersonal self-propelled bureaucracy? - the idea which Buller and Wakefield in the 1840s saw behind 'Mr Mothercountry' (the permanent under-secretary at the Colonial Office), and which Robinson and Gallagher revived in the 1960s in the more sophisticated form of the 'official mind'. To answer this question a preliminary observation
has to be made: the whole problem has been obscured by a historiographical emphasis on hero-figures. Chapters 4 and 8 tackle two of the most imposing of these. Durham in spirit and Smuts in person are widely held to have contributed to the solution of most of the critical problems of the nineteenth-century empire and the twentieth-century Commonwealth. We contend that their influence has been exaggerated, as others before us have contended that too much importance has been assigned to Wakefield (in colonisation schemes) and Disraeli (in empire sentiment). Indeed, by far the most striking aspect of the imperial pantheon is not that it has been filled with heroes, but that the heroes have consistently been the wrong ones. Palmerston was a more energetic promoter of British expansion than Disraeli; Cobden a more acute theorist of empire than Wakefield; Robert Baldwin, Louis LaFontaine and the eighth earl of Elgin all did more for Canada and responsible government than Durham; while the ninth earl of Elgin was at least as constructive an administrator as Chamberlain. Again, Commonwealth evolution was certainly not Smuts's chief interest—like Hertzog, as Chapter 9 indicates, he put South Africa first: he might indeed be regarded less as an architect of the Commonwealth than as the greatest Afrikaner nationalist of them all. Nevertheless we do not want to set up alternative heroes for the pantheon, since this would only perpetuate a distortion which, until recently, pervaded the historiography of the empire: a relentless search for heroes. Presumably the creation of heroes, and the proliferation of comfortable myths about their deeds, was itself a reflection of the larger myth of empire: sagas and parables, and sometimes even pieces of gossip, were necessary to bolster the imperial illusion. Thus the historiography itself gives a clue to the reality of the empire. Perhaps, too, men find claims to greatness, confidently made, irresistible. The supposed significance of Durham, Wakefield, Disraeli, Chamberlain, and Smuts was highly publicised, often by the boasts of the men themselves; the claims were eagerly believed.

If our reappraisals, however, lead to a discarding of all heroes and heroics, the reader might well ask himself whether our picture of the empire simply amounts to a lumbering dinosaur with a tiny brain, but needing enlarged nerve centres near its tail to have even the illusion of control over its own bulk. And if the empire was a dinosaur, could individuals ever alter such a monster's course? The empire, however, was never a single animal of whatever species. In assessing the ability of individual policy-makers to alter events, it matters very much which unit of the empire was involved, and it has first to be established how intensive its relationship was with Britain. It is pointless, for instance, to upbraid British ministers for abandoning black South Africans to Union control in 1910, simply because there was no effective British power to help the African majority. In the High Commission Territories
alone was the administrative relationship direct and intensive enough for something to be done, as indeed it was. Some decisions, like the concession of responsible government in Canada and later in the Orange River Colony, resulted mainly from recognition that those units of the empire were rapidly receding beyond effective control. Even so, it took courage and perspicacity to admit this. Grey in 1847 and Elgin in 1907 should at least be credited with perceiving a truth which had been hidden from Stanley in 1842–4 and Lyttelton in 1905. British policy-makers arguably had the clearest freedom of decision when the occupation of new territories was at stake. Government could refuse to recognise annexations made in its name, as Glencög did with D’Urban’s Queen Adelaide Province in 1835, and Gladstone’s ministry did with Queensland’s annexation of New Guinea in 1883. The negotiation of peace terms in 1761–2, and the search for new convict outlets between 1778 and 1790, discussed in chapters 2 and 3, are both reminders that within options and pressures, and alternatives and counter-pressures, individual ministers had finally to make a choice—and did so, with far-reaching consequences for Canada, the West Indies and Australia. The occupation of new territory could, however, be the result of constraint, or unavoidable imperatives, rather than preference, if British interests were to be properly provided for. The British government had little option but to accept territorial acquisition in India in the late eighteenth century, and in Africa in the late nineteenth. The partition of Africa is discussed in chapter 7, and we relate the balance of personal and impersonal forces in the British part differently from the way in which Robinson and Gallagher have done it. In this connection Hopkins has reduced the influence of individuals in the partition merely to one of influencing its timing and nature: they did not, he argued, ‘cause’ it—why else did Chamberlain, Goldie and Lugard succeed where strong men like Faidherbe and Glover had earlier been frustrated? It is indeed largely a question of the right conditions; as Bismarck once remarked, the statesman cannot create the stream of time, he can only navigate it—or again: ‘A statesman cannot create anything himself: he must wait and listen until he hears the steps of God sounding through events and then leap up and grasp the hem of his garment’. Hopkins’s argument is a reminder that it is less the decisions of individuals which matter than the interaction of many different personalities to the point where collectively they mould an almost impersonal process. Thus it is reasonable to believe that the activities of European adventurers in Africa, and those of indigenous rulers themselves, created a situation which made a partition likely, but the actual timing and the selection of territory was determined by decisions made in Europe.18

To imply that the British government could assess the value of potential acquisitions in the 1880s and 1890s is to elicit a further in-
sistent query: how far were the policy-makers adequately informed when making their decisions? In this connection our study of a 200-year time span definitely (though not perhaps surprisingly) shows a marked growth in the amount of relevant information available to government. There was profound, even comic, ignorance of North America in the 1760s and Australia in the 1780s, but acute awareness of the South African situation in the 1900s. Comprehension of the federal idea meanwhile progressed from the virtually non-existent to the minutely sophisticated. These are signs, mainly, of the development in the nineteenth century of an informed bureaucracy. Yet this major development only underlined the fact that ultimately the bureaucracy (an impersonal force) did not make the critical decisions: politicians continued to show a remarkable facility for ignoring advice, choosing wrong analogies and even for repeating blunders. Thus the form of the Suez invasion of 1956 was an almost exact copy of the campaign plan of the 1882 occupation, despite the fact that Eden preferred Hitler to Urabi Pasha as an analogue for Nasser. Despite all the official knowledge of South Africa accumulated by 1906, the politicians managed to make an electoral miscalculation strangely reminiscent, as chapter 8 suggests, of a ministerial error in Canada seventy-five years earlier. Few measures have been backed by so much research and discussion as the Government of India Act of 1935, yet it still represented a misleading diagnosis and embodied a fundamental misconception. Knowledge by no means guaranteed sensitivity, any more than intelligence is proof against silliness. Nor was insensitivity a matter of distance and unfamiliarity: it is hardest to be right about problems nearest the heart; and the Irish settlement of 1921, discussed in chapter 10, stemmed in part from Lloyd George’s failure to appreciate the strength of Sinn Fein. On the other hand, ignorance could sometimes be an asset. It is possible to wonder if the global expansion of Britain, whether led by merchants or missionaries, would ever have been begun if the formidable nature of the enterprise, and the decades of poor returns, had been properly grasped and foreseen at the outset. Knowledge, on the other hand, only revealed the intractability of so many problems, not least that of South Africa. It was always easier to make a diagnosis than to suggest a remedy. It is thus not surprising that the men of the empire sometimes preferred a discreet screen of myth to the intractable truth.

Where knowledge was misleading and analysis defective in sensitivity, policy-makers themselves could confuse the illusion of empire with the fact of power. And so too did a generation of historians (mostly bred in the notable Oxford school of medieval constitutional history) who focused the study of the empire upon its constitutional development. Ideally, imperial history should treat of power – its nature and use, its
location, devolution and transfer—and be about the role of the empire in the total structure of British world interests. Some of our chapters, however, still concern themselves with constitutional questions: but this is precisely because imperial problems were discussed and sometimes solved in such language, and the record must be set straight in this sphere before newer types of study can be undertaken. The historian's task is to decide which constitutional forms corresponded with the reality of power, and which diverged. Restrictions on the autonomy of distant colonies envisaged by the Durham Report, as also by the imperial federationists, were unenforceable, but equally we argue in chapter 10 that the Irish Free State simply did not have the strength to effect the changes in the Commonwealth which have been attributed to it. The myths are as revealing as the realities.

These, then, are the assumptions which have guided us in the reappraisals which follow.

NOTES


6. Quoted in F. H. Hartmann *The relations between nations* (1957) 125.


16. The publication of J. Gallagher's 1974 Ford Lectures on the decline and fall of the British empire, 1919-60, will be a landmark in this regard.

17. Notice R. J. Moore's recent affirmation that 'the constitutional and the socio-political [are] equally necessary approaches to the study of history': the fashionable analyses of the relationships between social change and local political development can still be illuminated by studies of 'high politics' with a constitutional dimension: R. J. Moore *The crisis of Indian unity 1917-1940* (1974) ix.
2 Imperial interests and the Peace of Paris (1763)

The Seven Years War was the most successful war Britain ever fought. She conquered Canada, the French slaving-ports in West Africa, virtually all the French West Indian islands, including Guadeloupe and Martinique. French power in India was reduced to nothing. Spain joined France as an ally in January 1762, and in August 1762 Britain then proceeded to capture Havana in Cuba (the lynch-pin of the Spanish colonial trading system); Manila in the Philippines also surrendered to the British, at the end of October. Meanwhile the French navy was destroyed and, as Miss Behrens writes:

At the same time, every neutral seafaring nation found its ships at the mercy of the Royal Navy, which claimed the right to search them for blockade-running, in accordance with rules of the British government’s devising, and, for the sake of the prize-money, frequently seized them and their cargoes even when they had observed the rules. Not surprisingly in these circumstances, the cry went up all over Europe that Louis XIV’s power and arrogance paled into insignificance by comparison with those of this new mistress of the seas.¹

Proportionately to this pre-eminent position and to the magnificence of the conquests, the British acquisitions ratified under the Peace of Paris 1763 were relatively modest. France renounced all pretensions to Canada together with all its dependencies and the islands in the gulf of St Lawrence (including Cape Breton Island and Prince Edward Island), except St Pierre and Miquelon which she was allowed to keep ‘to serve as a shelter for the French fishermen’. French fishing privileges in northern Newfoundland were renewed. Britain obtained all ‘Louisiana’ eastwards of the left bank of the River Mississippi, including the town of Mobile, but excluding New Orleans. Spain ceded Florida to Britain in return for the restoration of Cuba. British logwood-cutting privileges in the Bay of Honduras were provided for, but not backed by any further cession of
Spanish territory. Manila was restored to Spain. In the West Indies Britain returned the French islands of Guadeloupe, Martinique, Marie Galante, Desirade, Belleisle and St Lucia. Britain held on merely to Grenada, the Grenadines, St Vincent, Dominica and Tobago. In Africa Senegal was retained but Gorée surrendered. In India Britain and France agreed to return to the status quo ante by restoring the posts each had held in 1749; no British conquests were kept.

The consequences of these territorial rearrangements were momentous. The war ended with striking possibilities for the American colonists. Thomas Hutchinson argued in 1773 that the rise of American colonial resistance to the empire stemmed not from real oppression but from the destruction of French power in North America in 1763, and this argument was accepted by Gipson, the leading American historian of the eighteenth-century British empire. Gipson believed that the American Revolution logically flowed out of the situation created by the Peace of Paris; the victory over France was too complete, and the terms of peace were too drastic for the empire to be maintained without profound alteration in the relation of the parts to the whole—a task which British statesmanship could not manage, largely because the colonies were too powerful to be contained after the removal of the French menace. The immediate consequence of the decision to secure an enormous territorial expansion of the triumphant empire in 1763 in mainland America was the failure to strengthen the British holdings in the West Indies; and this failure, bolstering up the existing unsound economic system, according to Ragatz, ‘made their ultimate complete ruin more certain’: the ‘unnatural and peculiarly disadvantageous settlement’ of 1763 ‘profoundly affected the course of British West Indian history’.2

Many contemporaries complained that the emphasis had been wrong and that the right course for Britain would have been to let Canada go, since it was economically nearly useless, and to have strengthened the position in the economically important West Indies instead. The readmission of France to the Newfoundland fisheries was also by no means a foregone conclusion—Pitt had tried to prevent it—and the result was a cause of Anglo-French disputes right down to 1904. The re-establishment of the French position in India was to prove a source of imperial anxiety at least until 1803.

In view of the momentous bearing the terms of the peace had on the development of the empire it is strange that analysis of their formulation should have attracted so little attention from imperial historians, unless it be that imperial historians are not, traditionally, interested in the study of third-rate politicians, for such Bute and his henchmen undoubtedly were. Indeed, the subject has not been significantly studied by recent historians of any kind. Namier contrived to write a book of nearly
500 pages on the ministries of Newcastle and Bute, 1760 to 1763, without making any analysis of or judgement on the terms of peace. Harlow had but little to say about them. Only two essays have ever been specifically devoted to the Peace of Paris: Hotblack’s in 1908 and Temperley’s in 1929; both are good, but the same cannot be said of the one book on the subject (Rashed’s, 1951), which is in any case mainly concerned with the diplomacy of the settlement. The result is that the most influential modern writings upon it have been those of Richard Pares, who never studied the subject comprehensively in its own right; it is, however, fortunate that this distinguished and fairly recent historian at any rate has provided the basis for orthodox modern judgements of the peace suited to textbook repetition.

Pares in 1936 formulated three main conclusions. First

. . . there seems to be no doubt that their personal reputation, even their personal safety, was the ruling consideration in the minds of the English peace-makers . . . pure politicians, to whom popularity and prestige were the realities.

Second

Historians have often remarked that England gained too little or too much at the Peace of Paris. In this they only echo Pitt, who was justified by events within his own lifetime. As a criticism of the details of the peace, this seems to be a little severe. It is not the loss of territory, but the loss of the war itself that creates the desire for revenge. . . . Yet in a more general way, Pitt was right. France and Spain were neither appeased nor crushed.

(This judgement directly echoes that of Kate Hotblack: ‘It was as a settlement of disputes that the inadequacy of the Peace of Paris was most disastrous. . . . France was neither reduced, nor, as events proved, conciliated. . . . The Spanish question was unsolved.’) Third, and with regard to the European war,

It was no use to conclude a war of intervention [on the continent] by an isolationist peace as Lord Bute did in 1762.

Pares’s third judgement (also reflecting another of Hotblack’s) need not detain us, not only because its relevance to the imperial aspects of the peace is oblique, but also because it is essentially uncontroversial, perhaps even incontrovertible. Whatever legitimate disagreement there may be about the peace as an imperial settlement, it is not open to dispute that the European settlement constituted a political error. Though Bute can be defended from charges of moral default towards Britain’s Prussian ally, it was unquestionably bad diplomacy to threaten Britain’s future international position by cancelling the subsidy to
Frederick the Great and forcing an importunate peace upon him, and it was unprecedented to sacrifice continental interests to securing colonial territory and, for domestic reasons, a quick peace.  

In seeking to explain why the peace terms were what they were, how far does Pares's dictum about personal reputation and safety being 'the ruling consideration in the minds of the English peace-makers' provide an adequate guide? The peace-makers were, principally, Bute, Pitt, Bedford, Grenville and Egremont. The third earl of Bute took office in March 1761 as secretary of state for the northern department. William Pitt (earl of Chatham), architect of the war victories, conducted the first round of peace negotiations started in mid-1761, but resigned his secretaryship early in October 1761. He was replaced by the second earl of Egremont as secretary for the southern department, while George Grenville became leader of the House of Commons. The Duke of Newcastle resigned in May 1762 and was succeeded by Bute as first lord of the treasury, Grenville replacing Bute as secretary for the northern department. The fourth Duke of Bedford, as ambassador in Paris for the conclusion of the peace treaty, officially negotiated with the Duc de Choiseul; they were the two main signatories of peace on 10 February 1763, together with the marquis de Grimaldi on behalf of Spain. The last stage of the negotiations was carried on through the intermediation of the two Sardinian envoys, B. de Solar (in Paris) and Comte Viry (in London).

It seems incontestable that in 1762 the country as a whole (outside the City of London and the merchant community) wanted peace—but a desire for peace was not incompatible with protest against the peace proposed. Horace Walpole, for example, deplored continuation of the war on the ground that 'the advantages of commerce are dearly bought for some by the lives of many more', and he considered that 'few disinterested persons would be content with so moderate a [peace] as I should; yet I can conceive a peace with which I should not be satisfied'. In the event he regarded the peace as 'to precipitate, too indigested, and too shameful to merit the coldest eulogy of moderation'. There is no doubt that the terms evoked widespread protest, with loud clamour against them both in town and country: as Newcastle noted 'great complaint was universally made of them'. The North Briton declared: 'The sense of the nation is clear and strong against the present terms of peace.' Despite this, the preliminaries passed the House of Commons easily by a majority too large to be explained away by bribery. The protest, it seems clear, was not really against the terms of peace as such: it was against Bute; and this is the explanation of the paradox that a nation wanting peace protested violently against terms which parliament nevertheless endorsed. Henry Fox (who joined the ministry in the autumn of 1762) realised this
plainly: ‘I do not flatter myself’, he wrote, ‘that any peace that Pitt does not make will go down, or the best not equally be abused with the worst’; or again, he wrote:

Upon the whole it is easy . . . to see that no terms of peace would either lessen or increase the clamour. It is aimed at Lord Bute not at his measures, and which is shameful, many who approve the peace will join in opposing it as a means of destroying him.

Lord Chesterfield came to the same conclusion, and indeed made a fair and balanced assessment of the peace:

The nation universally condemned it, not upon knowledge but because it was made by a Favourite and a Scotchman, two inexpiable sins in the opinion or rather in the humour of an English multitude. The truth is, that the peace was not so bad as it was represented by some and believed by most people; nor was it so good as it ought to have been and certainly might have been if more time and better abilities had been employed in negotiating it. It must be allowed to have been inadequate to our successes in the war . . .

English prejudice against the Scots was inveterate and universal; as Horace Walpole wrote, ‘The cry [against Bute] you may be sure is on his Scot-hood’. It was not grounded upon rational objection to his policy; nor was it objective and honest.11

That conspicuously successful but short-lived journal *The North Briton* expressed the hope that if Bute should make anything but a safe, adequate and honourable peace, he would be dragged ‘even from behind the throne should he take shelter there, to receive the just punishment of so great a treachery to his injured country’. A vast quantity of anti-Bute cartoons appeared. Impeachment was hinted at: the King, Pitt and Newcastle referred to it. Choiseul complained that Bute and Bedford seemed to talk of nothing but impeachments and scaffold. The Duke of Devonshire’s opinion was that ministers would be ‘tore to pieces’ if no compensation was obtained for Havana. On 25 November 1762 Bute was roughly treated by the London mob: ‘very much insulted, hissed in every gross manner and a little pelted’, according to one observer; he tried to make himself inconspicuous in a hackney carriage but was discovered – the window was broken and the mob ‘by threats and menaces put him very reasonably in a great fear’. Bedford, the leader of the ‘peace party’, enraged the City, and he too was hissed in London. The mobbing of politicians was an enduring feature of eighteenth-century political life, but as J. Brewer points out, its frequency should not be allowed to detract from the significance of attacks on Bute, which were peculiarly hostile and unremitting.12 And yet even in these almost uniquely unpleasant circumstances Bute did not in fact behave
as Pares describes him: as a man concerned only for the satisfaction of his honour and the safety of his skin. Naturally he wanted to make a good impression and leave office with an unblemished character, but he did not allow the public outcry to deflect him from doing what he felt was right: 'I will not procure safety to myself at the expense of my country', he said on one occasion. To Bedford he wrote:

I should think myself unworthy of the name of a good subject and an honest man were I capable of permitting any private view, any personal motive or selfish idea to influence my judgement upon it [the peace] one instant.

And to Grenville he confessed in September 1761 that he saw nothing but rocks and quicksands in my way, and the times, persons and situations all thwarting every wish of my heart: however, I must go on while I see the smallest prospect of serving my prince.

There seems no reason to doubt his sincerity. Choiseul thought Bute the most disinterested of all the British ministers. If he wanted to make sure of his public reputation and safety there was one obvious course open to him: to try to make peace more on the lines which Pitt might have made it. He did not take this course. 18

If Pares's statement is suspect with regard to Bute, it is manifestly untrue of Bedford. He was not afraid to preach the desirability of peace in mid-1761, when it was not a popular doctrine, nor to insist on generosity to France:

Let us do as we would be done by, the most golden rule . . . always to be observed. . . . We have too much already—more than we know what to do with; and I very much fear that if we retain the greatest part of our conquests out of Europe we shall be in danger of over-colonising and undoing ourselves by them as the Spaniards have done.

These were reasoned convictions and Bedford stood by them unswervingly; indeed he was possibly too inflexible and irrationally doctrinaire to make an ideal negotiator. Fortified by his reading of Clausewitz (to the effect that measures, however plausible, which tended to rouse up fresh enemies did not increase the strength of a state's international position), he firmly opposed Pitt's determination in 1761 to exclude the French from the Newfoundland fishery. Bedford was regarded by his friends as being unafraid to speak his mind, even against Pitt (of whom most of his colleagues were terrified), and they believed him to despise popular abuse. He disliked the idea of his plenipotentiary powers being buried in the protection of Bute's doctrine of 'collective responsibility'. 14
It was otherwise, however, with Grenville and Egremont, and Pares was probably right about their preoccupations. Both of them heartily disliked Bedford: Egremont in particular feared Bedford would be the ruin of them all. Grenville attached inordinate importance to 'universal reputation, unblemished character and peace of mind' as the most desirable end which would attend a service to king and country rising above 'all private passions and all public discouragements'. In his uneasiness about the peace Grenville wanted to bring Newcastle, Hardwicke and others back into the ministry to reduce the strength of possible opposition. He and Egremont tried to insist on Bedford's submitting his terms to the cabinet before signing them, in order to keep a check on what they regarded as his immoderate inclination towards peace at almost any price. They wanted to keep Guadeloupe and St Lucia and to ask an impossibly high price for the restoration of Havana. Viry found Grenville most trying—and so did Bute. These ministerial disagreements led to Grenville's replacement as secretary of state by Halifax and as leader of the Commons by Henry Fox. Horace Walpole at this time had a 'very good opinion' of Grenville, but allowed it possible that he went because he was afraid of signing the treaty: he 'had qualms on the peace, could not digest such good terms as have been offered to France'. Immediately before this, another observer thought him 'frightened out of his wits' and insisting on 'lawyer-like distinctions'. Egremont was altogether a much less able man, apparently busily engaged on eating himself to an early death, which occurred in 1763. There seems little to be said in defence of Egremont (at least, no historian has yet said it): he was dull and dry, un inventive and narrow-minded, ungracious and malicious, greedy and probably corrupt, and far from disinterested: Rigby considered Egremont would sooner 'kiss Lord Bute's backside' than leave office, despite his mounting quarrels with Bute. His criticism of Bute's tenderness towards France—Egremont's affection of a 'certain patriotic insincerity' as Pares calls it—was essentially negative and the result of anxiety about his own safety. He was alarmed by Bute's decision to let France retain New Orleans. T. C. Pease comments: 'His mind turned at once to his own safety and to covering up his own tracks'; he asked Choiseul to take and destroy a certain note, probably incriminating him on St Lucia.25

Personal reputation and popularity came closer to being Pitt's ruling consideration than it did Bute's or Bedford's. Although recognising that he was 'an exceedingly artful demagogue' who took the credit for anything popular and sometimes shirked responsibility for things which were not, Pares was inclined to exonerate Pitt because he at least seriously considered economic and strategic interests, which his colleagues did not. Yet so excessive was Pitt's concern for his public standing, and so marked his urge to publicity and self-justification, that
the main object of his long and tedious speech on the preliminaries was (as Edmund Burke recognised at the time) 'an apology for himself rather than an attack on the peace' (saying, for example, that his ministry 'will always be remembered with glory'); and he gratuitously lied when he claimed that he had been overruled on the retention of Guadeloupe. When in office and in charge of peace negotiations, he freely accepted the need to return it. Moreover, when it seemed that Britain would have to yield on the Honduras logwood settlements, he prepared to throw the blame on Newcastle for having compromised the position many years before. Above all, it is possible that Pitt may have resigned office in October 1761 in order to preserve his reputation against the dents it must have suffered in peacemaking. The royal chaplain, Dr Pyle, thought him 'a very inconsistent and shameless man . . . [who] went out in a huff; in order to continue a popular IDOL'. Pitt himself made no secret of his worry that 'peace will be as hard to make as war': 'Anybody', he said, 'could advise me in war, but who could draw such a peace as would please everybody?' — and again, 'Some are for keeping Canada, some Guadeloupe: who will tell me which I shall be hanged for not keeping?' Even in his speech on the preliminaries he admitted that it was 'impossible to reconcile every interest'. Many of his contemporaries believed he had engineered a situation in which he knew his colleagues could not follow him, in order to have an excuse for resignation. This is indeed possible. The immediate cause of his resignation was a difference of opinion on Spanish policy and a conviction that he must have complete responsibility for it; he wanted his own way, but at the time in question he probably could have had it. After all, the difference of opinion was not whether a war with Spain would be fought, but only when it should begin. Whatever the long-term intentions of George III and Bute, these were totally irrelevant to Pitt's retirement: neither of them ever indicated a wish that Pitt should go in wartime. In fact Bute said in September 1761 that they should try 'to hinder Mr Pitt from going out and leaving the impracticability of his own war upon us'; he lamented his departure.

The burden of Pitt's criticism of the peace was that ministers seemed 'to have lost sight of the great fundamental principle that France is chiefly if not solely to be dreaded by us in the light of a maritime and commercial power'. He believed France had been given the means 'of recovering her prodigious losses and of becoming once more formidable to us at sea', since British territorial acquisition on the North American mainland was 'of very little detriment to the commerce of France'. He specifically itemised Martinique, St Lucia, Miquelon and Gorée as conquests which should have been retained, and he regarded Florida as inadequate compensation for Havana. In a general way, said Pares,
Pitt was right to condemn the peace, because 'France and Spain were neither appeased nor crushed'. Is this a fair assessment? The clearest case of something Britain should have insisted on was St Lucia, to which she had at least as good a claim as France: the first settlers in 1605 were British, there were subsequent groups of settlers there too, and as late as 1722 George II had treated it as at his disposal. Moreover, every French West Indian island except St Domingue had been captured, and the chance was missed of reducing the price of sugar in the home market. The strategic importance of St Lucia was overlooked, and it did not finally become British until 1815. But perhaps the most powerful indictment of the terms of peace is that they took virtually no account of the signal successes of the last year of the war. As the earl of Hardwicke put it in his speech on the preliminaries: 'I wished from my soul, that advantage had been taken of the successes of the last year... to have varied, to have abated, some part even of these concessions' which he had previously agreed should be made to France. In particular he felt more leverage should have been exercised on account of the capture of Havana, 'not only an immense and insurmountable loss to Spain, but a pressing distress upon France herself'.

The effect of the fall of Havana, Spain's most important possession, had been profound. Long considered impregnable, its surrender was a major triumph for British arms, but an embarrassment to Bute, as it made a conciliatory peace harder to conclude. Florida (compared by William Beckford with Bagshot Heath for barrenness) was indeed a poor compensation. Spain regarded it as the least valuable of her possessions, insignificant enough and far enough away from Mexico to be lost without much difference being felt, especially as Britain already held Mobile. The security of the North American colonies had been the original object of the war, but after the entry of Spain into it, the war could not be said to have been satisfactorily concluded if no further objectives were obtained. A major consideration ought to have been the smashing of the Bourbon alliance, which had always been Pitt's big bugbear. Yet as Legge (Pitt's chancellor of the exchequer) complained, the Bourbon union 'is not even attempted to be broken', while as Burke wrote 'a security against that league ought to have been the fundamental point of a pacification'. Instead the peace-makers actually countenanced it. Bedford treated their representatives as if they had been ministers of the same crown. France was able to compensate Spain for her loss of Florida by the gift of Louisiana west of the Mississippi, thus cementing their anglophobic friendship.

In effect what Bute did was to sacrifice the West Indies to North America, and in this he followed Pitt's disposition to conquer in the islands in order to annex on the continent. As von Ruville pointed out long ago, Bute's idea was evidently to demand only what it would
be easy for Britain to obtain and for France to yield, and so to get French support against her obstinate ally, thus producing a speedy end to the war. Bute yielded to France the main West Indian islands in order to get all America on the left bank of the Mississippi (Pitt had never asked so much): an ingenious compromise which provided the maximum gain for Britain and an impressive splash on the map with the minimum loss to France and the least damage to her pride; it established an apparently clear frontier, and made it impossible for anyone to deny that the American interests of Britain were (to quote the Annual Register) 'well-weighed and solidly provided for'.

Although much of the public discussion of the desiderata for the peace centred on whether or not it would be best to keep Guadeloupe in preference to Canada, the retention of Canada was in fact never in doubt for a moment. In January 1761 Pitt defined his great aim as 'the entire safety' of North America and especially 'the secure possession of that most valuable conquest of Canada'. In planning the restoration of conquests in 1761, he 'made North America entirely his object', as the sagacious Hardwicke observed. And Bute would never have laid himself open to a charge of having failed to secure even the original object of the war, perhaps still less to the charge that Wolfe had died in vain on the heights of Abraham (said to be the most painted scene in British history). Canada was retained to give security to the colonists on whose behalf the war had been begun, and possibly to dominate a base for the development of sea power through the fisheries. The indispensable corollary of this unavoidable decision to keep Canada was, given the assumption of the time that a victorious power could not keep all its best acquisitions, the return of Guadeloupe. The government in any case ignored the whole public 'Canada versus Guadeloupe' controversy, recognising with Hardwicke that each side 'have but one point in view, which is how it may affect their particular interest'. It is absolutely unnecessary to invoke the pressure of the powerful West India interest headed by Beckford and Rose Fuller to explain the government's emphasis on continental acquisitions. These planters' interests coincided with the peace terms: they did not determine them. It is nonsense to contend (as Ragatz did) that these established planters 'shaped the peace to their own ends', and equally silly to regard it (as Eric Williams did) simply as making no sense except as a victory (though a Pyrrhic one) for this interest. If Beckford had believed the peace had been made to please his group he would not have described it in general as 'more infamous than that of Utrecht'. Equally misleading is the interpretation of Harlow, apparently following that of G. L. Beer, according to whom the peace marked a turning-point in commercial policy, because he believed that manufacturing and landed woollen interests had enough influence on the peace-making to secure the laying
of a greater stress upon colonies as markets. It is extremely hard to find any evidence for this, particularly in the absence of any decisive pressure exercised by any lobby. Nevertheless, Harlow was prepared to assert that, when other factors had been given due weight,

the fact remains that the acquisition of Canada and the 'Middle West' as a great potential market for British products was deliberately chosen in preference to a policy of containing the American Colonies: strategically, by leaving the French at their backs and, commercially, by providing them with a large legitimate vent in the West Indies.

If this was the result of the peace treaty, it is most unlikely that it was done deliberately. And it was certainly not the decisive consideration. Harlow seems to have assumed that Shelburne influenced ideas behind the peace-making of 1763. This is not so. All he did was, in his own rather eccentric and far-sighted way, to justify and rationalise what had been done by others simply for strategic reasons. His special pleading on behalf of the government in December 1762 was a premature forecast, arguing that

The total extirpation of the French from Canada and of the Spaniards from Florida gives Great Britain the universal empire of that extended coast . . . opens a new field of commerce, with many Indian nations which have hitherto been enemies . . . furnishes great additional resources for the increase of our naval power.

He calculated that the cold climate of North America would need £200,000-worth of clothing from Britain every year. One of the arguments offered in defence of the treaty was that soon North America alone would supply the deficiencies of British trade in every part of the world. We must not be misled by these arguments. The Annual Register described the prospects more realistically: Britain 'had, 'though a distant, a fair prospect of commerce' with America, but only after it had been fully peopled and properly cultivated. In any case, these prospects did not determine the peace terms, or the legislation which quickly followed them. The possibilities of the western fur trade counted for so little that the trade was completely ignored in the restriction of boundaries laid down by proclamation on 7 October 1763. It was with but grudging and indifferent recognition that Canada was received within the imperial circle. To most Europeans it was still Voltaire's 'few acres of snow'. Its acquisition was much abused by pamphleteers. Almon's description of it as 'an almost barren province' was typical. Hardwicke wrote to Newcastle on 2 April 1762

I always suspected that one reason why he [Chatham] contended so much for the totality of the fishery, impracticable to be obtained, was that he saw the country of Canada was not greatly worth keep-
ing... Canada is a cold Northern climate, unfruitful; furnishes no trade to Europe that I know of but the fur trade, the most inconsiderable of all trades...

Its products, he added, were nearly the same as Britain's 'and consequently will take off not much of ours'. The possession of Canada was in itself of no commercial value, but controlling Canada met political objectives and gave the British an economic and military security in North America which outweighed this, and thus could be said to make good sense from the mercantilist viewpoint. The arguments of the pamphleteers urging the retention of Guadeloupe were solely economic, and they were abortive.23

Three basic considerations dominated the entire treaty: the search for strategic security in North America, the recognition of the need for moderation towards France, and Bute's hopes of establishing a permanent peace.

There was no searching out of economic opportunity. The attractive feature of the acquisition of eastern Louisiana was not its supposed market potential, but that by it an incontrovertible boundary would be established and the French could be removed from contact with the Amerindians. Such contact, it was believed, could have vitiated the advantages to Britain of holding Canada: the Amerindians might have been most troublesome to the frontier unless the great lakes were fortified. Nor was Florida valued commercially. To the mercantilist way of thinking it was economically useless. Its possession would, however, complete the British command of the North American continent. Its acquisition was expected to remove the threat of a Spanish incursion from the south. General Amherst endorsed this military argument. Nor should it be forgotten that France tried to save Florida for Spain by offering Britain a million square miles of Louisiana territory to the west of the Mississippi. Britain rejected this striking offer as an inadequate substitute for strategically valued Florida.24

The need for moderation towards France was widely recognised. Newcastle in private repeatedly criticised Pitt for the impracticability of his large schemes, his 'idlest imaginings', of extirpating France from every foothold in America and its fisheries. The 'Canada versus Guadeloupe' controversy owed its existence to the widespread assumption that Britain could not possibly keep both; only cranks and extremists (like the editor of the Monitor, H. McCulloch and the author of Letter on the approaching peace) suggested keeping everything. The Annual Register for 1762 remarked:

As it is grown into a sort of maxim, that nations greatly victorious, must cede something in a peace, the difficulty on our side was only what and how much we should retain.
Choiseul pointed out in May 1762 that 'there is no modern example in which a peace has been made when the conquerors kept the whole of their conquests', but it was not a doctrine the British wished to flout. Even Pitt in power, despite his firmness on the fishery, did not intend to subvert the eighteenth-century conventions, and Bedford's basic principle was that 'estimable rule of life' of not demanding of others that which you yourself would not have given if placed in similar circumstances. The whole peace-making proceeded by exchange of bargaining counters, and essentially Bute returned St Lucia to France because of her insistence that it was a vital interest, especially for the protection of Martinique. Bedford showed careful consideration to France on the fisheries, 'The endeavouring to drive France entirely out of any naval power', he wrote, 'is fighting against nature'; it could do no good to Britain, but on the contrary 'must unite all the naval powers of Europe to enter into a confederacy against us'. He regarded it as desirable that the King should 'show Europe his moderation', but this was for sound political reasons, not sloppy abstract magnanimity. Bedford was no fool. He doubted, for example, whether 'with such a chicaning power as France, we ought at the first opening to go to the utmost extent of the cessions we intended to make'. And his moderation did not blind him to the desirability of raising demands after the capture of Havana.  

The cosmopolitan outlook on international relations in the mid-eighteenth century may seem strange to post-1919 generations accustomed to thinking of peace-making in terms of squeezing the defeated enemy until the pips squeaked. The total perspective of the international order as a whole was borne objectively in mind; and its preservation was the ultimate aim of eighteenth-century diplomacy. All governments knew that they were vitally interested in the preservation of the international system and, as Butterfield says, it was an ordinary maxim of diplomacy that a victor should not provoke undue resentment in the vanquished: the primary concern was to check and not to destroy the aggressor. It was an age of limited war, and of carefully disciplined acquisitiveness. Even Frederick the Great conceded that a state should labour only 'to extend as much as possible by customary and permitted means the number of its possessions', its power and security.

More fundamental even than the search for American security and the moderation shown to France (since it explains the purpose of each as more than ends in themselves) was Bute's sincere if misconceived determination to produce a permanent peace. It was a creditable aim, but sentimental and potentially dangerous. Bute's only political ambition was to bring peace to a war-weary world. It was rumoured that he wished his epitaph to read: 'Here lies the earl of Bute, who in concert with the King's ministers, made the peace.' He and George III read
and discussed Sully's Grand Design, the peace-plan of Henry IV, and they saw themselves, perhaps, as their inheritors, confronted with a splendid opportunity to serve the international system. Writing to de Solar in June 1762, Viry reported Bute as having said:

Instead of going to the ordinary way of forming pretensions much stronger than one would wish to conclude, I have traced the plan of an equitable peace such as France could accept with honour.

He added that he had not hesitated to make great sacrifices for this result, wishing to make a permanent alliance with France, not a 'paix plâtrée'. He pleaded with France to accept such an alliance. Viry certainly seems to have thought, and Choiseul sometimes to have admitted, that Bute lived up to his professions. He tried to avoid the diplomacy of the auction room. To produce a quick and permanent peace the government actually admitted that they would 'make sacrifices even beyond what may be expected of [them]' (Egremont to Viry, 1 May 1762). In surrendering St Lucia Bute said he was trying

to cut off all other present matters in dispute between us ... but chiefly to render the peace stable and permanent, to remove everything likely to produce animosities hereafter.

Egremont explained in a memorandum dated 26 June 1762 that Britain's demands for the Mississippi boundary were

not to extend our possessions into a country a great part of which is useless and which probably we shall never clear or people ... [but] chiefly to establish peace on solid and lasting foundations and to forestall all disputes regarding the boundaries of the two nations ... since with each nation keeping to its side of the river they would have in the future nothing to adjust with each other.

The importance of this idea of a permanent peace to the peace-makers may be illustrated by emphasising the two matters which Britain adhered to as essential to the conclusion of peace. First, Egremont told Choiseul:

His resolution to make a lasting peace is so strongly taken that in the articles most calculated to that end, rather than for any possible advantage to be gained, especially that of the acquisition of Mobile and of settling the boundaries at the two banks of the Mississippi, His Majesty would prefer, though to his great regret, to continue the war, rather than not to remove by the peace everything that might, with respect to boundaries or otherwise, become the occasion of new disputes between the two Crowns.

Second, Bedford was solemnly instructed to resist Spanish wishes that the renewal of all her former commercial treaties with Britain
should be only temporary. Bute was so insistent that the renewals should be permanent, and Bedford (regarding it as of ‘too great moment’ for him to waver) so successful in resisting Choiseul’s pressure upon him (Choiseul said he would guarantee Grimaldi’s immediate signature to a treaty providing for only temporary renewal), that the French and Spanish had to give way in the face of Bedford’s threat that ‘peace or no peace depended upon it’. 37

One can only conclude that in attempting to make something more permanent than the traditional uneasy truce between France and Britain Bute was aiming impossibly high. The Seven Years War could not be a war to end all wars, and Bute never seems quite to have grasped that France was not interested in a permanent peace. Within months of the signing of the treaty Choiseul was beginning the task of aggressive reconstruction, and in twenty years France allied with the rebellious American colonists whose position had been so greatly enhanced by Bute’s preoccupation with adjusting relations with France. To this end Bute was prepared to ignore all the claims of British merchants, and because of it he underrated the value of any strategic considerations outside the mainland of America, and forgot Hardwicke’s warning that ‘it is possible for England to be overloaded with foreign colonies’. Thus, in Hotblack’s striking phrase, ‘while the victors secured the large coins, the vanquished kept the gold ones’, and Bute omitted entirely to consider the implications of the new territorial empire for efficient imperial administration and control.

Nevertheless, if the foregoing analysis be accepted, it cannot be fair to say that personal reputation and safety was the ruling consideration in the minds of the peace-makers, particularly since those who chiefly left their mark on the peace treaty were Bute and Bedford. If in certain vital respects they paid insufficient attention to imperial and commercial interests broadly considered, this was not because they thought of nothing but their own position. They held firmly to certain general principles based on a particular view of the international system, which was at least a plausible alternative to Pitt’s view. 38

However, even when a sympathetic attempt has been made to understand why the terms of peace were what they were, and the most favourable construction placed upon Bute’s policy, the modern historian cannot help being struck by the extreme lack of sophistication with which British interests in general, and imperial ones in particular, were dealt with by the peace-makers. If Bute’s concern was to establish a permanent peace, and to make allies not enemies, his neglect of Prussian friendship, and his inability to see its relevance to imperial policy, seems little short of astounding. The peace of Paris was made in remarkable ignorance of any but the most obvious British overseas interests. The importance of sea power, and of the
fisheries as vitally contributing to it, could be grasped by all, and so could the need to prevent a fresh outbreak of war with France in America. But when it came to assessing the value of any individual overseas territory it was scarcely possible to do this on the basis of any solid reasoning or even accurate information. The only possible explanation for some of the detailed terms of the peace is that they were settled in an atmosphere of the most profound ignorance of overseas countries. To some extent this was the result of undue haste, of not waiting until expert advice had been received. But an irreducible element of fundamental ignorance remains. General public knowledge of the most elementary geographical facts was derisory, and this is one reason why so few people at the time were able to make any genuine assessment of the peace which might deserve notice by historians. The depths of the ignorance can only be touched on here.

The Annual Register in 1758 described the River Niger as having its source in east Africa, and dividing into the Senegal, the Gambia and the Rio Grande; this was the current view. An amazing journalistic hoax was pulled off by the editor of The North Briton. Under the name of 'Viator' he wrote a letter to the government organ Auditor in December 1762 saying that 'The only, at present, profitable tracts of Florida are certain large bogs of marshy ground which produce an excellent kind of fuel, much needed to give give comfortable fires to our cold frozen West Indian islands'. The editor of the Auditor quoted this as a serious argument in favour of the government's decision to keep Florida! Nor, with the exception of Pitt, was the ignorance of ministers much less. Newcastle had no idea where Annapolis was, though it was crucial to the defence of Nova Scotia (our Dunkirk of North America') at the opening of the Seven Years War. He never understood the logwood dispute with Spain. In September 1762 he reported the King as having confused the Ganges and the Mississippi, but added 'as I am far from knowing exactly the state and limits of those countries, I said nothing further upon that head'. The very choice of the Mississippi as a boundary showed unfamiliarity with local conditions, for the river valley was an economic unit which could not logically be divided; furthermore the River Iberville was fixed as part of the boundary without having determined whether it was a navigable outlet to the sea. In fact it turned out not to be, and as a result, provision for unimpeded navigation of the main channel had to be inserted into the preliminaries, although it was not possible to alter the boundary line fixed further east in the Iberville. The decision to give up St Lucia was undoubtedly taken without proper understanding of its strategic and naval importance. Admiral Rodney explained this very fully in a letter to Grenville dated 4 December 1762, which arrived of course only
several weeks after the cession had been agreed. Rodney's statement appears to have taken ministers by surprise and to have occasioned an outcry among most of them, for in a letter dated 1 February 1763 Rodney set out (apparently in response to urgent demands) the arguments for keeping Dominica rather than St Lucia. It was a difficult task. The only disadvantage which he managed to find with St Lucia was that it was 'swampy, extremely sickly and inhabited by serpents'.

Even when ministers tried to obtain information and advice about basic matters they could not always get it. In November 1762 John Pownall, secretary of the Board of Trade, apologised to Charles Jenkinson (Bute's private secretary) for furnishing him with such a fragmentary and unsatisfactory answer to his question concerning the African trade: 'The materials of this office are very imperfect with respect to this branch of commerce'—a branch, be it remembered, so important that in orthodox mercantilist theory the British empire was 'a magnificent superstructure of American commerce and naval power on an African foundation'. The island of Gorée was given back to France because the government was assured by governor Worge that it was useless. This was probably true from the trading standpoint, but its position and good harbour made it essential to the safety of British Senegal, or so at least Pitt argued; and a merchant trading company called the African Committee petitioned against its cession. It was recaptured in 1779, lost in 1783, retaken in 1800, and returned again in 1817. There appears to have been complete uncertainty as to the possible value of holding St Pierre and Miquelon. Capt. G. Williams was sceptical about them, and the Board of Trade apparently thought their formal possession unnecessary, but again Pitt contended that their surrender was 'a most dangerous article to the maritime strength and future power of Great Britain'. Of course one cannot assume Pitt's opinion to be objective, but as he was incomparably better informed than anybody else about British overseas interests, his testimony cannot be rejected out of hand.

Some mistakes undoubtedly were made. The East India Company for example approved the clause in the preliminaries stating that she would restore what France held at the outbreak of the war in 1749, and only later realised it had committed itself to a disadvantageous settlement. Nor could the various interest groups always agree among themselves. It was impossible for the government to make any sense of 'the national interest' in the West Indies, since the planters were split into at least three conflicting sub-interest groups. Pitt himself had to rely generally on private informants, and he had constantly to bully governors and military officers into submitting material information. The organisation of his own sources of commercial intelligence was a personal tour de force, so that it has been said that his departure from
office was like the closing of a department of government. None of his colleagues had the energy or concern to ensure that they were kept similarly well-informed about commercial interests, and in view of the discouraging circumstances which surrounded the attempt to get good advice it is perhaps not surprising that Bute and his colleagues refused to be guided by specific interest groups even when these were capable of making their views plain. When petitioned by Liverpool merchants trading to Africa in October 1762, Bute expressed surprise at the size of their operations, but said it was too late to do anything to assist them.20

This disinclination to listen extended even to the big companies, whose loans were such an important part of the government's ability to finance the war effort (up to 70 per cent of the cost was borne by loans, largely from merchants). The government did consult the East India Company about the peace, but chose to find its claims excessive and unsatisfactory. No more than a modified form was given to these claims in Bedford's instructions about the Indian clause in the preliminaries. On 20 October 1762 the Company was told it must either come to terms or be left out of the negotiation, and it was given an official draft to accept or amend in one day. It accepted it with only one change of any significance, which the government agreed to. The East India Company was nevertheless accorded much better attention than the Hudson's Bay Company. The committee of the latter was given an appointment with Egremont in September 1762, but there is no evidence that the case of the company bulked at all large in the propositions for discussion with France. Only in March 1763, after the conclusion of the final treaty, did Egremont turn again to the company and ask for a statement on the limits of its claims in Labrador. As the company's historian observes, it was not able to sway discussions at the highest political level.31

Any attempt, then, to understand why the terms of peace were what they were, must take into account the extraordinary lack of information about imperial interests, and the reluctance of every minister except Pitt to regard commercial interests as something to be seriously promoted. The terms in effect reflect the view of Dean Tucker, writing in 1763, that 'The interest of the merchant and the interest of the kingdom are two very different things'.32

Bute's aim, then, genuinely had been to secure a permanent peace and not temporary personal popularity. On the continent, as Sir Francis Bond Head might have remarked, he chose to forgive and forget — to forgive France and to forget Prussia. On the imperial side his mistakes were more subtle: first he failed to realise that the war itself, and more especially the extent of British successes, had created a new situation; and secondly, he attempted to return to a pre-war situ-
ation which had not in itself been a permanent peace but a mere *status quo ante*. The failure of Bute and his colleagues to react more positively to the capture of Havana was merely symptomatic of ministers’ larger illusion that a new lasting peace could be built on the foundations of an old armed truce. It seems clear that Wolfe’s death alone had made the retention of Canada a necessity, but there is no evidence that any serious thought was given to the general effect of its acquisition either on France or on the American colonies. As Peter Marshall has observed, the military conflict was resolved, but in other terms the outcome of the rivalry was less decisive; occupying the new acquisitions itself proved a ‘lengthy and frustrating task’. Moreover, Pitt was surely right in seeing that the removal of the French from the American mainland was ideally the moment to attack them in the Newfoundland fishery. According to mercantilist theory the fishery was the nursery of seamen and thus the foundation of naval power. Perhaps it was impracticable, as Hardwicke said it was, but certainly the continuing presence of the French in Newfoundland helped to preserve the French navy as a constant threat until 1805. Similarly, no minister appears to have considered what effect the elimination of France would have on the American colonies. This is not to say that in 1762 a reasonable man could have foreseen the emergence of a federal republic, but rather that the colonies had often proved recalcitrant enough within the empire when they had need of its protection, and that they were likely to be even less accommodating when the need was removed. We might argue that the British not only could not solve the problem of control, but seemed unable to grasp the fact that it existed. Nor was it appreciated that conquering Canada did not make the Canadian problem vanish, but merely brought it within an imperial framework already strained at the edges. Sensibly – maybe, even generously – the British chose to rule Quebec with a light yoke: even the Catholic church was quietly accepted. As a result the counter on the American board which had kept the British and the colonists united while it was in French hands began to drive them apart. Before long the Americans concluded that Canada had passed from an overt to a potential enemy. Yet at the very moment when the British had apparently neutralised the main check on the colonists, they gave them the incentive to throw off all restraint by forcing the French to give up all claims east of the Mississippi. The peace was quickly followed by the Proclamation Line, which attempted to forbid settlement west of the mountains. Not for the last time, the empire attempted to use paper as a substitute for power. The westward movement was merely part of an American drift right out of the empire. In North America Bute failed to make a peace settlement based on the new situation caused by the very success of the
war. That new situation came full circle in 1781 when a French fleet forced Cornwallis to surrender to an American army at Yorktown. Honest recognition of the new situation might well have demonstrated the futility of seeking a permanent peace, but attempting to prevent future wars by returning to a situation which had manifestly helped to cause existing conflict was plainly illogical. In India the French regained the positions which they had lost, and for nearly fifty years British rulers remained mesmerised by the threat of a revival of French power, which itself helped to push them further in the career of conquest. In Newfoundland the restored privileges continued to obstruct Anglo-French amity even into the twentieth century.

The peace of Paris thus embodies several of the ironies of the empire. Decisions taken by British ministers, muddled in theory and misinformed in fact, none the less had far-reaching implications for the countries involved, notably for the modern United States and Canada. A settlement paradoxically made with undue haste in order to create a permanent peace certainly produced enduring consequences—consequences which undoubtedly extended well beyond the immediate disaster of American independence—but they were not the consequences which the peace-makers had laboured to secure.

NOTES

4. The chief accounts of the peace-making are: R. Pares War and trade in the West Indies 1739–63 (1936) 596–612; K. Hotblack The Peace of Paris 1763’ 3 TRHS ii (1908), 235–67; H. W. V. Temperley ‘The Peace of Paris’ CHBE x (1929) ch. xvii; T. C. Pease Anglo-French boundary disputes in the West 1749–63 (Collections of the Illinois State Historical Library, xxvi, 1936) intro. cxxi–xxxi; W. L. Dorn Competition for empire 1740–63 (1940) 370–84; J. S. Corbett England in the Seven Years’ War (2nd ed. 1918) ii 328–76; L. H. Gipson The British empire before the American Revolution VIII The Great War for the empire: the culmination 1760–63 (1954) 284–312; Z. E. Rashed The Peace of Paris 1763 (1951). Miss Betty Behrens gave a series of Special Subject lectures on ‘British interests and politics and the Peace of Paris 1759–63’ in the Cambridge History Faculty from 1957 to 1962 (which inspired the present writer’s interest in the subject), but these were never published.
5. Pares War and trade in the West Indies 609–12, ‘American versus conti-

6. W. L. Dorn 'Frederick the Great and Lord Bute' JMH i (1929) 530–60; F. Spencer 'The Anglo-Prussian breach of 1762: an historical revision' History xli (1956) 100–12; J. Holland Rose 'Frederick the Great and England 1755–63' EHR xxxix (1914) 262–75; L. M. Penson The colonial background of British foreign policy (inaugural lecture 1930); A. Bisset (ed.) Memoirs and papers of Sir Andrew Mitchell (1850) 281–332.

7. Of these the only subject of biographies or monographs to carry any extensive analyses of peace-making is Pitt: notably A. von Ruville William Pitt, earl of Chatham (1907 trans.) iii 71–98; B. Williams The life of William Pitt, earl of Chatham (1913) 74–149; O. A. Sherrard Lord Chatham in Chatham and America (1958) 51–94; J. H. Plumb's little book Chatham (1953) is admirable, but more concerned with war than peace.


9. Paget Toynbee (ed.) The letters of Horace Walpole (1904) v 144, 210, 265; G. F. R. Barker (ed.) Horace Walpole's Memoirs of the reign of George III (1894) iii 5. (Mrs Toynbee's edition of Walpole's letters contains more references to the peace than the Yale edition.)

10. P. C. Yorke The life and correspondence of Philip Yorke, earl of Hardwicke (1913) iii 123, 440; W. J. Smith (ed.) The Grenville Papers (1852) 22–3; J. Almon The history of the late minority 1762–65 (1766) 89–90; Annual Register vi (1763) 76; The North Briton (collected ed. 1769) xxxv (29 Jan 1763) 117.

11. Earl of Ilchester Henry Fox, first Lord Holland (1920) 204; Lord Fitzmaurice Life of William, earl of Shelburne (1912) ii 118, Fox to Shelburne 4 Sep 1762; J. Bradshaw (ed.) Letters of the earl of Chesterfield, with the 'Characters' (1892) iii 1493–4; Toynbee (ed.) Letters of Horace Walpole v 213; J. A. Lovat-Isaacs John Stuart, earl of Bute (1912) 48–52.

12. North Briton xv 48 (11 Sep 1762); Lord J. Russell (ed.) Correspondence of John, fourth Duke of Bedford (1846) iii xxv, 159–60; Ilchester Henry Fox iii 293; J. Brewer 'The misfortunes of Lord Bute' HJ xvii (1973) 8.

13. R. Sedgwick (ed.) Letters from George III to Lord Bute 1756–66 (1939) 128; Correspondence of Bedford iii 30; Grenville Papers i 396; Gipson The British empire before the American Revolution viii 293.

14. Correspondence of Bedford iv 14–17, 116 (Bedford to Bute 13 Jun 1761 and 20 Sep 1762), 6, 56, 123 (letters from Rigby, 22 Apr and 13 Oct 1761, 16 Sep 1762); Corbet England in the Seven Years' War ii 171–3 praises Bedford's disinterestedness, and his political insight and wisdom at this time as almost prophetic.

15. Grenville Papers i 389, 476–85; Letters from George III to Lord Bute 188; Toynbee Letters of Horace Walpole v 263–4; Correspondence of Bedford iii 127–8; Pease Anglo-French boundary disputes in the West, cxix, cxlix;

contemporaries (1852) i 47; T. W. Copeland (ed.) The correspondence of Edmund Burke i 1744–68 (1958) 160.

17. H. Butterfield George III and the historians (1957) 102, 182; W. Hunt and H. W. V. Temperley 'Pitt's retirement from office, 1761' EHR xxxi (1906); Yorke Life & correspondence of Hardwicke iii 323; A. Christelow 'Economic background to the Anglo-Spanish War, 1762' JMH xxxvi (1946).


20. von Ruville William Pitt m 72–8, 96; Pares War & trade 226.

21. The most useful discussions of the 'Canada versus Guadeloupe' controversy are: Pares War & trade 216–26; Namier 317–37; Harlow i 162–6; W. L. Grant 'Canada versus Guadeloupe' AHR 17 (1911/12); F. W. Pitman Developments of the British West Indies 1700–63 (1917) 334–60; C. W. Alvord The Mississippi Valley in British politics (1917) i 45–84. At least 65 pamphlets were produced on the subject between 1759 and 1763; the best of them include: [B. Franklin?] The interest of Great Britain considered (1760), and [J. Douglas?] A letter addressed to two great men on the prospects of peace (1760)—for Canada; and [G. Townshend?] Remarks on the letter addressed to two great men (1760)—for Guadeloupe.

22. G. S. Kimball (ed.) Correspondence of William Pitt when secretary of state with colonial governors ... in America (1906) ii 386; Pease 411–12.

23. Ragatz Fall of the planter class 125; Eric Williams Capitalism and slavery (1944) 112; Pease 412; Pares War & trade 193; G. L. Beer British colonial policy 1754–65 (1907) 139; Harlow i 138, 166; Gipson The British empire ... xx 41; Parliamentary History xv 'The principal arguments which were offered in favour of the treaty' 1272; Annual Register for 1762 56; W. S. Wallace 'The beginnings of British rule in Canada' CHR iv (1925) 208; G. S. Graham British policy and Canada 1774–91 (1930) 9; J. Almon A review of Mr Pitt's administration (4th ed., 1764) v; North Briton xxxiv 13 Nov 1762.


25. B. Williams Carteret and Newcastle: a contrast in contemporaries (1943) 209; Albemarle Memoirs of Rochambeau and his contemporaries i 23–4 (Newcastle to Hardwicke 15 Apr 1761); the Monitor quoted in The Gentleman's Magazine xxii (1762) 473, 580, 583–4; H. McCulloch Miscellaneous representations relative to our concerns in America (1761, ed. W. A. Shaw [n.d. ? 1905]) 6; Annual Register v 49; Choiseul quoted in CHBE i 501; Correspondence of Bedford iii 16–17, 23–9, 78, 96, 113, 121–2, 147–8.


27. Temperley CHBE i 500; Pease 424, 436–7, 450; M. Savelle Diplomatic history of the Canadian boundary 1749–63 (1940) 131–41; Letters from George III to Lord Bute 139 (Bute to Bedford 28 Sep 1762); Correspondence of Bedford iii 107–11; Horace Walpole's Memoirs of the reign of
THE PEACE OF PARIS (1763)


28. K. Hotblack Chatham's colonial policy: fiscal and economic implications (1917) 53, and 3 TRHS ii 254; Pease 294 (Hardwicke to Newcastle 16 May 1761).

29. North Briton xxx (25 Dec 1762) 99; Yorke Life & correspondence of Hardwicke iii 414 (Newcastle to Hardwicke 4 Sep 1762); Pease cxxxi, 295; Saville Diplomatic history of the Canadian boundary 140; Aiton AHR xxxvi 715; Grenville Papers ii 10–20, 25–6 (letters from Rodney).


32. J. Tucker The case of going to war for the sake of procuring . . . trade considered . . . (1763) 56.


Moreover, the decision to let Guadeloupe go was far from irrelevant to the later American crisis: it has been suggested that if Grenville could have taxed Guadeloupe sugar he might not have had to levy stamp tax (H. C. Mansfield JBS i (1962) 45).
3 The foundation of Botany Bay, 1778-90: a reappraisal

One day in 1787 a young midshipman was standing on deck in Portsmouth Harbour, watching a small squadron leave the harbour. His captain came up and touched him on the shoulder, saying: 'Mark these vessels well, and remember them: they are going to lay the foundation of a great empire.' The unspectacular flotilla was part of what is now grandiloquently called the 'First Fleet', then assembling off the Isle of Wight, preparatory to sailing away to establish a penal settlement at Botany Bay. More than sixty years later the midshipman, by then a venerable sailor, told the story to a journalist, who used it to illustrate one of the many newspaper articles of the 1850s which extolled the rapid growth which had turned a refuse dump for English criminals into a burgeoning continent of British communities.

Traditionally, historians did not advance far beyond that explanation; the foundation of New South Wales was explained simply in terms of the need to empty crowded gaols in the United Kingdom. The independence of the United States had closed the traditional outlet for convicts. A few sites in Africa were considered and rejected. From these points the conclusion was drawn that the entire continents of America and Africa were closed to convict transportation, and only Australia was left. In fact the United States was by no means coterminous with British America, and Sir Charles Bunbury reminded parliament in 1778 that even with the thirteen colonies in revolt, 'we still possessed several places in America, to which felons could be transported'. Only in recent years have historians recognised that while crowded prisons explain the British need to form a penal colony somewhere overseas, it is worth asking whether more specific reasons lay behind the choice of an Australian site. Broadly, six positive theories have been put forward for the choice of New South Wales. K. M. Dallas in 1952 claimed that the colony was established with a fourfold commercial motive: as a base for trading with China and South America, as an adjunct to the North American fur trade and as a military base to attack Dutch and Spanish commerce. To these Geoffrey Blainey added in 1966 a dual explanation based on British
needs for two strategic raw materials: ship timber and flax, for naval stores. Blainey's two theories had the merit of forcing attention on the reasons why Norfolk Island, 900 miles from Botany Bay and barely 15 square miles in area, should have formed an integral part of the original colony, for Norfolk was a known source of pines tall enough for ships' masts, and of luxuriant wild flax. The Dallas and Blainey theories have generated a controversy which will be reviewed in this essay. However, these attempts to argue positive reasons for the choice of Botany Bay share a common weakness. By concentrating on why Australia was selected, rather than on why alternatives were rejected, they have reversed the order of options open to the British government. Although when James Matra presented the government with a scheme for settling American Loyalists in New South Wales in 1784, he was given a broad hint that what was really required was a penal colony, the slowness with which his suggestions were considered suggests that Botany Bay was not then at the forefront of official consideration. It is plausible to assume that no government would mount an expedition to the ends of the earth, simply to dispose of convicts, without first satisfying itself that no outlet could be created in its existing possessions. Certainly, the semi-official account of the establishment of the new colony stated that the reason why convicts were sent to New South Wales was

as is well known, the necessary cessation of their removal to America; and the inconveniences experienced in the other modes of destination adopted after that period.

There is a case, therefore, for examining other possible 'modes of destination' and attempting to discover or reconstruct why there were 'inconveniences' about them which did not apply to Botany Bay. For much of the world this involves attempting to interpret negative evidence, and here there are plainly problems of method. For instance, government planning for Botany Bay gave relatively little indication of commercial motive: Roe advanced the plausible speculation that the commercial case was deliberately understressed to avoid arousing the hostility of the East India Company, but Blainey argued that the commercial implications were too well known to require elaboration. If there can be such a disagreement about evidence bearing on the colony actually chosen, explaining why whole areas of the globe were earlier ruled out will not be easy, especially when so much contemporary attention apparently centred on African sites alone. A further problem is that Botany Bay was an entirely new form of penal transportation, a government-run, guarded convict settlement in unknown country. Until 1775 felons had been transported to the Americas by private contractors, who had either abandoned them, or sold their
services to local employers as semi-slave labour. The surviving evidence from the 1780s mainly establishes why the Caribbean and British North America were unsuitable outlets under the old system. However, this does not necessarily prove that either region was an impossible choice for a guarded penal colony on the new model. In fact, the British and Irish governments did not finally abandon the idea of transportation to the Americas until 1790. It may be argued that local storms caused by sending convicts on the old system to Honduras in 1784–5, and Newfoundland in 1789—both discussed below—helped to rule out the two most likely transatlantic sites for guarded penal colonies on the new model of Botany Bay. The Newfoundland affair at least throws some light on why these places were not seriously considered.²

Before 1776, convicts were sent to the American colonies, especially Virginia and Maryland. Duncan Campbell, a contractor who shipped felons to the colonies, told a parliamentary inquiry in 1778 that epidemics in these two colonies were attributed to the convicts, many of whom escaped into neighbouring areas to continue their criminal careers. Certainly Pennsylvania’s Benjamin Franklin was a bitter critic of the system. In 1751 he sarcastically proposed to arrange shipments of American rattlesnakes for English parks as a return, and when parliament authorised Scotland to send convicts to America in 1766, he drew up a jocular petition asking for Pennsylvania to be granted reciprocal rights. Colonial legislation banning convict importation was overridden by the British and undermined by the willingness of some employers to purchase convict labour. When attempts were made to revive transportation in 1783, the Americans were reluctant to take them. A parliamentary committee in 1785 noted this ‘with regret’ since ‘the old System of Transporting to America, answered every good Purpose which could be expected from it’. But the committee went on to express its uncertainty

Whether such Prohibitions are intended to operate perpetually, or whether they may be removed in Consequence of some future Arrangement, as the occupying new Province [sic] on the Continent may render the Arrival of new Settlers, of any Description not undesirable, if they are acquainted with Husbandry or Manufactures.

This is a point of some importance. By the mid-1780s the British were beginning to realise that American independence had not made quite the catastrophic difference to old ways which had been feared. Unchecked by British prohibitions, the Americans were beginning to move into the interior and soon this might make them welcome even English convicts. In studying the search for new penal outlets, we
should remember that in the minds of some policy-makers there was a hope that they were merely seeking an interim solution. As late as 1788 Irish convicts were dumped in the United States.

If Tudor England lived in fear of the beggar, the England of the 1780s was equally fearful of the untransported convict. The situation seemed especially bad in London, and one critic of Botany Bay believed that only the ‘total negation, or relaxation of all necessary police in the capital’ had made the settlement necessary. An MP complained in 1786 that the suspension of transportation had caused a crime wave in London, and in 1789 a correspondent of The Times complained:

Crimes multiply in every shape, and we have more men convicted of felonies at one session now, than we had at five formerly.

The parliamentary committee of 1785 reported that ‘the extraordinary fullness of the Gaols makes a separation [sic] of offenders impracticable’, and minor offenders were thus exposed to moral contagion from those whom the under-secretary for home affairs, Evan Nepean, described as ‘a class of people too dangerous to remain in this country’. Worse still, Nepean warned, these ‘notorious felons’ were ‘every day expected to break prison’. In the early months of 1786, the government was still not sure where to send them, and was in fact ‘not a little embarrassed what method to take consistently with the public safety’. What was agreed was that they had to be sent somewhere, and political pressure was strong enough to make a costly solution acceptable. An English MP in 1786 thought it ‘better to bear the expense [sic] than to submit to the danger’ and even after Botany Bay seemed to have been exposed as a failure, an Irish MP in 1790 thought £70 a head a cheap price to rid the country of malefactors. The near panic which the crowded gaols induced made the costly Australian venture feasible, but only if ‘prompter and cheaper solutions’ were ruled out did New South Wales become in any sense a necessary choice.

Much of the evidence given to parliamentary committees in the 1780s concerned possible sites in Africa. This tended to obscure the possibility of outlets in British North America or the West Indies. Thus the Commons committee of 1785 listed as second in order of consideration, ‘the Provinces as well as Islands which are subject to His Majesty in America’, but only reported on its first priority, Africa. The emphasis on Africa may have been the work of the slave-trading lobby. The unreliable African market made the first leg of the Atlantic slaving trade a risky venture. If ships fitted up to take black slaves in irons across the Atlantic could also have assured cargoes of white convicts, the voyage out to Africa would be financially covered. Unfor-
fortunately for such a scheme, Edmund Burke denounced the Gambia, a much canvassed location, as ‘the capital seat of plague, pestilence and famine’. Sending convicts to a ‘singularly horrid’ death there was ‘a mock display of mercy’. The merciful gallows of England would rid them of their lives in a far less dreadful manner, than the climate or the savages of Africa would take them.

The British, then, were not simply concerned to get rid of their convicts. If that were the only aim, it would be easiest to hang the lot of them; Burke in 1778 had ‘feared the time would come when we should put prisoners and felons to death on the principle of oeconomy’. Was West Africa rejected for motives of ‘oeconomy’ or those of humanity? The former motive cannot be ruled out, for in October 1786 the government supplied naval transport to carry American Negro refugees to found the colony of Sierra Leone. Perhaps the motive was simply to rid London of its unwanted blacks—as Botany Bay has traditionally been explained as a receptacle for unwanted felons. But it is equally plausible that the government felt the need for a naval station in West Africa, and decided to occupy it with settlers who seemed most likely to stand the climate. Certainly the occupation of Freetown in 1786 and the East India Company’s establishment of a naval base in the Chagos archipelago in 1785 look like an attempt to establish a sea-route to India independent of the Cape, then Dutch, just as a century later the French used Dakar in Senegal and Diego Suarez in Madagascar to be independent of British South Africa. Certainly the timing of the Sierra Leone venture just after an unsuccessful French attempt to get a foothold seems to suggest a strategic motive, and the French were to destroy Freetown in 1794 despite an appeal from its governor to Lafayette to have it spared in the interests of anti-slavery. In fact, the connection with Botany Bay may have been closer still. The two expeditions were planned together, and it is possible that the black settlers were intended as gaolers for white criminals. In December 1786 there was a report that hardened London convicts were to be sent ‘to Africa, to be slaves for life, to attend upon black masters that settle in the new colony going to be established there’. This would enable the government to send only felons with some useful skills to New South Wales, while using Africa as ‘a greater punishment than death’. Nothing came of this, probably because Sierra Leone, like New South Wales, had a hard fight for survival in its early years and was in no condition to absorb large-scale immigration. It has been suggested that just as New South Wales may have been founded to grow flax, so Sierra Leone may have been projected as a source of cotton. This possibility does not
THE FOUNDATION OF BOTANY BAY

exclude the likelihood that the West African colony was established primarily as a way-station on the route to the east.

Two other African sites—Das Voltas Bay and a settlement east of the Cape—were also championed because they would provide a halfway house to India. Plettenberg Bay, 300 miles east of Cape Town, was probably ruled out for fear of offending the Dutch, whose settlers were already moving far along the coast. In any case, Plettenberg Bay has never developed into a major port and probably did not impress the government in 1786. Das Voltas Bay seemed more promising. It lay at the mouth of the Orange river, cut off from the Cape by hundreds of miles of desert. Slave ships could carry convicts out, there were mineral deposits and it would be 'an excellent Place for Homewardbound Indiamen' to put in. In 1785–6 the government made preliminary plans to establish a penal colony there. The survey ship *Nautilus* was sent out to examine the area. It returned on 28 July 1786, with its commander and survey team unanimous in condemning the area. Mackay argues that Sydney was finally convinced by them on 15 August 1786: three days later he informed the Treasury that Botany Bay had been selected instead.²

There seemed then, no way in which convicts could be made useful in Africa. Could they be sent to the West Indies instead? Duncan Campbell thought not—certainly not under the system he had operated to America before the war. The West Indian colonies, he reported in 1778, had passed laws to keep convicts out. Although they attempted to maintain white numbers in proportion to blacks, transported convicts did not 'count' as white. In theory, white convicts could have been used as slave labour, as had happened after the Monmouth rebellion in 1685. By the 1780s, however, it is understandable that the planters were reluctant to add a potentially dangerous white helotry to a resentful black one. Jamaica, the largest of the colonies, was actually attempting a mildly liberal reform of its slave code, and an influx of white bondsmen would have complicated the process. Few other islands were large enough to absorb large consignments as was shown by the chaos caused by the dumping of a shipload of Irish felons on Barbuda in 1789. White convict labour would also have exacerbated the problem of the mulattoes. By the late eighteenth century even partial white descent was regarded as sufficient for exemption from field labour, a clear sign of a hardening colour line. Furthermore, the white population of the West Indies had reached a settled sex ratio, in which men did not significantly outnumber women. Large numbers of male convicts would upset this balance, and lead to further racial mixing.

If convicts could not be sold as labourers, there was little point in transporting them. Henry Dundas suggested in 1789 that boys or young
men who committed lesser offences might be formed into regiments ‘in our colonies abroad, either east or west’. Military discipline would have a reformatory effect, and Dundas was evidently assuming that such a force would both overawe subject populations, and relieve regular regiments from unhealthy postings like the West Indies. W. W. Grenville, the home secretary, agreed that it was a good idea in principle, but would meet with ‘insurmountable prejudices in those whose consent or acquiescence is necessary for its execution’. The army might be recruited out of the scum of the earth, but military authorities were not likely to welcome too blatant a reminder of the fact. It was probably a combination of military and colour prejudice which had caused the reported rejection by ministers of plans to use convict labour to repair fortifications in the West Indies.

Would it have been possible to establish a guarded penal colony on an uninhabited island in the West Indies, an alternative suggested by Blainey? The problem is that no such island seems to have existed. In 1783 Britain had given up two of her best sugar islands, and the remaining islands were suffering from soil exhaustion and declining yields. If Britain controlled any fertile uninhabited islands in the Caribbean, it was likely that they would be occupied by the powerful plantation interest. Any islands too small or barren for them could equally be rejected for a guarded penal settlement. Slightly more plausible were the Bahamas, which were canvassed as an outlet for Irish convicts in 1788. But here arose the standard problem: the inhabited islands could absorb few if any indentured labourers, while the uninhabited ones were too small for a prison colony.

The only reasonably likely Caribbean site for a penal colony of the Australian variety was not an uninhabited island, but on the mainland of Honduras. Certainly for a brief period in 1784–5, Honduras had seemed the answer to the government’s convict problem. Local mishandling and international diplomacy prevented it from providing a permanent solution. The British occupied two strips of coast in Central America, the Bay of Honduras and the Mosquito territory in modern Nicaragua. The settlements were not legally annexed from Spain, but were useful for cutting logwood, from which coloured dyes were made – ‘wherefore its consumption is very great in all the Woollen, Linen, Cotton and Hatt Manufactories’. By the 1780s logwood was being supplanted by mahogany, required for furniture making. Neither could be represented as valuable naval resources, in the way that Norfolk Island pine has been, but Honduras had some potential for shipbuilding. However, it seemed a plausible outlet for convicts, since logging required slave gangs.

In 1784 George Moore, a shipowner, contracted to carry eighty-six convicts to Honduras on his ship, Mercury. In July the ship arrived at
Belize and Moore's factors, Daniel Hill and William Whaley, began to clear ground to establish a settlement. On 9 August 1784 the settlers—who, according to one Superintendent, practised a 'democratick' form of government—held a meeting at which they gave Whaley and Hill fifteen days to remove their felons, and agreed to levy a fine of £100 on any person buying convict labour. Whaley protested at this, but shortly afterwards he died. Hill then attempted to move some of the convicts further to the north, but the local logwood cutters managed to remove the party to a small Spanish island. A whole series of quarrels and court cases ensued, in which the luckless Hill was told not expect any hearing, and was finally imprisoned on the Mercury while the settlers helped themselves to the services of its former inmates. Evan Nepean reported to the parliamentary committee of 1785 that the convicts had 'got into quarrels with the Log Wood Cutters' and that they had been sent without government authorisation.

His superior, Lord Sydney, was more optimistic. In October 1784 he informed the acting governor of Jamaica that he understood the convicts sent to Honduras, although unauthorised, were likely to be well received.

The more I consider the matter the greater difficulty I see in disposing of these people in any other place in the possession His Majesty's Subjects.

Further convicts would probably be sent, and the acting governor was instructed to find out how they would be received. Whatever reply was received, George Moore was apparently willing to make a further attempt, and in September 1785 Nepean, at Sydney's direction, instructed the Superintendent of Honduras to give them every assistance. The Superintendent, however, refused to leave Jamaica, and the settlers had no difficulty in driving off the new shipload.

By 1786, the year in which Botany Bay was selected, it was clear that private transportation ventures to Honduras were unlikely to succeed. Would the government step in and establish a settlement of its own? If Sydney still thought of Honduras, international diplomacy stood in his way. Britain had omitted to secure legal sovereignty over Honduras from Spain in 1763, and although British occupation had been confirmed at the peace of 1783, it was only within narrow limits. The position of the settlers was also irregular since they were officially only allowed to cut logwood, whereas mahogany was now more important commercially. In July 1786 Britain and Spain signed a new convention dealing with these points. The British paid a high price. In return for an inadequate extension of the boundaries of Honduras, they agreed to evacuate Mosquito. Since five-sixths of the loggers were on the Mosquito shore, Honduras faced an influx of people with which

61927
it could barely cope: in 1788 there was a severe shortage of basic provisions, and the following year the Superintendent proposed to move some of the poorer settlers to the Bahamas. There was simply no room in Honduras for a penal colony. Nor did the terms of the 1786 Convention encourage one. The British agreed to establish no plantations or factories, except saw-mills, and were to erect no fortifications on the adjoining islands. For several years the Spanish exercised their rights to police the settlement and destroy any installations they thought illegal. In July 1786 the British had signed away the chance of establishing a guarded penal colony in Honduras at just the moment when they discovered the unsuitability of Das Voltas Bay. In August the government announced that it had selected Botany Bay. There is no evidence that Honduras was formally considered as a site for a government-run prison settlement, but then there is little enough about Botany Bay itself.

What other possibilities were there in the Atlantic area? Campbell ruled out Florida in 1778, but was slightly more optimistic in 1779. However in 1783 Britain surrendered it to Spain. Blainey speculated that there might have been uninhabited islands at Bermuda suitable for a guarded penal colony, but with a total land area of less than twenty-one square miles there was hardly room for a large settlement. When convicts were sent there after 1823 it was only in small numbers to work in the dockyards. Similarly, although the Gibraltar dockyards absorbed convicts in the nineteenth century, the Rock was not a good choice in 1786. Extensive defence works were just being completed but in any case the recent three-year siege (1779–82) would have discouraged any government from adding to the numbers to be maintained there. In the South Atlantic two islands – St Helena and Tristan de Cunha – were also too small either to accommodate large numbers of convicts or be a reliable port of call for the East India trade: the Dutch had abandoned St Helena for the Cape a century earlier because its resources were inadequate. Tristan, however, was put forward by Dalrymple as a useful adjunct to the southern whaling industry – an argument which would assume New South Wales was not. More significant was the neglect of the Falkland Islands. A much larger group, they were several times considered as a possible penal colony in the nineteenth century. They too might have provided a useful port of call for whalers, and a more useful base against Spanish South America than Botany Bay. But the Falklands were not without their drawbacks. They were inhospitable, and Britain’s title to them was disputed. But perhaps the major disadvantage was that they lay hundreds of miles west of the Cape sea-route, and could in no way become a port of call for India.³

If the Caribbean and the Atlantic offered no outlets for convicts,
what opportunities existed in British North America? To the north of the USA, the British retained territory which can be considered under four main headings. First there was Canada proper, the province of Quebec conquered from France in 1759. This in turn was beginning to be subdivided and would be formally split in 1791: the old French colony continued to occupy the lower St Lawrence valley, but the back country was filling up with English-speaking settlers. Second, the old province of Nova Scotia on the Atlantic coast had also been split up in 1784 to create new colonies in New Brunswick and Cape Breton. Third, the island of Newfoundland lay in a class of its own. Last, westward from Canada to the Pacific, stretched the Hudson’s Bay Company lands.

There were certainly discussions of the possibility of using at least the eastern half of British North America as a convict outlet. Burke in 1778 suggested Canada and Nova Scotia, but Campbell in 1779 thought Canada could not absorb any, and the Commons committee of that year concluded that transportation to North America was impracticable—but this evidently referred to the old system of transportation by private contractors. Nepean assured the 1785 inquiry that there was ‘no proper place in America to transport them to, at least within the King’s Dominions’. In the summer of 1786 the cabinet was reported to have considered Canada, shortly before it chose Botany Bay. If North American obstacles made Botany Bay attractive, the announcement of the Australian site, with all its apparent absurdity, made North America attractive once again. ‘Might they not have been employed’, asked one critic, ‘with equal advantage and utility to the State, in hewing timber for the navy of Great Britain, on the island of Newfoundland?’

There is some reason to believe that the British government continued to look to the Americas even after the First Fleet had sailed for Botany Bay. In 1786 the Irish parliament had passed an act reviving transportation to the American colonies. Since 1782, Ireland had been largely autonomous in relation to Britain, but as the act applied to colonies under the authority of the Westminster, not the Dublin parliament, British ministers could have interposed to prevent the royal assent. As the Irish government bitterly pointed out when their convicts were returned from Newfoundland in 1789, by allowing the measure to go through the British seemed to be approving of renewed transportation to America—and at much the same time as they were selecting Botany Bay. Indeed, much of the controversy among Australian historians over the choice of a site seems to end with an abrupt sense of relief, as soon as New South Wales was selected. Yet if British prisons really were overcrowded, it is reasonable to think that the British government continued to consider other possible outlets, at least during
the early problem years of Botany Bay. Certainly by late 1788, when nothing was known of the new colony's fate, London's gaols were once again crammed full with felons awaiting transportation. On 1 December the Recorder of the City had a 'long conference' with Sydney. *The Times* reported:

The season is over for sending them to Quebec and Nova Scotia, but assurances have been given that two ships, properly fitted up, shall be ready by the latter end of March next to carry convicts to America. It has also been mentioned, that there is an intention of sending some of the men to Newfoundland in the fleet next season.

The status of the report may be questioned. Furthermore, the meeting took place in the middle of the Regency Crisis, when any promise might be made to keep the support of the City of London. None the less, it suggests that in 1788 convict transportation to America had not been finally ruled out. The transportation of at least 140 Irish convicts to the United States in 1788 and of 114 more to Newfoundland in mid-1789 would confirm this impression. Transatlantic opposition did not abate: citizens of New London, Connecticut, threatened to tar and feather the captain who unloaded his convict cargo on them; the townsfolk of St John's, Newfoundland, imprisoned their unwelcome visitors and persuaded the governor to send them back.

The government's failure to establish a guarded penal colony in any part of the eastern half of British North America may throw oblique light on two of the arguments put forward for the choice of Botany Bay—flax and timber. The apparent lack of interest government agencies showed in the flax growing potential of Australia contrasts strongly with the attention given to British North America: bounties were extended to Nova Scotia in 1768, and Quebec in 1772. Results, it is true, were disappointing, but the Board of Trade 'with incredible zest' recommended that the governors of the North American colonies should encourage the growth of hemp and flax. In 1785 the governor of Quebec was instructed to make all land grants conditional on the growing of a quantity of flax and hemp. In February 1786 Canadian merchants argued for an increased bounty, and acts were duly passed for this purpose. Was this another example of 'drowning men clutching at straws', desperately hoping for flax supplies to appear in unlikely places? In fact a major reason for poor results was that labour costs among free settlers were high, and that in any case their resources were fully occupied in keeping themselves alive. In that case, since the government was prepared to invest generously in bounties, it might as well have spent its money on establishing a Canadian convict colony to grow flax. Indeed, it had enough convicts available for forming colonies in both Australia and Canada. Perhaps, however, the government
decided to gamble on free settlers in one and convicts in the other. The Canadian example is inconclusive, but it seems to indicate that if the prime purpose of convicts was the cultivation of flax, irrespective of other factors, they were not necessarily sent to the right place.

Comparison with available British North American timber resources makes it seem unlikely that any British government would plan to develop an Australian supply at such expense, for general naval requirements, although this does not rule out the possibility of using Norfolk Island pine for ship maintenance in eastern waters. It is true that Canadian timber imports 'hardly existed' before 1809, but the same objection applies more forcefully to Norfolk Island, whose exports existed not at all. If the function of a convict settlement was to open up new resources, then there was more certainty of success in British North America. Governor Wentworth of Nova Scotia energetically explored the timber resources of the Maritimes for twenty years from the 1770s: by 1787 New Brunswick was exporting 200 masts a year. Furthermore, the main New Brunswick timber reserves lay along the north shore, where in 1788 Wentworth found 'the largest and best growth of true Mast Pine that I ever saw: exceeding any shipped from New England in forty years past'. The north shore remained almost unpopulated until the interruption of the Baltic trade in 1807, when uncontrolled settlement usurped Wentworth's naval reserves. A London newspaper, the *Daily Universal Register*, in 1786 noted the potential of Nova Scotia for producing timber, pitch, tar, hemp and flax, the last two being 'objects of national importance' and urged the government to develop them. It seems difficult to believe that an expensive convict settlement should have been established in Australia to supply naval timber either for general navy needs, or the marginal requirements of the Pacific, when no such pioneering venture was launched on the Miramichi or in Newfoundland or Nova Scotia. Like Sherlock Holmes's dog in the night, British North America failed to bark at timber and flax.

Could a convict settlement have been established in any part of British North America? In 1785 Nepean had 'heard of no Plan for sending them to Canada'. French Canada might be ruled out fairly easily. It was a settled point of British policy not to disturb the French community. A guarded penal colony in the lower St Lawrence valley (where naval timber was in any case in short supply) would have been too great a shock. Nor was there much chance of selling convict labour in a society of peasant cultivators with a high birth rate. Further inland, however, in the future province of Upper Canada, government-controlled convict labour could have been used for valuable pioneering work in back country whence escape would be difficult. Upper Canada did have naval timber reserves, and a convict colony would have given a plausible excuse for the maintenance of a garrison for keeping in
touch with Britain's Indian allies in the Ohio country. Attractive as such a proposition might seem, there were two obstacles. One was the American Loyalists, who had begun to settle Upper Canada in 1784. Loyalists and bonded labour were not incompatible: the Das Voltas Bay project and the early New South Wales schemes intended to provide for both, and some Loyalists brought Negro slaves to Canada with them. However, in 1785 the back-country settlers began to petition to form a separate province from the French, in which they might enjoy 'a liberal system of Tenure, Law, and Government'. Here was an echo of the older, lost colonies. The Loyalists had already suffered a lot for Britain's sake, and it might be unwise to provoke them on such a sensitive matter. There was, too, a geographical obstacle. The St Lawrence was a fine waterway, but it was not an uninterrupted one. The parliamentary inquiry in 1785 decided 'a Coast Situation is preferable to an Inland one', to support any settlement in its early years and protect it from hostile natives. Sending convicts to the heart of Canada would involve overland marches around rapids which were particularly frequent along that part of the St Lawrence which formed the boundary with the USA. Thus Canada might be ruled out.

These objections did not all apply to the Atlantic Coast area. In two areas, the St John valley of New Brunswick, and St John's (later Prince Edward) Island, recent settlement perhaps ruled out a penal colony, while there were too few people to absorb convict labour in the old system of transportation. From the older established colony of Nova Scotia, Nepean reported, 'there have been strong Representations made against it'. However, there was room for a timber-cutting penal colony on New Brunswick's north shore, and there were reserves of naval timber and coal on Cape Breton Island. Nepean claimed there were 'very few settlers' in Cape Breton, an argument against attempting to sell convict labour through a contractor, but if anything one in favour of a guarded settlement. The island had become a separate colony in 1784 and it had exploitable reserves requiring intensive but unskilled labour. Sydney, Cape Breton, might well have become Britain's overseas gaol, rather than its Australian namesake. Certainly in its early years Cape Breton's settlers were as lawless as those at Botany Bay, but lacked the corresponding advantages of organised government and development.

Out in the Atlantic, several hundred miles closer to Britain, lay a larger, wilder island: Newfoundland. Convicts sent out by the Irish government were dumped there in July 1789. Under pressure from the merchants of the capital, St John's, where most of the convicts had drifted, the magistrates rounded them up, and prevailed upon the local army commander to put them under guard until they could be repatriated. The Newfoundlanders assumed that the ship had been en
route to ‘Botany Bay’, but the convicts themselves were sure this was not so:

The Inspector of Prisons told them in the Prison at Dublin that they were not to be sent to Botany Bay, that such a voyage would cost the Irish Government One Hundred Pounds a Man and that no more Convicts would be sent to Botany Bay.

Their own impressions were that they were to be landed in Newfoundland, Nova Scotia or ‘in some part of the United States’. They were not, however, to remain in Newfoundland. When the governor, Admiral Milbanke, arrived in September—governors came out only for the summer and Milbanke’s appointment was late—he fully supported the magistrates’ decision, and shipped the Irish convicts across to the British government.

In the ensuing correspondence between the home secretary, W. W. Grenville, and the Irish secretary at Dublin, Robert Hobart, several reasons emerged why convicts should not be sent to Newfoundland on the old system. First of all, Grenville, unlike Sydney, disliked inflicting the burden on any American colonies, and sympathised with their resistance.

No convicts have been transported from this country to any of the British colonies in America since the last peace, and all the colonies have uniformly expressed a decided resolution not to receive them.

Furthermore, the Newfoundland fiasco made it certain that no other colony would now accept convicts: as in Honduras, mishandling had blocked possible outlets. Grenville advanced a more material argument, which the Irish government seized on as a way out of a humiliating position. The Irish Act of 1786 provided for transportation to British colonies in America. However, ‘Newfoundland is in no respect a British colony, and is never so considered in our laws’. The island was regarded as a fishery, and as a training ground for British seamen. In March 1786 Charles Jenkinson defined the government’s Newfoundland policy as

- to preserve it entirely a British fishery; and this could only be done by confining it to British ships, navigated from Great Britain, and by no means permitting any stationary settlement to be made on the island of Newfoundland.

In theory, no one stayed on the island through the winter. In practice, 19,000 remained in 1789–90, but the energetic Milbanke attempted to reduce their numbers. Clearly, indentured convict labour could not be introduced to an island where the law recognised the existence of no potential employers, and allowed no permanent settlers.
However, the theoretical absence of any local population made Newfoundland a feasible site for a guarded penal colony. There is no evidence that it was ever so considered, but then there is very little evidence bearing on the actual choice, New South Wales. It may be a legitimate exercise to work out the relative merits of the two places as a site for a guarded penal settlement, as they may have been seen at the time of the decision for Botany Bay in mid-1786. An extended comparison may help, at least in a negative sense, to highlight the reasons for choosing the Australian site.

We may begin by noting that Newfoundland would be a reasonable selection for timber, but probably not for flax. Similarly inconclusive is the fact that Newfoundland was relatively close, New South Wales very distant. The voyage to Newfoundland would be cheaper, and perhaps healthier, but on the other hand it would be easier for escaped or expired felons to get home. Convicts and fishermen might be difficult to tell apart: in 1789 St John's had already been 'crowded with Idle Persons', and in the outports order was traditionally maintained by the primitive rule of 'fishing admirals' who had the power to order floggings. Although Blainey has attempted to deny 'that extreme remoteness was considered a major determinant of the site of a penal settlement', the 1785 inquiry had concluded that

unless they are removed to a considerable Distance, from whence the Means of returning may be rendered difficult, the End of their Transportation will be defeated.

When Banks had recommended sending convicts to Botany Bay in 1779, he pointed out that 'their Escape would be very difficult, as the Country was far distant from any part of the Globe inhabited by Europeans'. In fact it is doubtful whether a prison colony, not only in Newfoundland but anywhere around the north Atlantic, could offer security comparable with Botany Bay. 140 Irish convicts had been landed in Connecticut in June 1788, and others had actually paid the captain to take them on to New Jersey: by March 1790 Dubliners estimated that at least one hundred of them had returned within twelve months, to join 'the most desperate gangs which infest this metropolis and its environs'. In 1788 the Freeman's Journal had complained that 'the frequent return of shipping from Nova Scotia and Canada' made it pointless to send convicts there. Nor did it seem right to send people as a punishment to a country where so many free emigrants were anxious to go.

A further point of comparison between Newfoundland and New South Wales was the potential of the two places for self-sufficiency. Newfoundland was known to be infertile. Even in the 1780s the imperial commercial system had to be breached by allowing the import of
American grain: even with its small and transient population, Newfoundland could not feed itself. New South Wales, on the other hand, was believed in 1786 to be a fertile paradise. At least one pamphleteer thought it too good for convicts, and argued that if it had to be colonised at all, free settlers should be sent. The Home Office was in fact besieged with volunteers in the autumn of 1786, all anxious to sail with the expedition. True, within three years disillusionment had set in. In 1789 The Times noted that at first people had committed crimes to qualify for the privilege of going to New South Wales, but that criminals were now begging to be hanged rather than go to ‘that miserable place of bondage’. Soldiers had volunteered to go in 1786; by 1790 departing contingents had to be closely guarded to prevent desertion. But when New South Wales was chosen, it was widely believed to be potentially self-sufficient. (It is true that Banks, who argued for Botany Bay in 1779, had called New South Wales ‘barren’ and ‘unable to yield [sic] much towards the support of man’ but this had been his description of its uncultivated state, and he had specifically exempted a few fertile oases. From its name, Botany Bay may be presumed to be one of them.) No amount of optimism could paint Newfoundland in such a light. It should be remembered that the government not only had to consider convicts, but the welfare of those who guarded them: felons might be left to die in Africa or starve in Newfoundland, but soldiers could not. If a Newfoundland settlement could not grow its own food, it would have to catch it. Sooner or later it would begin to invade the fishery.

A settlement in either Newfoundland or New South Wales would represent an infringement of important interests – the one of the English West Country fishery, the other of the East India Company. However, in every respect, the comparison was favourable to Botany Bay. A settlement on the east coast of Australia represented at most a marginal infringement of the rights of the Company; any settlement on the Newfoundland coast was a direct challenge to the English fishery. If the China trade did develop, and the Australian route supplanted the one through the East Indies, the Botany Bay settlement could actually become useful to the East India Company, which until 1813 retained a monopoly of eastern trade. A permanent settlement in Newfoundland was no use to the fishery: it could only be a rival. There was also an important difference between the relations of the two interests to the government. The East India Company was powerful, but the India Act of 1784 had gone some way towards making it an unofficial department of State: in the last resort, it had to bow to government pressure, as in 1786 when it was forced to waive its objections to the extension of whaling in the southern oceans. The fishery interest was not subject to government control, and not slow to defend itself – ‘a very discontented body of men, as we have always found the Newfoundland merchants,’
Grenville noted in 1797. The unreformed parliament gave them a disproportionate power of nuisance, since in the House of Commons the south-western counties were heavily overrepresented, mainly because so many small fishing ports were rotten boroughs. The East India Company, then, was by no means the only powerful interest the government had to consider.

Considering, however, that there were opportunities for using convicts in eastern British North America, provided local opposition might be overcome, it is surprising that the only penal settlement actually contemplated by the government was on the far-distant west coast, even less accessible from Britain than Botany Bay. In 1790 Captain Phillip was instructed to send a handful of troops ‘together with a few of the most deserving of the convicts’ to occupy Nootka Sound in Vancouver Island. The timing of the order was undoubtedly connected with Spanish attempts to prevent British ships from using Nootka, and it was cancelled when the crisis worsened and an ultimatum was sent to Madrid instead. Britain was prepared to risk a European war for a Pacific inlet because Nootka was the depot for the fur trade, and furs were among the few items available to Europeans which were acceptable to the Chinese market. The British government planned ‘an establishment for the assistance of his Majesty’s subjects, in the prosecution of the fur trade from the N.W. coast of America’. Thus the only formal penal settlement the British government seriously considered in North America was part of a strategy for opening up the China trade.  

What tentative conclusions may be drawn from this survey? First, there were unoccupied parts of British North America where a penal colony might have been established to ensure supplies of flax and naval timber, provided the government was willing to ignore local objections of varying intensity and run the risk that the settlement would fail to be agriculturally self-supporting. It seems likely that it preferred a more distant site in a supposedly fertile country where fewer interests would be offended, and whence return would be difficult. It seems unlikely that Botany Bay and Norfolk Island were founded primarily to provide naval stores in an area of relatively peripheral importance when opportunities to establish similar settlements in the much more important Atlantic region were apparently rejected. Flax and naval timber would however, have been a useful resource if Botany Bay were intended to open up a new trade route. That the New South Wales colony was intended as a way-station to China seems to be confirmed by the decision to occupy Nootka on similar lines – the only American site actively considered for a penal settlement, and the only one of importance to the China trade.

Having attempted to set the choice of New South Wales in a wider imperial context, it is now profitable to examine the more particular
controversy over the benefits which might have been hoped for from the colony. The first attempt to argue positive reasons for its selection was made by K. M. Dallas in 1954. Dallas claimed that the colony was founded as a base for Pacific commerce, instancing in particular the American fur trade, whaling and sealing, and trade with South America and China. Despite subsequent elaboration, Dallas’s theory never progressed much beyond dogmatic speculations, accompanied by evidence which suggested that Botany Bay ought to have been designed as a trading base, but never quite proved that it was. Two subsequent historians, Roe and Blainey, have cautiously concluded that Dallas had made out a prima facie case. Clark dismissed it by citing a parliamentary inquiry’s view that no trade was carried on at Botany Bay—which did not preclude future development. Shaw similarly discounted the trading base theory, by pointing to the East India Company’s trading monopoly in the Far East.

All intercourse with India, Malaya, China or the Asian Islands was forbidden, and no ships could be built in the colony. So much for the government’s anxiety to encourage trade!

This criticism seems to rest on a simple misunderstanding: naturally the British government would not found Australia in the interests of Australian trade, but it might do so in the interests of British trade, which was carried on through the East India Company.

Examined under its separate headings, Dallas’s theory seemed unconvincing. ‘The fur trade never came near Australia.’ James Matra in 1783 argued that a New South Wales settlement could be useful to the fur trade, but Alexander Dalrymple two years later regarded this as one of the ‘many Proteus-like forms’ the project has assumed ‘just as the Temper of Ministers was supposed to be inclined to a favourable impression’. The argument that the colony was established as a base for whaling and sealing seems equally unproven. It is true that in 1786 the East India Company’s objection to whaling in the southern ocean was overcome, and there was general consideration of southern hemisphere resources. However, the area in which whalers were allowed to operate specifically excluded Australian waters. Dallas cited a letter from Samuel Enderby, a leading spokesman for the whalers, to a government official in January 1789, arguing that if their limits could be extended, they would be able to use the settlements in New Holland, and so stimulate their growth. If anything, this evidence indicates that New South Wales was not established as a whaling base. In the early 1790s the British government rejected Captain Phillip’s proposal to encourage whaling in Australian waters, merely noting that an eventual extension of their area of operations might make whalers useful as a means of communication between Australia and Britain; the
whalers might help the colony, but it hardly seemed that the colony had been founded to help the whalers. The possibility that Australia was settled primarily as a base either for trading or privateering in South America also seems unlikely. Alexander Dalrymple had used such arguments in 1769–70, but he denounced them as illusory after Botany Bay was chosen. There was some talk of using Botany Bay as a privateering base against Spanish America in 1778, but in the subsequent wars with Spain after 1786, Sydney harbour constituted no great threat to Spanish America. However, Botany Bay’s potential as a military base may have been an additional attraction in 1786. The Universal Register observed that ‘if we should ever be at war with Holland or Spain we might powerfully annoy either State from the new settlement’. Rapid and effective attacks might be launched not only against Mexico and Peru, but also on Java and Manila. However, this argument made only a brief appearance in the newspaper’s defence of the scheme, and its wording was taken from Matra’s scheme of 1783.

Circumstantial evidence also seemed the only prop for Dallas’s claim that Botany Bay was established as part of a new and safer route to China. Pitt’s reduction in the tea duties in 1784, and the Macartney embassy to Peking in 1792—planned as early as 1787—all seemed to point to a concerted policy of regularising and expanding the China trade. Although both Matra and Dalrymple, from their different viewpoints, recognised a ‘China’ argument for Botany Bay, firm evidence of causal connection seemed lacking. Dallas suggested that an eastern Australian route would avoid the monsoons of the East Indies, while Blainey speculated that it would avoid pirates. Plausible as these arguments seemed to historians, they carried little weight with sea captains. The Australian route to China was slow to develop and never supplanted the East Indies. Again, however, the failure of certain advantages to materialise does not prove that they were not hoped for in 1786–7. The Universal Register presented the scheme as a cooperative venture with the East India Company, whose ships would take convicts out, go on to Canton and return with tea, thus halving costs on both sides. Although three convict transports from the First Fleet did sail on to Canton in this way, difficulties developed over the Company’s monopoly and the partnership broke down. Despite the disagreements, the Universal Register still expected that considerable advantages to the China trade will arise from the settlement in New Wales. It sometimes happens in the voyage to China, that missing the trade-wind, the ships are obliged to go to Batavia, and few months are lost in the voyage: now they will be able to proceed to Botany Bay . . . and from thence proceed to China at a much less loss of time than heretofore.
Stronger, though still circumstantial, evidence was adduced from the ‘China’ argument by H. T. Fry. Fry pointed to a revival of French ambitions in India in the 1780s, and to European circumstances which seemed to be pushing the Dutch into French alliance. In 1785 and 1786 there seemed considerable danger that France would take military control of the East Indies, and thus seal off British trade with China. Since this trade was now necessary for the solvency of the East India Company, France could use the East Indies to undermine British power in India itself. The Company had won the right to navigation in the East Indies at the peace with Holland in 1783, and proceeded to defend its gains by seeking its own gateway to the archipelago. The Company failed to secure Riau, near modern Singapore, but occupied the Nicobar islands in 1785, Penang in 1786 and the Andamans—incidentally by means of a penal colony—in 1789. Meanwhile the British government was anxious to persuade the Company to abandon its newly won right of general navigation in the East Indies, and limit itself to a single route through the Strait of Malacca, to maintain Dutch goodwill. If peace was to be preserved at that price, the Company was entitled to compensation. If war came, the Company’s access to China had to be safeguarded. Either way, a government enterprise to occupy Botany Bay and Norfolk Island, thus securing the Tasman sea, seemed a reasonable way of disposing of unwanted convicts. Fry, no more than Dallas, could not point to documentary evidence proving that ministers selected Botany Bay as a staging post to China, but he did prove that the diplomatic position of the Netherlands and its likely impact on Asian affairs was a matter of concern at the heart of the British ministry, where the actual decision was made. Furthermore, although in the other planks of the Dallas platform the failure of expected advantages to materialise has embarrassed the case, Fry was able to argue that the need for a major new China route disappeared with changing European circumstances. Fry argued that convicts had been used ‘as a means to an end’, but the end envisaged never materialised, which ‘resulted in the means being mistaken for the end’.  

While Dallas’s speculations remained unsupported, a new series of positive arguments for the choice of Botany Bay were advanced by Blainey. While not excluding the possibility that the colony was established as a trading base, he laid greater stress on its potential as a supplier of strategic raw materials—flax, hemp and naval timber. Timely and compelling motives existed. The Armed Neutrality of 1780 showed how easily the Baltic could be closed to Britain, thus interrupting supplies of flax from Russia. American independence meant that New England timber could no longer be relied upon for ships’ masts. Such official documents as existed bearing on government reasons for establishing the settlement seemed to show that these arguments were in the
minds of ministers. Flax and timber in particular seemed to explain the otherwise puzzling emphasis on Norfolk Island, where Cook’s expeditions had noted tall pines and the luxuriant wild flax also found in New Zealand. Blainey based his argument on the Heads of a Plan which accompanied Lord Sydney’s letter to the Treasury on 18 August 1786. Exactly who drew up the Heads of a Plan has been the subject of some debate: a recent well-informed speculation by Mackay points to Banks. Banks was mentioned by one contemporary press report as a supporter of the scheme, and if the government did rely on his authority, it would explain why no attempt was made to survey New South Wales in advance, as had happened with Das Volta’s Bay. However, the authorship of the Heads of a Plan matters less than the fact that the document was used by Sydney, and Blainey could fairly claim that it represented his intentions. However Blainey’s use of the document involved some sleight of hand. The Heads of a Plan referred to the cultivation of the New Zealand flax plant ‘in the intended settlement’ and to ‘the possibility of procuring from New Zealand any quantity of masts and ship timber for the use of our fleets in India’. To Blainey it must have been Norfolk Island flax to which Sydney referred—although the island was not mentioned—and Norfolk Island pine, despite the explicit reference to New Zealand. Furthermore Blainey quietly ignored the planned limitation of mast supply to British fleets in eastern waters and portrayed the New South Wales colony as the projected supplier of all Britain’s naval needs following the loss of the New England colonies. Two points then may be made about Blainey’s theory at the outset. First, provided that it is modified in the light of his own documentary evidence, his theory is not incompatible with a belief that the colony was intended to strengthen British commercial interests in the Far East: if Botany Bay was to supply masts to British India, then the development of some regular trading contact was obviously envisaged, which in turn would connect the opening of an eastern Australian route to China. Second, it should be stressed that the major merit of Blainey’s theory is that it alone attempts to explain why tiny Norfolk Island, 900 miles out in the Pacific, should have loomed so large in the original scheme. ‘Norfolk Island seems to be a key to the plan to send convicts to Australia.’ In Blainey’s view, the British government had decided in 1786 to form two settlements as part of a single interlocking scheme to provide strategic raw materials: Norfolk was to be a plant nursery, Botany Bay a flax farm and market garden.

It was on flax that the subsequent controversy centred. There was some criticism of the idea that Norfolk Island would prove a useful source of mast timber—the island lacked potential port facilities and the timber proved to be brittle—and an attempt by Bolton, much
ridiculed by Blainey, to argue that Bombay teak supplied naval requirements in the area. Bolton also pointed out that British North America was a more likely place for the government to look for timber if it wanted to supply the navy as a whole.

Criticisms of the flax argument may be grouped under four main headings. First, Bolton argued that the mid-1780s saw no particular threat to Baltic supplies, as the trade negotiations with Russia seemed to be going well. Contemporaries were less confident. In September 1786 the *Daily Universal Register* reported that negotiations in St Petersburg were 'at a stand' because the Empress was insisting on dragging in an issue connected with the Armed Neutrality of 1780, which had threatened to close the Baltic to the British. In February 1787 the *Universal Register* reported that France and the northern powers were negotiating with the United States to tax all exports of naval stores to Britain. Even if these reports were unfounded, they suggest public uneasiness which a wise government would wish to allay. Bolton also advanced the naïve argument that the Baltic trade was unlikely to be interrupted because it was as essential to Russia as to Britain—if the claim were valid of course, eighteenth-century Europe would never have had any wars at all. In any case, neither British nor Russian economic needs could prevent the closure of the Baltic by a third power. The British twice attacked Copenhagen in the ensuing French wars to keep the Baltic open, and would have been strategically blind not to have considered the contingency in the 1780s. In fact there is evidence that the government did seek to develop alternative flax resources.

However, the second point of attack on Blainey's theory is that none of this evidence suggests government interest in Australia. The Privy Council's Committee for Trade and Plantations devoted attention to the possibilities of growing flax in Britain, Ireland, France, Holland and Canada, but apparently never considered Australia. Yet in agreeing to expand whaling in the southern oceans, the Board of Trade in 1786 did carefully investigate—and reject—Australian resources. In any case, as Shaw points out, had the government seriously investigated antipodean flax resources, it would have been more reasonable to select New Zealand. Shaw assumed that Botany Bay was started for other reasons.

If it could supplement the efforts being made to grow flax in Canada, Ireland and elsewhere, so much the better—but that is not to say that the desire for flax was the motive for the settlement.

To these arguments Blainey replied that the government did establish a settlement in Australia, not New Zealand, and did stress flax as a motive in its *Heads of a Plan* of August 1786. However, the interpretation of documentary evidence forms the third main part of contro-
versy. The passage dealing with flax in the *Heads of a Plan* was evidently taken from Matra’s proposal of 1783— to Bolton the scrapings of a government clerk deputed to justify a convict colony, to Blainey clear indication that Matra’s claims on behalf of antipodean flax had been tested and endorsed. Here Bolton’s argument seems more plausible, but two further attempts by Shaw to challenge the validity of documents are less convincing. Shaw pointed to the lack of emphasis on timber and flax in Sydney’s letter to the Treasury Commissioners announcing the project; in winning over that ‘hard-fisted’ department of landsmen, it seemed odd not to dwell on these supposed advantages. In fact, as Blainey retorted, Sydney’s letter was principally a covering note to the *Heads of a Plan*, which did dwell on flax. In any case, Sydney could tell the Treasury as much as he pleased. He was not trying to win the support of a financial watchdog but was ‘commanded to signify to your Lordships his Majesty’s pleasure that you do forthwith take such measures as may be necessary’ for sending 750 convicts to Botany Bay. Similarly Shaw notes that a reference to flax and timber was deleted from a draft letter informing the Irish government of the project: in 1786, the Irish government was not involved.

The fourth point in the flax controversy centres on how far the supposed intentions of the government were carried out. Blainey points to instructions to Captain Phillip in 1787, to the dispatch in 1790 of at least one trained flax cultivator from England, and to £100 reward offered for the kidnap of Maoris who could show how to dress the New Zealand plant. Others have pointed to the failure to send skilled cultivators with the First Fleet, to the tone of Phillip’s instructions, which referred to the cultivation of samples which might ‘ultimately’ create an export industry, and to apparent lack of government enthusiasm before 1802, when, despite a growing number of free settlers in New South Wales, the government decided not to extend the Canadian bounty to the new colony. Overall, subsequent official attempts to stimulate flax cultivation in New South Wales hardly bear out a theory that the colony was primarily established for that purpose.8

There is, too, a fifth point on which Blainey’s theory is vulnerable. How valid is his confident assumption that Norfolk Island was an integral part of the Botany Bay scheme of August 1786? The *Universal Register*, for instance, published two lengthy descriptions of New South Wales in September 1786, and during the next two months it praised the new colony as a port of call for China and as a secure prison. Yet, strangely it made no mention of Norfolk Island at all. The silence of the public records is more deafening still. The *Heads of a Plan* contained no reference to the island, nor was it specifically mentioned in the boundaries of the colony defined in Phillip’s first instructions in October 1786. Not until mid-December does there seem to have been any official
reference to the possibility of sending ships 'to some of the islands in the Pacific Ocean', and the first explicit reference to Norfolk Island came less than three weeks before the fleet sailed, when Phillip was instructed to send 'a small establishment' there as it had been 'represented as a spot which may hereafter become useful'.

From the *Universal Register*’s evidence, it would seem that Norfolk Island was tacked on to the scheme in December 1786 for domestic political reasons. In November 1786 criticism of the choice of Botany Bay mounted, and the opposition gained an important advocate in Alexander Dalrymple, 'whose knowledge of that part of the world is highly respected'. Hydrographer to the East India Company, and a veteran, if a bitter one, of Pacific exploration, Dalrymple's opposition neutralised Banks's support. In fact Dalrymple's main argument fell flat. He argued that any colony in the far east was a violation of the East India Company's monopoly, failing to realise how far the Company had become a department of state thanks to the India Act of 1784. The *Universal Register* dismissed this part of the case as 'so far immaterial, as the Company have undoubtedly given their consent'. More damaging was his claim that convicts would become pirates and 'our China trade must fall a sacrifice to their depredations'. The major argument for the new settlement was that it would develop an alternative route for the important China trade. If it could be argued, on reasonable authority, that its effect would be precisely the reverse, the government was likely to run into parliamentary attack. With the new session only seven weeks away, the political danger was serious. The *Universal Register* was certainly impressed by the argument: 250 marines would not be sufficient to guard the convicts for ever, especially if the outcasts and adventurers of Europe should flock to join them. Not all the navies of Europe could guard such a long coast, 'full of harbours, bays, creeks, and firths'. The colony would involve either a ruinously expensive guard 'both by land or sea' or the loss of the China trade.

The government was politically committed to a large transportation scheme, and administratively too far embarked to draw back. Somehow it had to head off the opposition. Fortunately, Dalrymple provided them with a way out. Instead of limiting himself to criticising the choice of Botany Bay, he published a long letter he had submitted to the East India Company in July 1785, urging them to oppose a scheme then current to settle Norfolk Island. Although in passing Dalrymple had argued that Norfolk was too distant and too uncertain a source of naval timber and stores for India, his major arguments were the infringement of the East India Company's monopoly, and the danger that offshoots from the colony would establish piratical bases on the Australian mainland.
In fact, neither of these objections had much force. The East India Company was evidently not objecting to a colony somewhere in the Tasman sea, for the very good reason that its ships could use such a colony as a port of call. Furthermore, while escapes might be feared from a mainland penal settlement, and free settlers on Norfolk might well become pirates, a guarded penal settlement on the island would be completely secure. Moreover, by attacking hitherto largely unpublicised arguments that Norfolk might provide strategic raw materials, Dalrymple had paradoxically advertised the possibility that the island might be positively useful. It seems that the government moved quickly to draw the sting of attack. On 6 December, the Universal Register reported that it was 'now said, with some confidence' that ministers had decided 'to send the convicts to the island of New Norfolk' instead of Botany Bay. The major reason reported for the change was the difficulty of preventing escapes on the mainland, and consequent piracy. However, this was not the only reason.

Another idea which Ministers had in regard to Botany Bay, they have from conviction of its fallacy relinquished. They thought that our East India possessions might have been supplied with hemp and stores from this place.

Further enquiry had led them to conclude that it was 'highly impolitic to trust to so precarious a resource' on the mainland.

How does this evidence bear on Blainey's flax theory? It certainly suggests that his neat theory of an interlocking relationship between mainland and island settlements is untenable. When Sydney wrote of the possibility of growing New Zealand flax in August 1786, he apparently had only the mainland in mind. This adds to the impression that flax was merely thrown in, without close inquiry, as a makeweight to other arguments for the colony. On the other hand, it might be maintained that the Heads of a Plan did definitely cite flax as a motive, and that the Universal Register's testimony merely indicates that once the ministers became convinced of the unsuitability of the mainland, they decided to shift to Norfolk Island— the implication being that it was a known source of flax.

The weakness of this counter-argument is that the choice of Norfolk Island bears signs of being simply a smokescreen for continuing with Botany Bay. In January the Universal Register noted that Phillip had 'discretionary power to land the convicts at Botany Bay or Norfolk Island, or elsewhere, as he shall think proper'. There was the obvious drawback that Norfolk, 'little more than five leagues in circumference', was too small to absorb large numbers of convicts, especially if regular shipments were to be made. In sending an expedition to almost unknown country, much latitude had to be allowed to the commander. It
was politically convenient to shift the final responsibility to Phillip. The government could reply to parliamentary critics that it had added Norfolk to its short list, proclaim its confidence in the expedition's commander, and rely on nothing being heard of his activities for at least a year. When parliamentary attacks failed to appear, Norfolk receded into a subordinate place: its retention in Phillip's instructions of April 1787 was perhaps the germ of the idea that it might be used as a maximum security prison for particularly difficult felons. Nothing came of the report that a ship would be sent out six weeks ahead to find a safe landing on the island, and Phillip's instructions to grow flax — and only samples at that — still apparently referred to the mainland only.

If Norfolk Island did not hold the central place in British planning that Blainey asserted, it becomes pertinent to ask again, why did the British not seek New Zealand flax and New Zealand timber in the logical place: New Zealand? A possible answer is that in 1785 the British ambassador in Paris reported that the French explorer La Perouse was about to establish a prior claim through a timber-cutting convict settlement. However, signs of French activity the same year in Sierra Leone only spurred the British to action there, and much the same was to happen in New Zealand itself in 1840. More plausible is Blainey's argument that the knowledge that the Maoris were cannibals effectively discouraged settlement. This had not, however, deterred Cook from suggesting that colonies might be formed in two Maori areas on the east side of the North Island, and King repeated the proposal in 1793. In any case a local cannibal population could be a useful adjunct to a penal colony, if only by discouraging escapes. However, even if the Maoris were regarded as an insuperable obstacle, they only ruled out settlement of the North Island. On the South Island the native population was small and scattered. More than one explorer had put in to refit in the Marlborough Sounds, where Cook had found the natives friendly. In 1792–3 a party of sealers spent ten months at Dusky Bay on the South Island where they made fishing lines and ropes from the local flax plant and saw only three Maoris. Once Blainey's theory loses its prop of Norfolk Island, it becomes quite impossible to explain why the British government should have established an Australian colony to procure New Zealand raw materials. Once again, the choice of New South Wales only makes sense if it was planned as part of a new trade route to China. New Zealand, like the Falkland Islands, was too far off the sea-route.9

If Botany Bay began as a port of call for China, then other 'economic' factors take a secondary place. In fact, the economic considerations which weighed with the government were probably mainly negative: the convict establishment would not arouse protests from previous settlers, it would not challenge vested interests and it would not require
indefinite provisioning—all objections to the American and West Indian possibilities. Once these negative considerations were satisfied, it is probable that more positive benefits were hoped for from the colony. Here, however, historians may have been over-precise in their speculations. The eighteenth century believed that colonies were useful as such. They provided markets and stimulated navigation within a closed mercantile system. They also had a habit of providing unexpected staples: Virginia, founded for gold, had stumbled on tobacco, while no one had expected New England Puritans to manufacture rum. Project-mongers might trumpet flax, hemp and timber as inducements—poor stuff really, but all that was known—but it is possible that the government subscribed to a Micawberish view that once a settlement was established, something would turn up. Thus in recommending the dubious merits of Das Voltas Bay, the 1785 inquiry observed that

the First Settlements in *North America* were undertaken under every Circumstance of an inhospitable Climate and an ungrateful Soil, as well as the fiercest Attacks from the Natives; yet, in the space of 200 years, a new World has sprung up, under many untoward Circumstances to which the Undertaking in Question does not appear to be exposed.

Similarly Sir Joseph Banks in 1779 argued that a successful penal colony in New South Wales could not only constitute a market for European goods but

it was not to be doubted, that a Tract of Land such as *New Holland*, which was larger than the whole of *Europe*, would furnish Matter of advantageous Return.

The most that the semi-official account of 1789 would say was that the new colony was being ‘carried on with every precaution to render it as beneficial as possible’. If New South Wales was established as a port of call to China, it was enough that it should be self-sufficient. Experience suggested that time and colonisation could be left to discover if there were bigger prizes. Even the references to experimenting with flax amounted to pious hopes rather than fixed policy. Writing in disillusion a few months after arriving in New South Wales, Watkin Tench, an officer of Marines accompanying the First Fleet, referred only to ‘an idea prevailing at home’ when he lamented the inability not only to grow flax in the new colony but even to find a wild plant to cultivate at all. If flax cultivation had been the principal reason for the settlement, Tench would almost certainly have known of it, and indisputably would have placed more emphasis on the point in his jeremiads about the futility of the new colony. In fact, historians can be over-precise in their speculations about government motives. A more
convincing sidelight on the ‘decision-making process’ was offered by a paragraph in the *Universal Register*.

The Botany Bay scheme was at first taken up but faintly by Administration; but the alarm which was excited on account of the supposed expence, induced them to examine it more narrowly, and at length finally and fully to adopt it.

This is something different from arguing that Botany Bay was chosen in a fit of absence of mind: indeed, as Mackay suggests, a fit of desperation was more likely. Parliament was prorogued in mid-July 1786, amid rising public demands for something to be done about the state of the gaols. Originally parliament had been due to meet again in September, and although this was deferred until January 1787, the need for quick action remained. Ministers were apparently expecting to be able to proceed with a penal colony at Das Voltas Bay as soon as the *Nautilus* returned: in fact, as Mackay argues, the cabinet as a whole were not much concerned with the question and content to leave it to Sydney. Perhaps that explains why the possibility of a convict colony in Honduras was unthinkingly signed away in July 1786. Faced with the elimination of his own favourite, Honduras, Sydney not surprisingly ‘took some convincing’ about the unsuitability of Das Voltas Bay, and continued to interview the commander of the *Nautilus* until 15 August. Three days later the Treasury was informed that Botany Bay had been chosen. Momentous as the decision was to prove, it was probably taken more as a matter of administrative necessity, than as an act of grand policy. On 16 August Sydney had in fact been busy dealing with the arrival from Mauritius of news that an Anglo-French dispute had been patched up in India. Sydney’s choice of Botany Bay almost certainly did not proceed from a reflective global view. Yet this is not to say that there were no rational motives behind the choice. One important decision had already been taken: the British government had clearly decided to abandon private contractors and take over the job itself. Campbell and Moore had made honest efforts to deliver convicts to agreed destinations, but had been frustrated by local opposition: at least they did better than the sea-captains employed by the Irish government, who dumped convicts at the first port they came to, in defiance of instructions, and were not above taking bribes from their own cargoes.

Without the prior decision by the government to take charge of its own prison colony, the last minute choice of Botany Bay would not have been possible. The rapid appointment of a retired naval officer, Captain Arthur Phillip, as commander of the expedition was probably a legacy of planning for Das Voltas Bay for Phillip, who had served in the Portuguese navy, would have had experience of south Atlantic
conditions. Second, although Sydney was probably distracted by the arrival of news from India of the latest incident in Anglo-French rivalry, it too forms a logical background to the decision to choose Botany Bay. It would have been possible for Sydney to dispatch an expedition nominally to Plettenberg Bay, while giving its commander general discretion to select a South African site, just as Phillip was later to be given some leeway in locating the Australian settlement. But the ability of British power in India to resist challenge from the French depended largely on the profits from trading with China. The China trade depended in turn on access through the Dutch East Indies. In mid-August 1786 it must have made sense to Sydney not to locate a penal settlement close to the Dutch colony at the Cape, an incursion which might push Holland into alliance with the French. On the other hand, sending them to Botany Bay would give the East India Company a port of call on an alternative route to Canton should a decline in relations with the Dutch close off Batavia. The context may have been desperate, and the decision almost casual, but the motive would remain logical and intelligent. Sydney’s decision was not part of a master-minded eastward ‘swing’ in British commercial penetration so much as a safeguard intended to preserve a trade which had already become vital to British interests in India. Nor was he projecting colonies in the antipodes to replace those lost in North America, although, as Frost has shown, popular writers quickly began to draw the parallel—an example of the misuse of analogy throughout the imperial experience.13

New South Wales was designed as a penal settlement to relieve the pressure on Britain’s overcrowded gaols. Yet even though the main motive was the need to relieve a domestic crisis, the settlement was not located at random. Botany Bay was chosen because in August 1786 it seemed to offer the fewest complications in Britain’s foreign or colonial relations coupled with the maximum potential advantage to British commerce. There is however no reason to assume that New South Wales was intended to be Britain’s only convict outlet. It may have been planned merely as a temporary measure which, like the British settlements in Borneo, could be abandoned should the need for an alternative China route not materialise, or which could be fossilised into a lonely outpost should transportation to North America revive. In fact, events took a different turn. The ports of the United States never reopened to British convicts: within two years of the sailing of the First Fleet the Americans unexpectedly created a central government strong enough to enforce its prohibitions. The Newfoundland fiasco was equally effective in closing the remaining British colonies to transportation, and it led to the shipping of Irish felons to Australia from 1791: once two governments were involved, New South Wales acquired a momentum of its own. Twenty years of war in Europe discouraged further experi-
ments in founding of penal colonies. Consequently, in disposing of its prison population, the British government came to be limited to Algernon Moncrieff's choice—this world, the next world, or Australia.

NOTES


7. For comments on Dallas's theory, see Roe HS viii 212–13; Blainey Tyranny 26; Clark HS ix 226; Shaw Convicts 54–5. Bolton Aust. ECHR viii 14, 11; HRNSW i ii 1–6; Dalrymple Serious admonition 20–1; Harlow Founding of second British empire ii 301–5; Shaw Convicts 54; Enderby to Chalmers 16 Jan 1789 quoted Dallas THRA Papers 1952, 8; Clark HS ix 221; Dallas THRA Papers 1968, 37; Roe HS viii 209; Daily Universal Register 14, 13 Oct 1786, THRA Papers 1952, 6, 9; Blainey Tyranny 24; Daily Universal Register 18 Oct 1786, and cf. 6, 12 Oct, 15 Nov 1786, Phillip's instructions, 25 Apr 1787, HRNSW i ii 87; G. Bateson The convict ships (1959) 102; Fry HS xiv (1969–71) 497–510.

8. Blainey Tyranny 27–33, 35; HRNSW i ii 14–20 (Heads of a Plan); Bolton Aust. ECHR viii 9, 5–9, 10–11, 16; Blainey ibid. 163, 161, 160; Daily Universal Register 20, 27 Sep 1786; A. G. L. Shaw 'The hollow conqueror and the tyranny of distance' HS xiii (1967–9) 196–8, 200, 195–6, 199; Shaw Convicts 51–2; Roe HS viii 210.


10. C.J. xl 1164; xxxviii 311; Voyage of Governor Phillip 9; L. F. Fitzhardinge (ed.) Sydney's first four years (1961) 335; Daily Universal Register 26 Oct 1786; Mackay HJ xvii 489–90; A. Aspinall (ed.) The later correspondence of George III i (1962) 244; A. Frost "'As it were another America'" Eighteenth century studies viii (1973–4) 255–73. Two articles by Frost which restate the 'flick' argument appeared too late to be considered in this chapter: 'The choice of Botany Bay: the scheme to supply the East Indies with naval stores' Aust. ECHR xv (1975), and 'The East India Company and the choice of Botany Bay' HS xv (1975). Further contributions to the debate are to be made by A. T. Atkinson and A. McMartin. The present chapter draws on G. W. Martin 'The alternatives to Botany Bay' University of Newcastle (NSW) Historical Journal iii (1975) 11–26.
4 The influence of the Durham Report

'It has long been recognised as the greatest state document in British imperial history'. Thus in 1945 Sir Reginald Coupland described the Durham Report. Few works can have had such a chequered career as Lord Durham's *Report on the affairs of British North America*. Largely rejected by contemporaries and ignored for half a century, it became the most revered of texts for the Edwardian empire and continued to be regarded as the Magna Charta of the Commonwealth until the 1960s. As late as 1971 Ward could complain of 'what ought to be known as the great Durham illusion', and the myth was still strongly enough entrenched in standard works to provoke two strong and independently inspired assaults.\(^1\) Although the old orthodoxy is by no means universally rejected, it is strange that it should have remained unchallenged for so long. The case for the Report's significance was riddled with logical fallacies. For instance, the celebratory generation of imperial historians recognised that the Report made little impact on influential contemporaries, yet never wholly explained how its initial failure could be reconciled with their claims for its formative influence. Second they failed to see how far Durham's two main aims were contradictory. The Report recommended both the anglicisation of the French and the introduction of a form of local self-government in which the French themselves would take part. These historians never explained how a powerful French minority could be persuaded to commit communal suicide, and failed to understand that the Report was intended as a Utilitarian 'package' of interdependent points. Durham's hostility to the French was apologetically downgraded by Coupland to 'the only first-rate blunder in his *Report*', when arguably it was an inaccurate diagnosis of the Canada he so briefly visited and it certainly proved to be no prediction for its future. Third, although admitting that the scheme of local autonomy sketched in the Report would have been highly restricted, historians have tended to excuse Durham by their own speculation about his posthumous reactions to imperial change. Sir Charles Lucas in 1912 gave a good example of this technique:

it is of course a vain thing to ask what a man would have said or done many years after his death, in altered conditions or with
fuller knowledge. A broad-minded man moves with the times, and Lord Durham would never have stood still.

although in this case Lucas implicitly forbade Durham's shade to move further into the twentieth century by hurriedly adding that the Report offered 'a British prescription for a British community', and not 'a recipe for non-British communities'. The point remained, however, that historians were prepared to measure Durham's contribution to the development of the empire not by the limitations of what he actually wrote, but by how his ideas might have changed had he outlived his generation. No one ever thought of allowing this indulgence to Lord North or Sir Francis Bond Head. Durham actually considered allowing British North America to elect members to parliament at Westminster, which suggests that in 1838 at least he did not contemplate further extensions to colonial autonomy. No doubt this charity was largely inspired by Durham's untimely death - a parallel would be the apology for John F. Kennedy's Vietnam policy, just as Campbell-Bannerman's death earned him a reputation for 'solving' the South African problem. Benevolent as it may be, it is a misleading argument. It is easy to overstate the extent of Durham's radicalism. He was not in general politics the most single-mindedly radical or adaptable of his contemporaries, and he was certainly not the most prescient in colonial affairs. Others wanted Canada to have more freedom than he proposed - men like Howick, Roebeck and H. S. Chapman, whose involvement in the subject was deeper than Durham's own: as late as August 1837 he dismissed Canada as an 'unfortunate business' in which he did not intend to be involved. By concentrating on 'the great Durham illusion' historians have succeeded in conveying the impression that no serious thought had been given to the Canadian problem until he offered his brilliantly simple device of responsible government. In fact the problem of reconciling colonial autonomy with metropolitan supremacy was a good deal more complicated than the Report's superficial analysis allowed, and contemporaries were unimpressed by it precisely because they knew how much detailed and fruitless consideration the problem had already received. Historians, however, allowed themselves to be dazzled by Durham's confident prose, and took for perspicacity what infuriated contemporaries dismissed as arrogance. The Morning Herald, for instance, attacked the Report as a device for

representing John George Lambton Earl of Durham as the only wise, discreet, virtuous, and truly intelligent statesman that ever cast a glance at Canadian affairs.

The Report had its background in a mission flawed in many respects. One major weakness lay in Durham's poor relations with the ministers
he served and with Melbourne the prime minister in particular; in a mission in which mutual confidence was vital, neither side really trusted the other. Opportunities for misunderstanding were increased by Durham's vanity. He certainly laid great stress on his own magnificence, and arguably an imposing front was necessary for the success of his mission. His mistake was to delay his departure for nearly four months while assembling his equipment and retinue. While Canada was in crisis, the high commissioner made apparently leisurely arrangements for his journey, including the dispatch of his racehorses, plate and an orchestra. Durham's vanity was in itself a source of amusement, but coupled with his poor judgement of men and issues it became a fount of disaster. His most obvious blunder was the appointment of Thomas Turton and Edward Gibbon Wakefield, the first a central figure in a sensational divorce case, the second a former inmate of Newgate prison as a result of his abduction of an under-age heiress. Parliamentary attacks on the appointments helped to widen the breach between Durham and Melbourne. Yet damaging as these associates were, Durham's fundamental error of judgement was his reliance on his kinsman Edward Ellice, a great Canadian landowner and an influential figure in politics. Ellice was regarded by French Canadians as 'one of their bitterest, most indefatigable, and most powerful enemies'. From the outset Durham adopted Ellice's view of the Canadian problem and consulted closely with him. Even before the high commissioner had left Britain, he had adopted the francophobic view which was a fundamental weakness in the mission. In the short term he missed a great opportunity. French Canadians did in fact welcome him as a deliverer, and Durham alone among British statesmen at the time had the stature to rally moderate leaders into the communal partnership which Elgin presided over a decade later. By dashing French hopes, and adding the insult of anglicisation to the injury of repression, Durham made subsequent reconciliation of French and British more difficult. And in the long run no Canadian settlement could be made which involved the mastery of one over the other.

The major weaknesses of the Durham mission—his authoritarian behaviour, his lack of sympathy for French Canada and his poor choice of advisers—were all united in the affair of the Bermuda Ordinance. This dealt with the issue of the share of Canadian and Irish immigration to the South. Overruled on a technicality, Durham responded by an abrupt and spectacular resignation. Resignation in itself seemed bad enough—an abandonment of a difficult post—but the timing was unfortunate, and Durham's behaviour was widely criticised. Durham now intended to adopt a dignified and tenable position by writing a report giving his views on Canada—although from the government's point of view a report in London was a poor second to a settlement in Quebec.
Writing a report on Canada increased Durham's dependence on Edward Ellice, both for his influence in politics and for his interest in Canada, and who noted: 'Ld. Durham is going to produce a plan & hopes & intends to redeem himself thereby.' Subsequent events suggest that Durham or his staff intended the Report to appeal over the heads of the ministers to the Crown and the people. For most of December a haughty feud continued between Durham and the Whig leaders. There is little sign that ministers intended to give much weight to Durham's opinions. The hostile Melbourne bluntly said: 'I do not expect much from Durham's suggestions'. Thus at the time the Durham Report was being written, there was no question of guilty ministers eagerly awaiting the pronouncement of a triumphant high commissioner. The government was united in condemning Durham's behaviour, and Durham himself was hoping to re-establish his position in politics.6

In January 1839 work on the Report progressed rapidly and, as the Tories had cynically predicted, Durham and the ministers patched up their feud to avoid open conflict when parliament met. Naturally, as the Report was produced hurriedly, it contained mistakes. But its fundamental error was much more one of analysis. In 1836–7 the government, under the prompting of Howick, aided by James Stephen of the Colonial Office, had been moving towards the idea of British North American federation. This was broadly the plan which Durham took to Canada. Not the least unfortunate aspect of his resignation was that it aborted an intercolonial convention about to meet in Quebec to discuss the possibility of a federal union with the Maritimes. But a second French rebellion, late in 1838, seemed to rule out any federal solution. After two revolts in a year, a French Canadian unit in a federation had become unthinkable. Under Ellice's influence, Durham turned instead to a legislative union, in which the French would be outvoted centrally but without the nuisance of their own local legislature. Poor communications made a legislative union with the Maritimes virtually impossible, although Durham hoped they would eventually be incorporated. Circumstances, then, dictated a union of the Canadas alone: a solution which Ellice and the Lower Canada British minority had advocated as far back as 1822. Durham concluded that the French identity would have to disappear altogether. A Canadian Union would have an English-speaking majority, which immigration would reinforce. As a result, the French would be anglicised.

Durham had thus shifted from the idea of a locally autonomous federation based on some accommodation between French and British colonists, to proposing a locally autonomous legislative union, in which immigration was to be used to swamp and absorb the French. As a solution it contained several basic weaknesses. To give the united province any measure of self-government was tantamount to inviting the
French, who formed about two-fifths of the population, to acquiesce, if not co-operate, in their own demise. So open an avowal of an anglicising policy could be expected to unite the French in self-defence. Furthermore, in attempting to define the scope of local self-government, Durham reserved to British imperial control not only foreign relations, but the local constitution, tariffs and public lands. The limitation of colonial autonomy had been and remained an almost insoluble problem. Durham had simply drawn up an agenda for disagreements, while giving little indication how imperial supremacy in the disputed areas could be upheld. As Sir George Arthur pointed out, Durham had never had to handle a colonial legislature. At one and the same time he wished to thrust the British imperial government into Canadian affairs, while driving the French into opposition. It pointed to a period of instability for, as Bagot was to complain in 1842, it was one thing to rely on the anglicising effects of immigration in the long term, but quite another to keep the government going in the short term.

The Report was not well received. Praise from liberal journals was hardly enthusiastic, and several promised ‘due attention to this important document hereafter’ and then abandoned the subject. Only the radical Spectator and the Colonial Gazette, both influenced by Wakefield, loudly defended the Report. It was certainly not ‘greeted with public acclamation by Englishmen of liberal sympathies’, as Burroughs has claimed. The Morning Chronicle contented itself with saying ‘that great good will be effected by the mere circulation of this report’. Even the radical Leeds Mercury was less enthusiastic than it had expected to be. The field was left virtually clear for the opposition press to denounce the Report for ‘its mass of verbiage and its scantiness of fact’, and to dismiss it as a ‘fatiguing mass of impertinent trifling and newspaper trash’. It was widely noted that one of its major recommendations, the Canadian Union, was ‘whether good or bad, practicable or impracticable, not a new scheme’, and one which Durham had adopted, ‘without giving it any very profound consideration’. Many thought the Report superficial, containing nothing which ‘any man of third-rate abilities who had visited Canada for three or four months might have written just as well’. In February 1839 the Durham Report was certainly not recognised as the charter of the colonies.

A recent writer has confused press reception of the Report with its influence on the cabinet. However, there is independent evidence that ministers were little more impressed than journalists. Howick criticised the limitations Durham wished to place on colonial self-government. Russell, although listing the Report in a cabinet memorandum as one of the authorities for union, rejected Durham’s portrait of communal hostility and thought his restrictions on self-government unenforceable. Normanby, who succeeded Glenelg as colonial secretary in February
1839, argued that the government should check 'whether Durham speaks the opinions of the Representative Men of the English Party in Lower Canada'. To Normanby, Durham's own recommendation was not important. What mattered was whether union was supported by the Lower Canadian minority: 'If so this would decide the point of attempting to form a Legislative Union.' Other ministers cared even less for Durham. When Normanby wished to tell him what policy was to be adopted, the cabinet refused its permission. Ministers had already decided not to consult Durham during their own deliberations. It seems unlikely, then, that the cabinet decided 'to adopt in principle Durham's proposal for a legislative union of the Canadas', as Burroughs has restated the myth. Overall, they realised, as Durham had realised, that there was no real alternative to union. Following the rebellions, the French could not be allowed to control Lower Canada. Yet equally a liberal government could not indefinitely deprive a North American colony of a constitution. Union with English-speaking Upper Canada was the only way out. Nor did the principle of union come from Durham. Ellice had drawn up a complicated scheme of his own in December 1838, but as part of his policy of rehabilitating Durham, he did not submit it to the cabinet until February, when 'Durham had paved the way by giving his report'. When ministers accepted the principle of union, they decided to draw up a bill 'mainly founded on Ellice's project'. Its provisions were rewritten in detail several times in the next year, but the Report offered little guidance about the mechanics of Union. In its final form the government's scheme differed from Durham's on one important point, by giving Upper Canada equal representation with the lower province. Above all, it is difficult to see what other scheme the cabinet could have adopted. As Russell said, it was 'the best principle of a settlement, not because the principle of a union did not in itself contain very great difficulties, but rather from the difficulties attending every other plan'. When they did adopt it, they began with Ellice's scheme, not Durham's.¹

Nor is there much evidence from parliamentary debates on Canada in 1839–40 that the Report had many supporters. It seemed, as Greville noted, 'enormously long', and even Stanley, a leading opposition spokesman on colonial affairs, did not have time to 'skin' it until June 1839. It seems unlikely that ministers or anyone else had 'got it almost by heart' as Brougham emphasised, in what was ironically one of the more favourable references to the Report—apart from those of Durham's secretary, Buller. Durham did not prove a good parliamentary authority. In the summer of 1840 Melbourne quoted parts of the Report, arguing that 'whatever opinions might be entertained of some parts of it', it was still 'a very able and impartial view of the matter'. A week later he found it necessary to qualify even that endorsement:
There were unquestionably many things in that report which he did not praise, and which he did not think were prudent matters to be brought forward, and which he thought it would have been wise to have omitted, and he therefore did not say, that the report was an important authority.

Nevertheless he still thought ‘it contained much which was of very great value, and which was well deserving of consideration and attention’. A month later the sympathetic Colonial Gazette complained that the Report was ‘well-nigh forgotten’ in Britain.*

It may of course be argued that the impact of the Report either on the British government or British opinion is only a secondary question, and that the important issue is its reception in the colonies. It might also fairly be objected that British policy stemmed less from prescript than from reaction to events in the colonies, and hence Durham’s Report could have had a major roundabout effect in shaping the empire. Among French Canadians Durham’s impact was traumatic, though hardly in line with his intentions. His advent inspired a burst of optimism in a beaten people: all would be well at last, it was felt, for if the British really wished French Canada ill, how could they have sent their most liberal statesman to start a new chapter in its government? Disillusionment was rapid and brutal, as Durham moved openly into the arms of the francophile British minority in Lower Canada, and excluded the French from all but minor appointments. The satirical journal, Le Fantasque, which had applauded Durham’s firmness in July 1838, was by October lamenting that they had regarded him as a god, when he was only a man after all. The Report’s cold dismissal of French Canadians as a people without history or literature helped to spur on a local renaissance, paradoxically helping to ensure that within a couple of decades French Canadians had a more self-consciously local culture than the still derivative British colonials. Durham’s relations with the French were doubly disastrous. They had trusted him almost alone among British statesmen, and he might have been able to draw them into a British American federation based on a new chapter of communal co-operation. Instead he chose to trumpet a policy of assimilation which was threatening enough to reinforce French bitterness, but never in fact consistently enough adopted to destroy French identity. A good opportunity for statesmanship was discarded in favour of an unreal project of social engineering. When M-P. Hamel edited a French edition of the Report in 1948, he made it clear that the suspicions remained.

In Upper Canada the Report was mainly important for its effect on parties. The reformers, previously split into factions, were able to rally behind ‘responsible government’, and Durham flags appeared at their
meetings. Egerton Ryerson, the Methodist leader, was able to cover his tracks by insisting that Durham's view of responsible government differed from previous conceptions which he had opposed. Yet the unity which the Report gave the party was one of tactics rather than of intellectual revelation. Leading reformers differed in their responses to Sydenham's blandishments in 1841, and Ryerson himself broke with them in defending Sir Charles Metcalfe in 1844. Nor was this surprising. Responsible government was hardly a novel issue in colonial politics. Indeed, reformers had to make this point in order to defend themselves against the charge that they wished to abandon established constitutional forms in favour of the crochet of a visiting English peer. Nova Scotia's Joseph Howe denied in 1840 that the responsible government cry had been 'learned from the Earl of Durham... I am glad to have such an authority in support of my argument; but it was not learned from him'. The Nova Scotian Assembly had been asking

for a government responsible in local affairs, before his lordship saw this continent... I am happy to have the concurrence of so celebrated a man; but I think it right to show that we are not mere followers of his report, but had asked for responsible government before that document appeared.

Taking a wider perspective, it may be noted that the Report made less impact in New South Wales, despite extravagant claims by Wakefield. Few newspapers there seemed even to realise the full import of Durham's proposals. The Sydney Herald dismissed the Report as 'not of very great interest', and the Australian thought it lacked 'the least pretension to originality, or grandeur of thought'. D. Beer concludes that in 1839 at least, the Report 'had no significant effect on public opinion in New South Wales', and he indicates that the same was probably true of other Australian colonies. The English language press in South Africa was more enthusiastic. The Graham's Town Journal thought it

one of the most massy, and the same time one of the most lucid, documents which we have been privileged to read. Every thing like ornament has been discarded; and yet, as a whole, it is extremely beautiful.

It predicted that Durham's mission would be a landmark 'in the future history not alone of Canada, but of all the British colonies'. The Commercial Advertiser in Cape Town went further: 'Nor will the mere colonist alone discover his face as in a glass looking into this Report'. It would shake the foundations of the peerage and of the established church. Yet when it came to deciding how far Durham's lessons from the two communities in Canada applied to multiracial
South Africa, there was less certainty. The Commercial Advertiser published thirteen extracts from the Report over two months, but never delivered its promised article on the Report's application to the Cape. The subject faded quietly away.²⁰

What influence then did the Durham Report have on the Victorian empire? Conventionally it has been seen not only as the blueprint for colonial self-government, but also as a general picture of colonial affairs which made it, in Craig's phrase, 'a document of enduring value and interest'. There is a logical problem in arguing for the informative value of the Report. Lucas admitted that it contained 'one or two instances of direct mis-statement, and more numerous instances of obvious exaggeration', while Coupland pointed to 'some palpably unfair judgements in it and one or two small mistakes of fact'. The real informative value of an inaccurate report may be doubted. Furthermore, even where the Report provided a mass of evidence, it understandably arranged it to make a particular point. MacDonagh has commented that the Report's evidence on emigration, although sensational enough to administer 'a very healthy jolt' to the government machinery involved, was largely 'high-purposed manipulation of evidence to antecedently determined ends', amounting to 'an unprincipled indictment'. The Report was anything but the 'first-rate piece of research' which G. S. Graham asserted as recently as 1970. Nor should the Durham Report be considered in isolation. It had been preceded by two major inquiries into Canadian affairs, the parliamentary committee of 1828 and the Gosford commission of 1836-7, both of which had produced lengthy and less hurried reports. Admittedly, Durham had the burden of administration to cope with, but it is none the less true that the amount of enquiry on which his findings were based fell far short of that given to other major reports. Compare Durham's mission, for instance, with that carried out upon penal settlement by J. T. Bigge as special commissioner in Australia between 1819 and 1821. Durham spent five months in Canada; Bigge spent seventeen in Australia. Durham's impressions of the 400,000 people of Upper Canada were based on a ten-day steamboat tour; Bigge took six days to inspect a few hundred convicts at Port Hunter. Durham did not visit the Atlantic colonies at all, and confessed to 'no information whatever, except from sources open to the public at large' about Newfoundland; Bigge spent three months in Van Diemen's Land. Not surprisingly, Durham's account was often superficial. Unfortunately, it was some of his more sensational comments which lingered. The Whig government was embarrassed by his description of 'two nations warring in the bosom of a single state'. Russell labelled the description as 'highly coloured', since if hostility between the two communities was so bitter it hardly made sense to unite the provinces. Similarly, Durham's picture of a striking
difference between American prosperity and Canadian stagnation seems to have been occasionally referred to in the 1840s and 1850s.11

These peripheral references make all the more striking the absence of extended reference to the Report during discussions of the painful emergence of Canadian self-government in the 1840s. Exactly how Canada achieved a system of parliamentary self-government in 1847–8 remains a matter for debate. One quaint suggestion, recently made, is that ‘it was the apparent resolution of the French question in 1840 that made British ministers willing to concede greater self-government’—which makes nonsense of the political crises under Bagot and Metcalfe. The concession of virtual tariff autonomy to the colonies in 1846 made possible a wider measure of self-government than Durham had contemplated, and the adoption by the USA of an expansive policy under the presidency of Polk made a Canadian settlement more vital. The British concession of responsible government to the mainland colonies of North America in 1847–8 represented a timely realisation that Canada at least could not be retained in any other way. Durham’s idea of local self-government had involved the quasi-presidential rule of an anglicising governor, controlling a wide field of reserved topics, including land policy and tariffs. Canada in the late 1840s evolved a cabinet system explicitly based on Anglo-French partnership, and evading a close definition of local and imperial powers. When the first contentious legislation of the LaFontaine–Baldwin ministry was attacked in the British parliament, Brougham alone quoted Durham, and quoted his view of the ‘war of races’ to criticise the idea of partnership with the French. In fact as early as 1842, when Bagot was forced to admit the French to office, it was clear that Durham’s mixture of autonomy and anglicisation had gone astray. In the Morning Chronicle, Charles Buller was unwise enough to hail the new ministry as the triumph of Durham’s policy. The Times took up the subject:

It is not a little curious, and reflects no great credit on the penetration of the late Lord Durham, to compare the working of the new union of the Canadas, adopted in accordance with his report, with the purposes for which he recommended it.

Subsequent events had not inspired ‘implicit reliance on the predictions of that well known, and certainly very interesting report’. A year later it returned to the theme, blaming Durham for the ‘strange combination of blunders’ by which a union designed to end French influence had given them control of the province.

He it was... who contrived to revive and set the seal upon the worst suspicions of the French Canadians by the same act which conferred upon them an unlimited power of avenging themselves—to unite
the evils of provoking tyranny with those of the most dangerous
concession.

Yet few of the many detailed press discussions of the problem of colonial
self-government in the 1840s mentioned Durham's views. Perhaps the
reason was revealed by a journalist reviewing one of Sir Francis Head's
books in 1846, who said of Durham's Canadian mission, without any
trace of hostility: 'It has been hinted that mental malady afflicted
his Lordship at this period of his political career, and it is but fair to
think so.'

How then did the Report become an imperial symbol? Its rediscovery
came late in the nineteenth century. Historians trained in the Whig
tradition found in its clear and vigorous style an equivalent of Magna
Charta for the empire. Durham's career, both heroic and tragic, added
to the Report's stature as an imperial testament. Moreover, with hint-
sight it was easy to minimise the theoretical weaknesses of Durham's
ideas and credit him with prophecy. Irish and South African problems
seemed to give the Report a continuing relevance. In the latter case,
those who wished to anglicise the Afrikaners and those who wished to
reconcile them could equally appeal to his authority. The South African
crisis of the 1890s marked, however, a rediscovery, if not a rescue, of a
largely forgotten document: the republication of the Report in 1902
was the first reprinting since 1839. This process is notably evident in
the case of John X. Merriman of Cape Colony. Although born in
England, Merriman had opposed British intervention in South African
affairs from his entry into its politics in the 1870s, and consequently
disapproved of the Anglo-Boer War. In 1900 he argued strongly in
favour of clemency for Cape rebels who had risen in support of the
Afrikaner armies, and he began to read about the Canadian rebellions
of the 1830s in order to seek precedents. Admiration for Durham's
policy led him to read the Report, finding in the picture of communal
hostility 'much that applies to this country, but much that is so
different'. He was struck by the fact that he should have known so
little about it.

Lord D's Report is, of course, the Magna Charta of Colonial Govern-
ment, much talked about but seldom if ever read or looked at, and
I say this with a guilty blush as being a very tardy reader myself of
this particular document.

In 1902 he observed that Elgin and Durham had established the British
Commonwealth. 'Yet how few even know their names?'

Within a few years this complaint could no longer be made. A
mammoth biography by Reid in 1906 and a magisterial edition of the
Report by Lucas in 1912 enshrined Durham firmly in the imperial
pantheon. The report thus became the symbol of the empire’s success in solving one of its problems, namely relations with the colonies of settlement. In the twentieth century, it had less relevance than ever. For the empire as a whole, the central problem was with non-European peoples, to whom Durham’s anglocentric remedies could hardly be applied. In Canada, national status was replaced by cultural partnership as the major issue, and here the Report became a positive embarrassment. Historians’ references gradually faded from the passionate to the merely polite, a process which ironically helped to shield the Durham myth from basic challenge. Consequently ‘what ought to be known as the great Durham illusion’ continued to be enshrined in general histories and respected textbooks. Probably the myth was a benevolent one in the twentieth-century empire, stressing some of its more liberal elements and incidentally making its demise less painful. Now that the British empire is all but an episode of the past, we should discard the Durham myth in order to seek more realistic perspectives on the imperial experience.

NOTES


3. C. R. Sanderson (ed.) The Arthur Papers (1957–9) i 274; for Head The Times 28 Aug 1869; Lord Esher The girlhood of Queen Victoria (1912) i 280; New Lord Durham 78; The life and times of Henry Lord Brougham (1871) ii 502 Durham to Brougham 7 Dec 1827; Reid Life and letters ii 143–4 Durham to Ellice, 27 Aug 1837; Spectator 17 Nov 1838, 1084–5; Morning Herald 11 Feb 1839.


7. H. E. Carlisle (ed.) A selection from the correspondence of Abraham Hayward, Q.C. (1866) i 68–70; Leeds Mercury 8 Dec 1838; Globe 8 Feb; Examiner 10 Feb, 90–1; Manchester Guardian 9 Feb 1839; P. Burroughs (ed.) The colonial reformers and Canada 1830–1849 (1969) 128; Morning Chronicle 9 Feb; Leeds Mercury 16 Feb; Morning Herald 9, 11 Feb; Morning Post 9, 18 Feb 1839.


11. Craig ix; Lucas π 116; Coupland xlviii; O. MacDonagh A pattern of government growth 1800–60 (1961) 135, 131; Graham Concise history of the British empire 152; J. Ritchie Punishment and profit: the reports of Commissioner John Bigge (1970); Lucas π 202, 16 and cf. 3PD xlvii 3 Jun 1839, 1254–75. Durham's comments on Canadian economic backwardness were cited by The Times 12 Aug 1848, and in a speech by Elgin, Daily News 11 Jan 1855.


13. P. Lewsen (ed.) Selections from the correspondence of J. X. Merriman (1960–69) nr 196–9. When the Report appeared in 1839, Abraham Hayward, a lawyer and journalist sympathetic to Durham, noted that it was thought to be 'well-written, but all well-informed people say that it is superficial and one-sided'. This verdict remains closer to a balanced judgement than Graham's recent claim that the Report was 'a great, if not the greatest landmark in the history of the British Empire'. (Carlisle Correspondence of Hayward 68–70; Graham 153.)
5 ‘Anti-imperialism’ in the mid-nineteenth century and the nature of the British empire, 1820-70

In the first years of the twentieth century devotees of Empire were fond of contrasting their own interest in the subject with the neglect allegedly shown half a century before. Historians at that period did not always overburden their work with evidence, and it is possible that this self-congratulatory phase might have died away, leaving little mark on received ideas of imperial history. However, in 1924 a Danish scholar, C. A. Bodelsen, published one of the earliest historical works which felt bound to apologise for the length of its footnotes. With a wealth of evidence, Bodelsen presented a neat pattern in British attitudes: in the first half of the century, Utilitarians and Free Traders wished to get rid of the colonies, and their dominant opinion was only checked by the ‘Colonial Reformers’. Around 1870 the tide turned in favour of a full flood of late nineteenth-century ‘Imperialism’—a term which Bodelsen confessed to find vague, itself a comment on the exact nature of ‘Anti-Imperialism’. Few of his contemporaries chose to quibble. Bodelsen’s picture chimed in with a British cultural trait which disliked dogma and took a perverse pride in attributing the country’s greatest achievements to a muddle of happy accidents. Bodelsen’s scholarly equipment was impressive enough to lead subsequent historians to accept his findings, so that in the writing of imperial history ‘much has rested on the work of a previous “authority” whose study was also derivative’. For thirty years his viewpoint held the field unchallenged, and even fifty years later its traces survive. The attack has been fierce on several fronts. In 1953 Gallagher and Robinson pointed out that a supposedly ‘anti-imperialist’ generation has collected a remarkable array of new territories for their discounted empire. Galbraith in 1961 pointed to the mythological nature of the main categories of Bodelsen’s argument. Stembridge in 1965 showed how a single celebrated outburst by Disraeli required a seventeen-page commentary to appreciate its full significance. A more sustained attack came in 1969 from Shaw, directed less against Bodelsen than at the contemporary polemic which Wakefield, Buller and
Molesworth levelled at the colonial system, and which Bodelsen himself had tended to accept as neutral evidence. Even so, there is still both need and scope for revision. First, the criticisms of Bodelsen’s case have rarely extended to his method of argument. Not only were his examples highly selective, but he was uncritical in his use of evidence, accepting the testimony of men attacking their enemies, and sweeping into his ‘anti-imperialist’ net men who wished to modify the colonial relationship or who merely feared rather than hoped that it would not continue. Second, the need to counter his deep-rooted myth of anti-imperialism has tended to prevent historians from explaining how the British thought of their ties with settler communities overseas, and why they wished to maintain them. When the popular interpretation of that relationship is analysed, it becomes clear that there was more to ‘getting rid of the colonies’ than occasional outbursts of irritation could indicate. Third, there is a case for attacking the myth of anti-imperialism root and branch, for it is a powerful and interlocking component of the belief that the year 1870 saw a dramatic change in feelings towards the empire, its expansion and its organic union.

Bodelsen argued, plausibly enough, that most Englishmen expected the colonies ultimately to become independent. He extended the argument to claim that the colonies would become independent at precisely the moment they might start to offer Britain some return on their investment, and that this led many to conclude that the moment of separation should be brought forward to cut the national losses.

The belief that separation was the ultimate and inevitable destiny of the colonies and the realization that their retention at present imposed heavy burdens on the mother country were the two chief premises which led to the conclusion that the colonies were not worth keeping. Certainly the belief that the colonies would ultimately become independent—whatever that term may mean—was widespread. But it does not follow from this that any substantial body of Englishmen wished to hasten the process—indeed, John Dunmore Lang argued that the universal admission that separation would ultimately occur was a device for postponing immediate consideration of the question. It is difficult to understand British resistance to the demands of the Lower Canadian Assembly in the 1830s if that were really the case. At Christmas 1837 The Times did briefly ask ‘whether the retention of Lower Canada by the open and unaided exercise of military force would or would not be worth the attendant cost and trouble’. But that was mainly an expression of pent-up fury at the unseasonable revolt. It made it very clear, however, that the question was not to be answered at the behest of what it had regarded as ‘a perverse faction of ill-intentioned foreigners’ in revolt against Britain.
Had the proposition been put to us four or five years ago, to fling Lower Canada overboard altogether, as a dependency more expensive and troublesome than beneficial, we hardly know what our answer might have been, always securing the rights and interests and consulting the inclinations of our dear native countrymen in the Upper Province, and retaining the single fortress of Quebec. Now the time has gone past for such discussions. The national honour is involved in the necessity of crushing the wanton and audacious attack on the integrity of the realm.

Thus independence in the abstract was hedged around with almost impossible conditions, and when it became a practical issue it was branded as treason. 6

With the introduction of free trade in the late 1840s, attitudes to the colonies might have been expected to change. Cobden certainly believed they should, for 'under the regime of Free Trade, Canada is not a whit more ours than is the great Republic'. Yet in public he felt it necessary to deny that he was a separatist. He warned against 'the idea, industriously spread about that something tending to the dismemberment of the empire is involved in giving your colonial fellow-subjects self-government', wishing rather to keep the colonies 'by their affections'. Cobden had never flinched at voicing unpopular views, but even he steered clear of a direct challenge to the prejudices of empire. The farthest he would go in public was to talk of a gradual evolution towards 'a mere thread of connexion, politically speaking'. Even this was too much for the Morning Chronicle which observed that there were 'two ways of advocating colonial self-government', differentiated by fundamentally opposed motives. It was possible to support colonial autonomy as the easiest way to be rid of a nuisance, but it was equally possible to believe

that this is the way to keep them, and that a great empire is no childish vanity, but a source of substantial blessings, material and moral. . .

Cobden's motives were suspect, and not widely shared. The Spectator insisted that although 'a numerous party' wished to abandon Canada and the other colonies, they were not a majority. The Nonconformist deprecates a war for Canada, but admitted that 'the national pride somewhat revolts from the thoughts of dismembering the British empire'. Another middle-class observer, Roebuck, presented a similar assessment of public feeling.

The people of this country have never acquiesced in the opinion that our colonies are useless; and they look with disfavour upon any scheme of policy which contemplates the separation of the mother
country from the colonies. For this opinion, the people have been seldom able to render an adequate reason; nor have they been accustomed to describe with accuracy the way in which the colonies prove useful to us; still they believe them beneficial, and so believing, they regard with suspicion those who roundly propose 'to cut the connexion'.

Roebuck argued that political opposition to the colonies came from those who favoured economy and had associated them with the discarded imperial trading system. He believed that a combination of self-government and Free Trade would meet the requirements of both sides. On the whole the economical took second place to the emotional. The Montreal movement for annexation to the USA in 1849 received a stern rebuke from the Morning Chronicle. It strongly denied the people of England were resigned to the loss of Canada. 'England is not in the habit of considering any relinquishment of territory to be “inevitable”, unless she has previously satisfied herself that it is intrinsically wise and advantageous.' Furthermore, 'even were the material, commercial, and political expediency of the transfer perfectly demonstrable, there are popular prejudices existing on the subject which it would be a work of time and difficulty to overcome'. Most of the press disapproved of the call for annexation, and even those who manifested less alarm could see the obstacles. 'The pride and prejudices of the English nation are unquestionably against it.'

Indeed, it is possible to discern, long before 1870, a deep pride in the empire. Some even saw in it divine handiwork. 'That an Empire ... so extraordinary in its growth, and so exquisitely varied in its structure, is the result of blind chance, it would be impious to assert'. In 1835 Gladstone felt that

no man, especially if he bear the name and recognize the obligations of an Englishman, can exercise his thought upon the subject of our Colonial Empire, without being forcibly struck by the amount of moral responsibility which it entails upon us.

Fourteen years later he reminded parliament of 'the work which Providence has assigned to this country in laying the foundations of mighty states in different parts of the world'. It is true that Gladstone 'regarded our colonial connection as one of duty rather than as one of advantage' but he was a man to whom duty never called in vain. Goldwin Smith's challenge was ignored when he asked those who argued that 'Providence' had given Britain colonies to prove their claim.

Others took a more secular pride in their imperial destiny. Even a writer who despised 'clap-trap' appeals to imperial sentiment confessed he was
not insensible to the majestic spectacle of a people extending over so vast a portion of the earth's surface, with all its diversities of climate, and yet preserving a certain unity of name, of language, of arts and literature, laws, institutions and interests.

Even doubters bore testimony to the widespread feeling of pride in Empire. Goldwin Smith referred sarcastically to 'that "Empire", at the thought of which the heart of every Englishman must swell within him' and the Manchester Guardian referred to 'that glow of self-complacency felt by inhabitants of the empire on which the sun never sets'. But the Manchester Guardian's objection was less to the colonies than the system they had represented. 'Deprived of the great objections to which our colonial policy has hitherto been exposed' it wrote in 1850

we can now look with pleasure on the high destiny which this exercise of our national energy develops [sic], of founding and rearing young communities of our own race over the whole world, on terms equally honourable and advantageous, both politically and commercially, to them and to ourselves.

Here was something deeper and more calculating than profit and loss. Thus the Liberal Daily News could write in 1864:

The pride we feel in our colonies is of a nobler kind than that which a farmer takes in showing his stacks or herds, or a landowner in contemplating his broad acres. We follow with sympathetic interest the fortunes of the countries we have settled, because their people are of our flesh and blood, partakers of our civilisation, and unfolding in new and strange circumstances the character which they have derived from ourselves.

'We are all proud of our Empire', said The Times in 1867 'and we all regard the Colonies and dependencies as the various members of such a family as earth never saw yet.' These statements, from influential and representative sources, offer their own comment on the claim that free-trading Englishmen regarded ' "Empire" as a foreign joss, whose worshippers, where they were not simply benighted, were assumed to be the sinister agents of the forces of wrong'. There were even those who actively hoped to extend the empire. 'For many years past', lamented the Manchester Guardian in 1849, 'but with less success in former times than lately, we have attempted to check that strong national passion for colonies.' Even so it had to remind its readers that

There appear no sufficient advantages to warrant the extravagant notions which have for so long prevailed in this country, in favour of new dependencies.
Had the British simply and abruptly wished to ‘get rid’ of their colonies and dependencies regardless of the ensuing problems they would have had opportunities enough to part with them. That they did not do so must be attributed largely to the much stronger and deeper public desire to keep them. Hence some of the contemporary accusations that politicians wished to get rid of the empire reflect not widespread separatism but the reverse—the belief that branding opponents as anti-colonial would do them political harm. Melbourne thought that the separation of Canada might not be of material loss to the country, but the blow to the national honour ‘certainly would be fatal to the character and existence of the Administration under which it took place’. Sir Edmund Head, as Governor-General of Canada, felt that no minister would dare to propose a separation in peace, while the country would not tolerate the humiliation of losing colonies in war. Edward Watkin proclaimed his belief that

the people of England feel a deep attachment to their Empire, and that not even a barren rock, over which the flag of England had once waved, would be abandoned by them without a cogent and sufficient reason.

Even this statement may have over-estimated the rational elements of the imperial drive. An attempt in 1865 to withdraw from the interior of the Gambia was found to involve ‘disgraceful disregard of our responsibilities’ and Britain continued to be responsible for the affairs of an unhealthy and unprofitable river valley. This sentiment of empire not only made virtually impossible any surrender of territory, but for long hindered even reasonable reform. Progressive voices frequently complained at this irrational drag on measures designed to strengthen the empire. The Spectator in 1837 argued for loosening the colonial tie, retaining ‘but a nominal empire over them and friendly commercial relations’. However, this would

gall our pride; and we shall be told by the great men who rule this empire, that it is degrading to hint at such a proceeding.

Two years later the Colonial Gazette similarly complained:

There seems to be something in the term ‘Colonial dependence’ peculiarly gratifying to national vanity.\textsuperscript{11}

Where then does this leave ‘the rising tide of Separatism’? Without doubt the sentiment existed, although it had few public exponents. In analysing it there is a need to remember two distinctions, one between a reaction and an opinion, the other between a prediction and a wish. The classic example of a reaction was Disraeli’s outburst that the Maritimes—not, as often assumed, all the colonies—were ‘millstones’.
Similarly while many expected the colonies to separate, fewer actively wished it. The Nova Scotian T. C. Haliburton in 1824 regarded annexation to the United States as inevitable, but added, ‘I am only expressing thoughts not wishes.’ Not all historians have appreciated the distinction. In 1848 Sir James Graham told the diarist Charles Greville ‘that Canada must soon be independent’. A modern biographer has interpreted this as a wish to ‘make Canada independent’.

The pessimistic and irritated view of the colonial connection was probably at its height in the late 1840s, and largely confined to Canada. Francis Hink's regretted that ‘an opinion prevails rather extensively among certain classes of the people of England’ that the colonies would soon separate and would be no loss. A London merchant warned in 1849 that Montreal Tories could not choose ‘a more inopportune moment’ to threaten separation in the hope of gaining concessions. Many would welcome Canadian independence ‘as a happy chance of relief from a burdensome expense’ while ‘at the Clubs and in Political Circles, people would barely listen with complaisance to anything about Canada’. But evidence of this anti-colonial feeling could sometimes be useful as an excuse for governmental inaction. A much-quoted letter from Lord Grey to Lord Elgin in Canada falls into this category. Grey warned of ‘a party wh. is becoming very numerous’ who sought ‘to get rid of our Colonies representing them to be merely a burthen & incumbrance to us’. This policy was receiving ‘too much encouragement from persons who occupy a prominent position in public life’ and was worsened ‘by the fever for economy wh. runs so high just now’. Grey was explaining to Elgin why it was impossible for the government to provide a loan for an inter-colonial railway, after the North American colonies themselves had agreed to an earlier British request to secure the loan by accepting an increased duty on timber imports, which would have removed the colonial preference in the British market. In a difficult political situation Elgin and the Canadian government had volunteered a considerable sacrifice, only to be left in the lurch by the imperial government. It is scarcely surprising that Grey made the most of anti-colonial feeling in his explanations. Grey never took a charitable view of opponents — notably Gladstone — nor was he an easy colleague in government. Thus when, again on the subject of the railway, he imputed separatist tendencies to leading Peelites and some of his cabinet colleagues, a certain scepticism is called for.

Exaggeration of this kind led to reciprocal misunderstandings. More than one observer thought that separatist talk in the colonies stemmed from a mistaken belief that the British themselves wished to sever the connection: certainly the Canadian Annexation Movement was to collapse as soon as British disapproval was known.

In fact even in 1849, the Manchester Guardian noted, not altogether
approvingly, that there were forty-six colonies ‘not one of which would any important party in this country be willing to abandon’. In the next decade the success of responsible government in Canada and its introduction to the fast-growing Australian colonies meant fewer colonial crises in British politics, and fewer still which centrally involved the principle of colonial government. ‘The colonies are so well governed and behave so well that nobody thinks about them’, commented Cornwall Lewis in 1853. When Goldwin Smith opened his attack on the colonial connection in 1862, The Times greeted it as a fallacy which appeared from time to time, and one which had ‘enjoyed almost as much favour as the projects for general disarmament or for equalizing the political rights of the sexes’. Significantly, The Times estimated that ‘of those who once had misgivings as to the policy of retaining Canada, nine out of ten are by this time convinced of their error’ and were prepared to help the province settle her own requirements ‘either for maintaining her allegiance to this country, or for working out her independence, whenever she is able and willing to do so’. This was something rather more subtle than a simple reflex desire to get rid of the colonies, a reaction which The Times regarded as something belonging to the past.\footnote{14}

Certainly much of the vocal opposition to colonies which had existed belonged to an earlier period, and much of it was directed less at the colonial connection itself than at the abuses it was supposed to foster. In 1836 Cobden had listed the colonies, with the navy, army, church and Corn Laws as ‘impurities’ which were ‘merely accessories to our aristocratic government’. He repeatedly criticised the financial burden of the British garrison in Canada and warned of the danger it created of war with the United States. Opponents certainly did not regard radical opposition to the colonies as an expression of theoretical views of the imperial structure.

It is easy to see that the dislike of colonies is in most of these men a mere pendant to the abhorrence of armies, or of any force or instrument in the state which shall not be under the direct control of the ‘democracy’.

Francis Hincks argued that abandoning the colonies would probably not save the cost of a single regiment, and it hardly mattered where the soldiers were stationed.

In fact the Canadian garrison was not only expensive, but twice in the nineteenth century the need to maintain large forces there to deal with an American problem hampered Britain in dealing with European crises. The North American colonies also carried a stigma of unpopularity from the timber duties, which enabled inferior colonial timber to compete with supplies from the Baltic. Consequently ‘it is no
wonder that people wish to get rid of the Canadas and the tax at the same time'. The colonial relationship hardly seemed a fair bargain. Canada 'furnishes nests for the scions of the aristocracy, and the timber which it sends us in exchange, furnishes nests for bugs'. The popular belief that the colonies were maintained in the interests of the aristocracy 'as a field of patronage for their younger sons' was reinforced by the fact that colonial governors were paid at rates current for public officers in Britain, while state governors in the USA were paid according to notions of republican simplicity.15

In 1849 The Times reacted very strongly to this viewpoint. Cobden might find it convenient to dismiss the colonies as 'a Ministerial job' but most educated people had grown up with the notion that they were 'almost indispensable to the commerce, the power, and especially the glory of this empire'. Although the foundation of such arguments had been exploded, they regarded the colonies as 'an existing fact' and while they did not dispute 'the economical reasons now urged for abolishing that fact, they think it the safer course to maintain and preserve an existing dominion'. This sentiment, held by 'a large class at home', might be mistaken, but it was patriotic rather than self-seeking in intent.

We will venture to say that of those who would now hold up their hands in favour of retaining colonial supremacy at almost any cost, not one man in twenty has the least prospect of patronage, or preferment, or any other boon a Government can offer.

Lord Grey wrote in 1853 of the common belief that the colonies were maintained as a source of patronage: 'It is impossible to conceive a greater delusion'.16

Not everyone agreed that the colonies were useless, and that 'discarding them would be a saving of a few millions a year'. Fewer still believed that such 'sordid and miserable economy' would be sufficient reason for disposing of them. The Manchester Guardian warned that reduction of expenditure was not 'an object to be attained at all risks and at all costs'. While it was convinced that an extension of colonial self-government 'with a view to future independence' — not, be it noted, the indiscriminate severing of the colonial connection: 'we are not speaking of abrupt separation from the mother country, but of prospective independence' — was an economical step,

yet, if we saw either danger or ignominy in this concession we would never advocate it for the sake of paring down the taxes.

The Edinburgh Review, one of Bodelsey's chief 'separatist' organs, felt that colonial self-government involved 'nobler questions than can be disposed of by the amount of a salary of a colonial governor or the per-
quisesite of a colonial secretary'. In fact the cost analysis criticism of the colonial connection as such made little headway, although it added to pressures for economy in colonial administration, which was a different matter. On the one hand, it was too materialist an intrusion into an emotional subject, while on the other it made the error of predicting ruin for an obviously thriving country. Thus W. R. Greg, himself a former writer for the Anti-Corn Law League, reproved Cobden in 1852 for his alarms. Cobden himself had helped to double national wealth and halve national taxation: he could hardly now insist that the colonial burden was unbearable.  

Despite his occasional protestations that 'anti-separatist' views existed, Bodelsen created a false impression that separatism was the prevalent feeling. That it was much more isolated may be seen from further examination of his evidence. There were indeed 'separatists', but their views were not widely shared. Lord Ashburton certainly wished to be 'well rid' of Canada, and quoted the Duke of Wellington's Peninsular dictum, that it was better to leave by the front door like gentlemen than to be kicked out. But Ashburton was clear-sighted enough to see that the process would not be easy. 'I admit however that it is not easy to be well rid of them' and his hostility was directed at opinions on the value 'not of the colonies, but of the sovereignty over the colonies'. His views were not widely shared. Melbourne explained to the young Queen that Ashburton had adopted the "fashionable theory" that colonies should be abandoned as soon as they became restive. This struck the prime minister as tantamount to inviting them to rebel and throw off their masters. "And a very dangerous thing to declare," Lord Melbourne observed.' Ashburton's views were coloured by events in Canada in the 1830s. So too were those of Ellenborough, who in 1839 had preferred 'Independence open and avowed' for Canada to 'Independence in disguise'. When he repeated this view in the House of Lords in 1854, The Times dismissed it as 'sarcasm': as Governor-General of India, Ellenborough had made large and unwelcome annexations in barbarous frontier districts, and he could hardly be taken seriously in proposing to expel the civilised Canadians. The Spectator was less amused: 'strip England of her dependencies' and she would cease to be a leading Power—a sentiment which conventional historiography would confine to the later nineteenth century.  

The vulnerability of Canada during the American Civil War generated one other notable separatist, Goldwin Smith. Bodelsen cited Smith's own claims that most people agreed with him, and linked him with 'the leading members of the Manchester School (thus exercising a considerable indirect influence on the Liberal party)'. What Smith in fact claimed was that among the 'few people' who thought about the
colonies, there was a general feeling 'that the destiny of the colonies was independence'. This does not amount to a claim that public opinion was on his side. Nor would such a claim have been justified. A particularly significant counter-attack was mounted by C. B. Adderley. Adderley's dissent was significant, for his arguments on imperial defence were similar to Smith's and just as powerfully expressed, but his conclusions were diametrically opposite. 'The question is not of separation, but of sounder relations'. Permanent friendship involved a fair and equal relationship. Adderley admired 'the force and ability' of Smith's letters on the empire, 'though I deplore his conclusions'. Far from having widespread support, when Smith argued that Canada belonged to an American not a British orbit 'he touches upon a theme that will raise against him the opinion of the community in general'. This did not mean that the British did not resent Canada's protective tariff or, particularly, its failure to reform its militia law during the American Civil War. Newcastle complained to the Governor-General of Canada, that the defeat of the Militia Bill of 1862 had

succeeded in producing on this side the water a feeling which two months ago had no other existence than in their imaginations and in the clever but eccentric brain of Goldwin Smith.

But this feeling reflected not a desire to sever the connection so much as a belief that it was strong enough to bear some 'plain-speaking'.

At least two men from Bodelsen’s list of separatists, Joseph Hume and Lord Brougham, had simply despairs of Canada in the eighteen-thirties but later became reconciled to its position as a self-governing colony. Neither had any larger 'anti-colonial' theory, although Brougham was probably influenced by his studies of the thirteen American colonies. Bodelsen cited Brougham’s statement of 1840 that the connection with Canada was valueless, without adding his disclaimer made in 1849 that Melbourne had convinced him there was no precedent for a powerful state to surrender a colony. Bodelsen labelled Hume a separatist but did not attempt to reconcile this with his own description of Hume’s attempt in 1831 to have nineteen colonial members included in the Reform Bill. By 1849 Hume too was expressing his satisfaction with the state of the colonies.

Bodelsen was similarly selective in his treatment of the Colonial Office. It is certainly true that several leading officials expected the settler colonies to become independent in the long run, although even here there is a need for careful definition of terms – but they never offered advice designed to hasten that development. James Stephen, the most unambiguous 'separatist', not only confined his pessimism to Canada but expressed great anxiety lest there should be any official reference to the severance of the connection. In a private diary which
he kept in 1846, Stephen wrote 'Well Canada has nearly lasted my time. Would we were well rid of it!' When Lord Cathcart accepted the Governor-Generalship, Stephen wondered: 'Will he be the last we shall ever send, or the penultimate?' But Stephen at that time was feeling the strain of his Colonial Office work, from which he was shortly to retire on health grounds. In common with others interested in the colonies, his considered opinions were more complex than his irritated reactions. Commenting on a plan for a British North American federation in 1837, Stephen wrote:

We are acting on the assumption that between colonial dependence, & national independence, there is no resting place or middle point. This I do not believe.

The only danger in such a union was that it would

place the Brit.: North American Provinces, rather in a Federative than in a Colonial relation to Gt. Britain — a change, which it is conceived, would really tend to maintain rather than impair the integrity of the Empire, and the honor of the Crown, even if it should arrive...

which he doubted. In fact by 1846 it was the Province of Canada which 'appears to me to have shaken off or laid aside the Colonial relation to this Country and to have become, in everything but the name, a distinct State' only loosely controlled by Britain. Four years later he returned to his 'federative' view of Anglo-Canadian relations, and in 1858 expressed his hope that 'the federal compact' with all the colonies should last for ever. True, he predicted that 'Canada and our native dependencies' would eventually insist 'on being as independent in form and in name as they are already in truth and in reality'. It is true too that he hoped no one would resist such a separation, but he denounced as 'a pestilent heresy' the notion that the colonies of settlement were worthless burdens.21

Stephen's successor as civil service head of the Colonial Office was Herman Merivale. Bodelsen used a form of guilt-by-association, suggesting that his attack on the old colonial system led him 'to use language which laid him open to the charge of favouring Separatism'. Even so, elsewhere Bodelsen had to guy his own argument, branding Merivale as 'one of the so-called Separatists', and admit that he denied that 'the attainment of domestic freedom is inconsistent with a continued dependence on the imperial sovereignty'. Merivale argued rather that a nominal connection based on sentiment and a common crown might last 'longer than mere considerations of advantage would have upheld it'. Selective quotation may as reasonably label Merivale an 'imperialist' as a separatist.
May we not figure to ourselves, scattered thick as stars over the surface of this earth, communities of citizens owning the name of Britons, bound by allegiance to a British sovereign, and uniting heart and hand in maintaining the supremacy of Britain on every shore which her unconquered flag can reach?\textsuperscript{22}

The Colonial Office did, however, contain one separatist. Henry Taylor was a curious figure, almost certainly the only man who was ever considered both for the governorship of Upper Canada and the position of Poet Laureate. He declined to become Permanent Under-Secretary in succession to Stephen, and—despite Bodelsen’s attempt to boost his importance—there is no reason to think his influence extended beyond the West Indian department of the Colonial Office. It was not the West Indies he wished to part with, but Canada. When he expressed this opinion to Grey in 1852, he admitted that it was a subject ‘which you must have considered much more elaborately than I have had occasion to do’. In 1864 he warned Newcastle that the North American colonies were ‘a sort of damnosa haereditas’ and he expressed similar views to Sir Frederic Rogers, Merivale’s successor. Rogers is an interesting example of Bodelsen’s habit of selective quotation. True, he largely agreed ‘in the desire to shake off all responsibly governed colonies’ and thus in North America he preferred to abandon them all rather than be ‘left with a pitiful remanet’—Prince Edward Island or Newfoundland. But Rogers felt that Britain’s relationship with Canada involved a defence obligation which it would be ‘chicken-hearted’ to abandon in a crisis. Nothing would be worse, in his opinion, than to fight a war for ‘a colony which is no good for us’, and to fight it against the United States at that. ‘Yet somehow I would not wish England to refrain from doing so; for England would not be great, courageous, successful England if she did.’ Even Taylor wanted only a ‘preparatory policy’, recognising that ‘some self-sacrifice is required of this country for a time’. The frequency with which the Colonial Office was charged with wishing to get rid of the empire indicates the unpopularity of the clerks rather than of the colonies. When Palmerston used the jibe in 1861, he received a sharp reply from the Duke of Newcastle.

You speak of some supposed theoretical Gentlemen in the Colonial Office who wish to get rid of all Colonies as soon as possible.—I can only say that if there are such they have never ventured to open their opinions to me...\textsuperscript{23}

It seems clear that Bodelsen’s picture of British attitudes to the colonies was not only unbalanced but involved dangers of over-simpli-
fication. By and large politically aware Englishmen did not wish to sever their connection with colonial territories overseas, many welcomed extensive changes in the nature of the relationship, and perhaps most expected that it would eventually wither away. It is therefore necessary to move away from Bodelsen’s cloudy categories and ask a more fundamental question, how exactly did the British think of that ‘connection’ with the colonies? Was it a definable and mechanical link which could be snapped off at will? The question carried no problems for Buller and Wakefield. The colonial connection, indeed the imperial power itself, was a back-room functionary in the Colonial Office, who embodied ‘all the mother-country which really exercises supremacy, and really maintains connexion with the vast and widely-scattered colonies of Britain’. But the elaborate vagueness of their plans to supply Mr Mothercountry’s place were an index of the superficiality of their analysis. Was there in fact no link at all? Was it true that to call a colony a ‘possession’ was ‘a fatally deceptive misnomer’, a relic of ‘the barbarity of feudal times’? Or was it a class conspiracy, the aristocratic plot denounced by the Chartist Bronterre O’Brien?

This faction talks of OUR colonies. They lie, the vagabonds. We have no colonies: our aristocracy and merchants possess colonies all over the world, but the people of England,—the real, veritable people of England do not possess a sod of ground in their own country,—much less colonies in any other.

Analyses in concrete terms might well suggest that there was no connection between Britain and the colonies at all. Such subjects however are more often thought of in emotive terms and, indeed, as the success of responsible government became more obvious in Canada and Australia, even conservatives took pride in the paradox that ‘the connection between them and the mother country is stronger by a silken thread than by an iron chain’.

Two widely used images—the imperial solar system and the mother country and children—shared a common element of an invisible but unbreakable link. It is striking that these images should have been used, to the virtual exclusion of metaphors from commerce which could have been built on the economic links of empire. A single scheme to treat the colonies as shareholders in a joint-stock company was undeniably eccentric: as Churchill was to remark, the empire was a family, not a syndicate.

There were certainly dangers in such imagery. Homersham Cox claimed that the American war of independence had arisen largely from the ‘absurd’ notion that the thirteen colonies were ‘disobedient children’. John Stuart Mill varied the simile, likening England to ‘an ill-brought-up elder brother, who persists in tyrannising over the
younger ones from mere habit'. Most, however, agreed in principle that 'colonies, like other children, when arrived at a certain growth, should be allowed to shift for themselves' and James Stephen whimsically wrote to Sir George Arthur in Van Diemen's Land:

Be good children & dutiful & quarrel with us as little as you can help & we will be very tender & considerate parents. Young folks like you will grow big & unruly & we have at least learnt that it is to no purpose to use the rod . . . after our children have grown to men's estate.

Opponents of responsible government argued that it was 'idle and ridiculous' to deduce from the simile that the son

on attaining maturity, is to throw off all submission and control . . .
A good son, moreover, never, while the parent lives, does throw off duty or submission to the commands of a parent . . .

Others too regretted the passing of imperial parental authority, and at least reserved for themselves the right of deciding when a colony had reached adult status. This claim however was strongly contested by Australia's John Dunmore Lang. He was perfectly happy to abide by the general analogy.

As every human being who attains maturity of age must pass through the three successive states of infancy, of youth, and of manhood, so must every colony, and as the infant must be nourished and cherished, and the youth guided and governed by his parents, so must the colony.

However, Lang insisted that the analogy went further, for 'there is a time when the youth is no longer to be under tutors and governors'. English opponents of responsible government comforted themselves with the assurance that it was difficult 'to decide in the case of a colony when maturity is reached'. But Lang insisted that all law recognised an age beyond which the parent had no right to exercise control. No young man was required to leave his father's roof, and if he chose to remain after attaining his majority it was 'a matter for private arrangement between his father and himself'. The principle remained that

the young man is constituted the sole judge as to whether he shall assume and exercise his entire freedom and independence or not.

Thus Lang used imperial family imagery to prove that it was up to the colony, not the imperial power, to control the pace of its own constitutional advance.23

In other colonists the identification with children produced some curiously self-abasing attitudes, particularly noticeable among loyalist
Tories in British North America. Much of this stemmed from a feeling of inferiority in status compared with the USA. The Nova Scotian T. C. Haliburton in 1824 predicted the annexation of his province to the republic, and referred to it as 'the moment of our manhood'. Canadian Tories actively espoused annexation in 1849, one group calling for 'manly determination' in breaking with 'the mother country'. Others however felt that the Canadian Tories, who had lost office with the introduction of responsible government, were turning from one womb to another. One observer noted that there was

little self-reliance amongst the advocates of annexation; having lost their old nurse, they would fain have the leading-strings handed over to the United States.

In London, The Times saw annexation in the same way. 'Congress would merely relieve the British Parliament in the care of a very troublesome child'. An American newspaper insisted that the Canadas 'must be regularly dismissed by their old parent before we can consent to adopt them'. When the annexation movement collapsed, another journalist sneered that the Canadian Tories had 'again sought refuge at their mother's apron string', and resumed their ultra-loyal stand. When, in 1889, the Canadian prime minister, Sir John Abbott, was challenged to explain his part in the movement, he boldly claimed that 'there was not a man . . . who had any more serious idea of seeking annexation with the United States than a petulant child who strikes his nurse has of deliberately murdering her'. The same curious imagery had been freely appealed to by Canadian Tories in the late eighteen-forties, bemoaning their loss of Protection in English markets. One complained that they had been 'repudiated by England as her children . . . and placed somewhat in the position of a young man turned out of doors by his father with a sovereign in his pocket'. English Protectionists pretended to be affected by the sad spectacle of Canadian loyalists seeking to join the United States.

Who shall condemn the neglected and long-suffering child that accepts at the hand of a neighbour the sustenance denied at home; and transfers its affection from the foolish parent to the more considerate stranger?

Eventually, in exasperation, The Times flatly told the Tories to find a more dignified way of reciting their complaints. It ridiculed the 'poor foundling left naked on the snows of Canada, unable to walk, deprived of its nurse's hand, and consequently fallen flat on its face', and compared this pastiche with the virtually untaxed prosperity of a province which was drawing an unparalleled stream of migrants from Britain, where 'our real babes' were worse off than 'our metaphorical children'.
Perhaps Montreal sentimentalists were correct in thinking of England as a father withdrawing a son’s allowance, but that did not necessarily entitle them to protest.

If the father in our parallel has a dozen other children to educate and provide for, and if the eldest son is now thirty, the latter ought not to pick a quarrel, call himself a destitute foundling, an orphan, a sprawling babe, or anything of that sort, merely because he no longer receives the same allowance as he did at the University.

Whatever its merits, the family image certainly bit deep. Canada’s Reform leader, Robert Baldwin, roundly denounced one annexationist in 1849, telling him it was ‘impious’ to wish to break with the mother country.  

Overall, the family image was probably a beneficent one, since it provided a framework within which colonial self-government could be accepted as a natural development. In 1850, the Governor-General of Canada, the earl of Elgin, likened the province to a ‘great lubberly boy’ who was ‘too big for the nursery’. He could not afford his own establishment, and it was undesirable that he should be allowed to lodge with his republican elder brothers. Some other room had to be found for him in the imperial household, and that was responsible government. Similarly, in 1854 the Conservative spokesman on colonial affairs, Sir John Pakington, was attacked for wishing ‘to keep our colonial children at the Imperial apron string’.

Instead of treating them as adolescents, and giving them some degree of freedom, he wants to treat them as children; wants to fuss and fidget about their diet, their clothing, and is possessed with a truly parental desire of seeing them do nothing but what is good for them.

The colonists felt ‘that they are too old and mature to walk any longer in leading strings’ and imperial teenagers should be allowed some freedom. It was not the case that the British actively wished their colonies to become independent, but merely that they expected it as an eventual outcome, ‘as surely as infants born yesterday shall grow into men’. As the Daily News said of constitutional stirrings in Australia:

It is an irresistible human instinct which impels men, when arrived at maturity, to leave the paternal hearth and establish a home of their own. It is with nations and with states as with men.  

Family imagery could not only accommodate responsible government, but also regional unions or federations among colonies, which would necessarily widen their autonomy. The Canadian Union of 1841 was proclaimed on the first anniversary of Queen Victoria’s wedding. It was
not a promising analogy. French Canadians protested against 'le mariage forcé', while English critics insisted too that Upper Canada had been dragged to the altar, with chains and manacles for bridal ornaments. 'It was anything but a love-match', admitted one apologist in 1846, but who pointed out that the marriage had turned out well for all that. 'Since they must live together it is better to kiss like ring doves than to snarl like cat and dog.' The image of married offspring leaving the parental home was a common one in a discussion of colonial federations. Robert Gourlay in 1822 urged his country to grant independence to a federated British North America, thus enjoying 'the immortal honour of being the first nation upon earth to do justice to her progeny, – the first truly entitled to the endearing appellation of parent State!' J. A. Roebuck, who campaigned in 1849 for the creation of colonial federations in North America, Australasia, the West Indies and southern Africa, urged that their gradual emancipation from British rule should not be felt as a national slight.

We should feel in this case as a parent feels when a child has reached unto manhood – becomes his own master, forms his own separate household, and becomes in turn, the master of a family.

Visiting Canada in 1861, Anthony Trollope became convinced that Britain should welcome a colonial federation with the status of a separate nation, a 'child-nation'.

There is, I think, no more beautiful sight than that of a mother, still in all the glory of womanhood, preparing the wedding trousseau for her daughter.

In his novels the giving of the daughter of the house in successful matrimony was a common theme. 'So is it that England should send forth her daughters.'

When the first steps towards Canadian Confederation were taken in 1864, the British press welcomed the development as a natural one. 'England is never anxious for her children to throw off their allegiance', but was ready to help them 'as a wise and fostering guide'. Canada was 'the son whom the parent has put forward in the world, who is gradually working himself into the position of the full-grown man' with his parent's guidance and consent. But most frequently the image was feminine. The Leeds Mercury warned that Confederation would bring a new relationship.

We do not say that even then our connection must cease, or that our relative places as mother country and colony must necessarily come to an end. But the relation must be that of a mother to a daughter of full age and independent means.
Thirty years later Kipling expressed the same notion of Canada’s position in the empire:

Daughter am I in my mother’s house
But mistress in my own.\(^{39}\)

The use of family imagery in imperial relations was not without its problems. Apart from ambiguities of gender, there were difficulties in accommodating alien communities like the French Canadians who were inside the empire, or kindred folk like the Americans who were stridently outside it. It might seem unfeeling of Lord Durham to refer to French Canadian disloyalty to ‘the mother country’, but for the fact that the French themselves spoke of England as ‘la Mère Patrie’. The application of family imagery to the United States was embarrassing, for it imputed matricidal tendencies to the independent republic. Although H. C. Allen has used the analogy of a father and son to illustrate the changing relationship over three centuries, contemporaries tended to steer away from it. Americans might uneasily refer to England as ‘our old mother’ and Dickens guiltily to the ‘unnat’ral old parent’, but Americans were loosely thought of as ‘cousins’, a term which indicated blood relationship but left the details vague. Within the imperial framework, however, the imagery seemed capable of almost indefinite elaboration: in Victoria politicians in the early 1850s referred to New South Wales as ‘our “stepmother”’.\(^{39}\)

Despite its logical weaknesses, it seems fair to conclude that the widespread use of analogy from family life in referring to Anglo-colonial relations, suggests that the imperial tie was thought of as something nebulous and pervasive, rather than mechanical and removable. The practical relations between parent and child can alter radically; the blood connection cannot. This raises the question of ‘colonial independence’ in the mid-Victorian context. What was meant by the term, and how was it to be brought about?

The mid-twentieth century has precise ideas both of the terminology and the timetable of independence. A dependent territory passes through an intermediate phase of ‘self-government’, followed, using the procedure of an act of parliament, by a formal handing-over ceremony marking the granting of ‘independence’. It is a mistake to read the same exact meanings into nineteenth-century usage. ‘Independence is the hope of the colonies’, proclaimed The Times in 1865, apparently a trumpeting of mid-Victorian ‘anti-imperialist’ sentiment. But it added, by way of clarification, ‘independence in its present form or, if it must be at some distant day, formal, literal, and absolute self-government’. The Times could even write of a tiny island, ‘As a colony, Prince Edward Island enjoys independence’. Writing in 1862, Goldwin Smith, supposedly the theorist of ‘Separatism’, argued that since Britain had
given Canada 'independence' there was no point in complaining about
the uses Canadians made of it. Thus 'independence' was a loose term,
which equally covered 'responsible government'. Hence the fallacy of
C. A. Bodelsen's classic argument for 'anti-imperialism', that the loss of
control over the settler colonies involved in the concession of responsible
government made the British keener to break the tie altogether. The
reverse was the case: responsible government solved the practical
problems without raising the theoretical ones. George Cornwall Lewis,
who in 1841 dismissed the idea of a self-governing dependency as 'a
contradiction in terms' came to accept by 1849 that responsible govern-
ment could work in practice provided the British accepted that 'pro-
tanto, it is a concession of virtual independence to the colony'. That so
austere an intellectual was prepared to evade a theoretical solution is
a measure of the impotence of 'anti-imperialism'. Elgin argued that
there was 'some fallacy' in the argument that only 'by the severance
of the connexion' could British statesmen free themselves from respon-
sibility for colonial legislation. The British could wash their hands of
such responsibility just as easily by granting a wide measure of local
autonomy. Elgin even expected that Canada would eventually elect
her own Governor-General without ceasing to be part of the empire.
Herman Merivale pointed out that

The epoch of separation is not marked and definite, a necessary
point in the cycle of human affairs, as some theorists have regarded
it.81

It was, however, widely believed that a distant day would arrive when
the connection might finally wither. If a substantial body of men really
had wished to hasten this process, it might be expected that they would
hasten to devise some machinery, some timetable, which would enable
a colony to make the transition through real to legal independence of
Britain. There was no shortage of precedents for colonial independence,
but they were gloomy ones. Thirteen of Britain's colonies, all the main-
land of Spanish America, and the French sugar island of
San Domingo had risen in armed revolt and won their in-
dependence after years of bloodletting. Only Portuguese Brazil had
peacefully drifted off as a result of the split in the ruling dynasty. The
question of Canadian independence was often associated with the
creation of a Canadian monarchy or viceroyalty, under the rule of a
royal prince. This in itself was an elaboration of the 'family' connec-
tion, and one proponent of the plan insisted that even after a grant of
independence Britain might continue to support and assist the new
state. Queen Victoria in 1865 was attracted to the idea of an indepen-
dent Canadian monarchy under a British prince. She recalled that
'dearest Albert had often thought of the colonies for our sons'. Most
men, however, contented themselves with the hope that eventual independence should not be achieved 'by war, but by amicable settlement', 'in a pacific and not hostile manner', through 'an amicable separation'. Roebuck did not wish Canadian independence to come 'before its natural period', but when it did arrive his wish was that

we may separate in peace and goodwill towards one another; that we may voluntarily resign our supervising care, and that the colonies may assume it with our sanction and approval; that no bitterness should result from this new relation, but that reciprocal kindness should beget lasting and reciprocal good-will.

Similarly Gladstone hoped that

instead of the connexion being severed in the midst of bloodshed, as was the case with the United States, it may arise from the natural and acknowledged growth of these communities into States perfectly fitted for self-government and independence, and that after the termination of the political connexion a community of feeling will subsist in a similarity of laws and institutions, and in a close union of affection.92

But how this change was to be carried out was rarely discussed. The Australian patriot, John Dunmore Lang, simply asserted that his fellow countrymen had no need of a second Washington and still less of another Lafayette.

They will only have to declare themselves free, sovereign and independent States, in real earnest, and the thing will be done without further trouble.

But Lang's similes notwithstanding, removing a colony from the empire was not as simple as extracting a tooth. The liquidation of sovereignty would involve practical questions of finance and defence, to say nothing of more fundamental questions of local and international law. Lang did go as far as drawing up a draft declaration of independence for Victoria, in which existing legal obligations were vaguely entrusted to 'the protection of the Sovereign People' but otherwise he seemed more interested in rhetoric. Despite his bravado, Lang's main practical concern was that the British might resist a seizure of independence. He took the precaution of asking John Bright what the British reaction might be expected to be. If Lang had hoped to receive a reassuring reply by selecting the Manchester radical, he had calculated wrongly. Bright declined to give a direct answer to a hypothetical question, but was inclined to think that a declaration of independence by a single colony 'would excite little sympathy probably' although public feeling might
be aroused by a concerted campaign from all the colonies if founded on demonstrable grievances. Like Elgin, Bright saw no need to pursue dramatic solutions when practical alternatives existed.

There is one thing you may have, short of independence, & as good for present purposes. You may have virtual independence such as Canada has, or is gaining. You may have a good Constitution—a free representation—& as good a Govt. as independence could give you. . . .

If he were a colonist, Bright said, he would work for responsible government, and 'wait till time & circumstances provided an opportunity for your start as a free nation without the risk of wrong either to the Colony or to the Mother Country'. England would probably not go to war to keep Australia, but Australia would be unwise to take the risk. It was better to settle for 'the reality of independence, & the name will follow in due time'.

It is striking how little consideration the mid-nineteenth century gave to the question of machinery for making colonies into independent states. The Spectator in January 1838 raised the issue, but quickly argued that a strong man should be given carte blanche to rule Canada. Although proclaiming that there was no alternative to separation, it suggested that a grant of 'complete local self-government' might 'preserve their allegiance for general purposes', and went on to argue that the colonies should send MPs to Westminster. A more thoughtful consideration of the question came from the Leeds Mercury, which denied the right, feasibility or utility of a British reconquest of rebellious Canada, and went on to consider objections to separation. It was argued that Britain had an obligation to protect her settlers in Canada from the French. The Leeds Mercury denied that any such agreement existed, and insisted that 'the real interests of the British Canadians will be better consulted by acknowledging the independence of Canada, in a treaty which should stipulate for the security of British persons and property'. Nor would the Leeds Mercury abandon anyone who had fought for the Queen. 'We would compensate them all to the last farthing if necessary.' In successive issues the leading provincial newspaper presented a penetrating and compelling analysis of the Canadian crisis and how to escape from it. But as the paper had to recognise, the suppression of the revolt cut the ground from under its crucial assertion that the colony could not be held by force.

By comparison, the much-vaulted writings of Goldwin Smith were trivial and superficial. He not only used 'independence' to describe responsible government, but seemed to imply that at its deepest level the connection could never be entirely severed—a by-product perhaps of his own extensive use of 'family' imagery. While he criticised 'crav-
ings for a grand unity' in a federal empire, he thought they might be fulfilled in the 'moral and intellectual' sphere. He wrote of

the sympathy, deeper and surer than any political connexion, which unites all men of English blood; a sympathy which the presence of a Governor General with the veto does not create, and which his departure would not destroy.

He denied that 'by becoming perfectly free' men would 'cease to be Britons'. How then did he propose to effect a separation? Smith gave only the briefest indication. Canada was to elect her own governor, coin her own money, have her own court of final appeal and control over peace and war. This was very close to existing reality: Smith himself believed that Canada would never join in a British war, while the governor's veto and the right of appeal to the Privy Council were almost moribund. Far from suggesting a clearly defined procedure leading to a clearly marked separation, Goldwin Smith was ready to treat Canadians as British citizens and asked 'why Canada should not keep the old flag, with such difference as the Heralds' College may require?'

It was not until 1865, when the tide of 'Separatism' was supposed to be ebbing, that any clearly thought-out schemes for severing ties of Britain and a colony were put forward. The legal draftsman, Henry Thring, drew up a bill to create machinery through which any self-governing colony could become independent. Viscount Bury drew on Goldwin Smith's ideas, and unconsciously revived the Leeds Mercury's earlier idea of a treaty. His was to be a suspended agreement with the new British North American confederation, to be styled, in the absence of a better title, 'The New Nation'. Bury's argument was that the war with American colonies had only occurred because of 'non-recognition of the fact that they had been for many years virtually independent'. He argued that no one wanted to hold on to a lighted match until he actually burnt himself and had to throw it away. Politicians used the argument that the colonies might eventually wish to become independent to postpone current consideration of the issue. In fact, a colony was certain to request independence only after a quarrel, which would be the worst moment to arrange terms of separation. Hence the need for a treaty which either side could give a year's notice to activate. Bury overlooked the problem that a 'treaty' between an independent state and one of its own colonies would be of dubious validity while Thring's bill attempted to impose obligations on an independent colony which would be enforceable, but at least they attempted to face other questions which had previously been ignored.

Under Thring's scheme, a colony could request independence by twice passing resolutions through both houses of its legislature by two-
thirds majorities, with an interval of three months. The Crown (i.e. Britain) might refuse independence or impose conditions. Under Bury's scheme the Crown could only announce a separation following addresses from both houses of either the British parliament or the legislature of the New Nation. No separation was to be allowed within a fixed period after the American Civil War, or at any time of danger in North America. The treaty would lay down the precise title of the independent state and following Goldwin Smith, allow it the use of the Union Flag of 1707 subject to modifications of the College of Heralds. Bury explained that this would follow the English custom 'by which the son assumes, with a certain difference, the name and arms of his father'—another elaboration of the family image. Britain was to hand over all fortifications and military stores, and complete or finance the construction of any work already in progress. Other debts outstanding to the British Exchequer were to be remitted, but the New Nation was to take over responsibility for loans raised for public works. Britain would undertake to defend the New Nation from aggression, without any reciprocal obligation, and would endeavour to secure international recognition. The two countries would promise to refrain from imposing differential duties and guaranteed each other 'most favoured nation' treatment. Again following Goldwin Smith, there would be a reciprocal citizenship between Britain and the New Nation.

Bury accepted that his provisions seemed one-sided, and that by undertaking to defend the New Nation from aggression he seemed to be perpetuating the one responsibility 'from which many persons would now desire to escape ...'. To the first objection Bury replied that the expense involved could not be honourably avoided and that, unlike the existing state of affairs, it was definite and terminable. To the second he argued that there was a difference between a vulnerable territory which the United States might wish to attack because it was British, and one which would simply be 'an unoffending neighbour' to the republic. Bury's treaty scheme was not short of both practical and theoretical difficulties, but it was an attempt to face up to issues which others had ignored. Once again, Bury's scheme indicated that even a formal separation still involved continuing moral and material links. But Bury's treaty was never to be put to the test. If the 'New Nation' had taken any formal step, it would have been to issue a declaration of its continued membership of the empire.60

'We defy anyone', the Edinburgh Review proclaimed in 1825, 'to point out a single benefit, of any sort whatever, derived by us from the possession of Canada, and our other colonies in North America.' A pamphleteer promptly accepted the challenge, and there was no shortage of articulate defence for colonial relationship. Some of these arguments, it was pointed out at the time, contained logical fallacies but even so
were widely accepted. Before the introduction of free trade, the colonies—particularly those in North America—were easy enough to defend. After reading up the subject in 1814 in preparation for peace negotiations with the United States, Castlereagh had ‘a very increased notion of the value of our North American possession to us as a naval power’. And little wonder. Although colonial timber became increasingly more unpopular because of its inferior quality to Scandinavian supplies, men of the early decades of the nineteenth century remembered very clearly that in the two previous European wars access to the latter had been interrupted. ‘Can we be assured’, asked Sir Howard Douglas in 1831,

that we shall never again be shut out from the Baltic, by a northern coalition, and so have occasion to depend entirely upon our North American Provinces for the necessary supplies of masts and spars to enable Great Britain to maintain her naval superiority?

Protection for colonial timber survived until 1859. The protected trade with the colonies was itself a means of training seamen, for ‘a military cannot exist without a commercial navy, nor a commercial navy without colonies’. It may have been oversimple, but it was a powerful argument that

our colonial possessions were the nursery of our commercial marine;
our commercial marine was the foundation of our royal navy; and it was on our naval supremacy that the pride and majesty of England depended.

Wakefield argued that even after the repeal of the Navigation Laws trade between Britain and the colonies would ‘almost inevitably’ be carried on in British ships. This argument was strengthened by the long surviving assumption that Canada could never stand alone: Britain had conquered it from France, and if Britain gave it up, it would become part of the United States. Some almost seemed to argue that the battle of Trafalgar had been won on the Heights of Abraham. Furthermore, the strategic and commercial elements were interlocking. Although the United States was absolutely a larger export market, in the 1820s British Americans bought from the protecting Power at a per capita rate four times that of their neighbours. Nor did free trade at once alter this pattern. Twenty years later it could be claimed that one Australian or four Canadians equalled in consumption of British goods 25 Americans, 100 Frenchmen or 200 Russians. Goldwin Smith was critical of this argument. ‘The Colonist does not trade with us because he is a Colonist, but because at present he can get what he wants better and cheaper from us than from other merchants.’ In any case, he pointed out, the colonies represented one-third of British trade which
hardly merited all the fuss. 'They, it seems, are better customers than those with whom we do the two-thirds.'

Free trade did not however destroy the old mercantile arguments as abruptly as Smith's logical mind would have hoped. Russell argued in 1849 that the connection ensured the entry of British goods into colonies 'on payment of moderate duties'. ('No Canadian or Australian Lowell can be fostered for the sake of colonial protected manufactures.') This optimistic belief gradually faded as the colonies adopted higher tariffs for - as they claimed - revenue purposes. Even so, while the colonial connection failed to protect British exporters against protective tariffs, it did preserve them from discriminatory ones. In any case, the evidence that colonies had 'a strong propensity to the commercial vice of Protection' cut two ways. If they became independent states, they would incur additional expenditure for defence and diplomatic services. This too they would presumably pay for by an even higher tariff, 'and as England is the chief manufacturing country in the world, it would be chiefly on our productions that this tariff would press'. Whether the colonies were independent or not, Britain's world-wide interests would require her to maintain fleets and embassies in all quarters of the globe. Arguably it was cheaper for Britain to keep underwriting her colonies.\(^8\)

The issue of protective tariffs in colonies in general, and those of the worst offender, Canada, in particular, were not discussed in isolation. The United States, Britain's independent colonies, were more single-minded in their devotion to commercial heresy. The population of the USA grew from under four million in 1790 to over seventeen million in 1840. It was widely if illogically held especially in the 1830s and 1840s that this major market for British goods had grown precisely because independence had somehow freed the resources of the people, in contrast to the sluggish colonies. The rapid growth of Canada and Australia in the 1850s tended to quieten this argument, which had placed strange emphasis on institutions. In fact it was more plausible to argue that the growth of America would have happened anyway, and that if the empire had remained united British trade would have been even greater, since no American tariff would have succeeded in fostering rival manufacturers and a rival commercial marine. Here lay the double importance of Canada. It was believed that the St Lawrence was a virtually unpolicable frontier. While British goods could enter Canada, they could enter America. 'No American corps of police, no American militia, much less a corps of custom-house officers or excise officers, can prevent bales of foreign manufactured goods from entering the States across that vast frontier.' South Carolina might be unable to nullify US tariffs, but Canada could. 'Tariffs are a dream - an utter impossibility, so long as England possesses Upper Canada.' Russell wondered why even Cobden, 'in his narrow view', could not see the damage
which an effective American tariff across the St Lawrence would do to British manufacturers. Similarly the United States, with the second largest merchant marine in the world, was clearly threatening to ‘contend with us for supremacy on the sea’. Here again British North America could be the key to Anglo-American competition, for in the age of wooden sailing ships, the British North American colonies had the world’s third largest tonnage.

Let the Yankees get possession of British North America with the prestige of superior generalship—who can say how soon they may dispute with you the Empire of India and of the Seas?

One other commercial argument for the continued relationship was that British merchants ‘can maintain a connexion with firms in the colonies without fear of being partially or unjustly treated as foreigners’. Similarly, although colonists often complained at the reluctance of investors to finance them, money loaned for colonial public works was generally backed by the guarantees of the imperial power. Where prosperous American states could decide from the 1830s that debt repayment was inconvenient, the colonies remained faithful until the Canadian city of Hamilton defaulted in 1863.30

The second main group of arguments for keeping the empire stemmed from defence. Russell argued that some were military posts pure and simple, like Malta and Gibraltar, while others, like the Cape and Ceylon, although a source of much bother could be ‘a serious injury to us’ if held by a rival Power. Whether the settler colonies actively assisted in a British war or not, the colonial connection meant that the British could ‘shut their port to our enemies’. While the colonies remained theoretically linked to Britain, at least they could not join her enemies, as the United States had done in the Napoleonic war, and might do again.49

All of this put the strategic arguments at their lowest. They were capable of a more robust presentation. This was in fact necessary for the case, since at its unvarnished level it was open to strong counter-attack that the colonies were a running sore. ‘As to the military strength of the empire, instead of contributing to, they obviously derogate from it, by scattering and isolating our force, and wasting our means.’ The development of a less peaceable states system on the continent in the 1850s led to a need for concentration of troops in Britain, an increased insistence that colonial militia forces take a bigger share of their own defence, and even the suggestion that the only need for the previously sacrosanct Halifax naval base was to protect the naval base at Halifax.41 On a rule of thumb basis the strategic arguments for colonies were by no means overwhelming. But they were more deeply rooted than that. ‘There is a general advantage in the possession of Canada &
Australia, which is hard to define, but not difficult to perceive', wrote Russell. The extensions of the nation overseas made Britain a more imposing force in the world. Wakefield argued that 'the possession of this immense empire by England causes the mere name of England to be a real and a mighty power' and that 'by overawing foreign nations and impressing mankind with a prestige of our might, it enables us to keep the peace of the world'. It was this argument, and particularly the word 'prestige', which aroused such fierce scorn from Goldwin Smith. When all other arguments for the empire were exploded, he claimed, its defenders would fall back on 'glory, national spirit, prestige. . . . I look in the French dictionary for prestige, and find that it is "an illusion, a juggling trick, an imposture"'. Goldwin Smith in 1862 sneered at commanders who used wooden artillery even when the enemy had seen through the deception, but not until 1926 was any attempt made to define imperial relations on the lines Smith wanted, and even then Lord Balfour had to tell a protesting Winston Churchill, 'I do not believe in wooden guns'. Grey argued that

the power of a nation does not depend merely on the amount of physical force it can command, but rests, in no small degree, upon opinion and moral influence: in this respect British power would be diminished by the loss of our Colonies, to a degree which it would be difficult to estimate.

Many subscribed to a 'domino theory', that the loss of one colony would lead to a general collapse. Russell, for instance, believed that:

The loss of any great portion of our Colonies would diminish our importance in the world, & the vultures would soon gather together to despoil us of other parts of our Empire, or to offer insults to us which we could not bear.

The abandonment of Canada in particular was thought to be an open invitation to enemies to trample on British interests, and would prove as fatal to the British empire as the withdrawal from peripheral provinces had been for the Romans.42 The belief that the loss of one colony would lead to the loss of all was partly based on the older idea of an interlocking Atlantic trading system. British North America had been intended to replace the thirteen colonies as the source of supplies for the West Indies. Consequently if Canada were lost, the British Caribbean must fall into the hands of the United States. Alarmists feared this would be a signal for general war. France, anxious to avenge Waterloo, would encourage Russia to seize Constantinople and invade India. But deeper than this, to a period which had very scanty means of repressing civil commotion, the possibility of a colony separating itself from the body politic, had dangerous
implications in political theory. 'If we admit that the government of a colony is to be surrendered because the colony is unwilling to be governed, upon what pretence can government be maintained at home?' If Canada could separate at will, how could the same 'general right of defection' be refused to Cumberland or—and this was the real consideration—to Ireland. 'Let rebellion triumph in Canada, and rebellion will be instantly hazarded in Ireland.' Long before the American Fenians decided to free Ireland by invading Canada, the North American colonies had been seen as a first line of defence for Anglo-Irish Union. Thus the colonial connection came to be interwoven with the question of political stability, and Canada could not be abandoned 'without risking the subversion of the whole fabric of our national greatness'. Hence the notion, so roundly criticised by Goldwin Smith, that it was necessary to keep the colonies as an outlet for emigration, even though the majority of British migrants headed for the independent republic across the Atlantic. Somehow or other, teeming and perhaps explosive Britain must have her own safety valve. The Times reminded its readers of 'the service which a colony can render the parent state in its extremities', as when the Portuguese royal family fled to Brazil in 1807. It admitted that it was unlikely Queen Victoria would ever be forced to flee to Australia, 'or that the House of Lords will bodily take refuge in the Legislative Council Chambers of Sydney or Hobart Town'. But in an age of Chartism at home, revolution abroad, 'the social and political ferment of men's minds—the periodical oscillation of great prosperity and severe depression—the desperate competition for employment, wages and subsistence', it was to the colonies which Britain had to look for the prosperity and elevation of her masses.48

Lastly, there were arguments from duty and obligation. Grey argued that

by the acquisition of its Colonial dominions, the Nation has incurred a responsibility of the highest kind, which it is not at liberty to throw off.

In whole regions of the earth, the British Crown was 'the most powerful instrument, under providence, of maintaining peace and order' and so of diffusing civilisation and Christianity. Both Grey and W. R. Greg insisted that Britain 'simply could not abandon' colonies with 'mixed or aboriginal populations'. The West Indies would collapse in a racial conflagration similar to Haiti, and the same would happen in Ceylon whose 'native races are utterly incapable of governing themselves'. In New Zealand the British settlers would doubtless eventually exterminate or subjugate the Natives, but in South Africa the barbarous Dutch would triumph, 'an event to be deprecated and averted by every means in our power'. On the west coast of Africa the first faint signs
of legitimate commerce would collapse with the withdrawal of British rule. Only in the predominantly white colonies was there a reasonable hope of internal stability, but they showed little disposition to separate. As The Times sharply reminded Goldwin Smith, 'the colonists have rights as well as ourselves'. They were British subjects, and 'as long as they choose to remain so the mother country has no right to deprive them of their heritage'.

British attitudes to their empire were more complex and deeper than mere labels of 'separatism' or 'imperialism' would indicate. Broadly speaking one might suggest that there was often a lack of interest in individual colonists, irritation with individual colonies but an attachment to the empire as such going beyond the merely rational. The evidence points to continuity, not violent breaks, in imperial thinking. By 1900 devotion to the empire may have become more strident, more pompous and circumstantial, but if so this was mainly because a changing world had made the British more defensive, and thus added point to arguments voiced and tenacity to emotions felt long before. The mid-nineteenth century British were just as dazzled by the empire 'on which the sun never set'. Certainly that empire had no new dawn in 1870.

NOTES

2. C. A. Bodensen Studies in Mid-Victorian Imperialism (1924; 2nd edn 1960) esp. 7–9, 13–22, 32–59. Cf. 79: 'In the course of one decade all this was changed.' Separatism vanished with 'a rapidity and completeness which seem almost incredible'.
3. J. S. Galbraith 'Myths of the "Little England" era' AHR lxvii (1961) 34.
9. R. M. Martin History of Upper and Lower Canada (1836) v; P. Knaplund Gladstone and Britain's imperial policy (1927) 178; SPD 16 Apr 1849,
118 REAPPRAISALS IN BRITISH IMPERIAL HISTORY

352–61; John Morley Life of William Ewart Gladstone (1903) i 359; G. Smith The Empire (1863) 145–6.


15. Bodensen 45; The Times 7 Feb 1838; Hincks Canada 16; F. Marryat A diary in America, part second (1839) iii 23; Examiner 7 Jan 1838, 1; speech by Cobden Manchester Guardian 15 Apr 1849; H. E. Egerton (ed.) Selected speeches of Sir William Moresworth (1903) 251.

16. The Times 24 Dec 1849; Grey The colonial policy of Lord John Russell’s administration (1853) ii 37.


18. University of Durham, Grey Papers, Ashburton to Howick 10 Apr 1838; National Library of Scotland, Ellice Papers, E2, Ashburton to Ellice 16 Sep 1839, 72–3; Esher The girlhood of Queen Victoria (1912) i 277–8 (diary for 9 Feb 1838); PRO, Ellesmere Papers, PRO 30/12/20/11, memo; 3PD cxxxiv 15 Jun 1854, 166–9; The Times 17 Jun, Spectator 24 Jun 1854, 666.


22. Bodelsen 49, 58; H. Merivale Lectures on colonies and colonization (1841) ii 291, 292, 292, 293.

23. Bodelsen 48–9; E. Dowden (ed.) Correspondence of Henry Taylor (1888) 188–90; Autobiography of Henry Taylor (1875) ii 234–6, 238–40, 241–2,
235; National Register of Archives, Broadlands MSS, GC/NE/89/1, Newcastle to Palmerston 11 Nov 1861.

24. E. G. Wakefield *A view of the Art of colonisation* (1849) 285, quoting Buller. This section is based on G. W. Martin 'What was "colonial independence"? *Australian National University Historical Journal* x (1973) 3–9.

25. *No War with America!* (1856) 14; *Northern Star* 27 Jan 1838; *Morning Herald* 3 Sep 1858; H. Clinton *Suggestions towards the organisation of the British empire* (1856 ed.) esp. 11–17. For examples of the astronomical image, *Colonial Gazette* 31 Jan 1846, 61; R. Fletcher *England and her colonies* (1859) 199.


34. *Spectator* 13 Jan 1838, 36; *Leeds Mercury* 30 Dec 1837 to 10 Feb 1838, esp. 6 Jan.


37. Quoted Bodleian 15; Reflections upon the value of the British West Indian colonies and of the British North American provinces (1826); Castlereagh to Bathurst 4 Oct 1814, Report on the manuscripts of Earl Bathurst (HMG report, no. 76) 295–6; H. Douglas Considerations on the value and importance of the British North American provinces (1831) 25; Reflections 28–9; speech of Sir William Young, The Times 19 Jan 1838; Wakefield Art of Colonisation 102.

38. Grey Papers, Russell to Grey 19 Aug 1849; Smith 90, Greg Essays ι 247–9. Lowell was the centre of the New England textile industry.


40. Grey Papers, Russell to Grey 19 Aug 1849; Morning Post 28 May 1849.


42. Grey Papers, Russell to Grey 19 Aug 1849; Wakefield 98; Smith 94, 32; J. D. B. Miller Britain and the old Dominions (1966) 40–1; Grey Colonial policy ι 12; Grey Papers, Russell to Grey 19 Aug 1849; Morning Chronicle 25 Dec 1837, 4 Jan 1838; W. H. Russell Canada 208.

43. E.g. Spectator 12 May 1849, 439–41; Morning Herald 28 Dec, Standard 23 Dec 1837; Dublin University Magazine xxxiv (1849) 315; Morning Herald 2 Jul 1840; Smith 165–89; The Times 5 Feb 1849.

44. Grey ι 13–15; Greg ι 237–42; The Times 4 Feb 1862.

45. For mid-nineteenth century examples of the phrase, R. M. Martin History v; Greg ι 228; Shall we keep the Canadians? (1849) 19; M. Gore Observations (1838) 31; 3PD clxviii 25 Jul 1862 (speech by Bury).
6 The idea of ‘Imperial Federation’

At no time was there ever much real chance that the British empire
would adopt a formal federal constitution. One reason for this was that
for most of its history the empire in fact functioned on quasi-federal
lines, with considerable local autonomy mildly tempered by a loose
central authority. While this authority was accepted by the peripheral
parts, there was no need to face the many problems which the creation
of constitutional machinery would have involved, and once it ceased to
be acceptable, the empire simply disintegrated. Its federal practice
could not be reconciled with its theory of central authority.

But even if it was never likely to be realised, the idea of a federal
empire was not without significance in British imperial history. Its
significance has been obscured by two interrelated misconceptions. One
of these is that supporters of the idea were primarily, if not solely, in-
terested in superimposing on the empire the full machinery of a federal
constitution analogous to that of the United States. The second is that
the idea had ‘its first beginnings . . . in and around 1868’ but died in
the First World War. In fact there was no single dominant scheme of
imperial union, and it is more helpful to think not of the monolithic
aim of ‘Imperial Federation’ but of a broader collection of empire
federalist ideas. Their interrelationship can most clearly be understood
by discarding the notion of a late Victorian extravaganza, and seeing
empire federalism as an integral, if usually minor, aspect of imperial
ideas from the mid-eighteenth to the twentieth centuries.

Empire federalist schemes may be classified into three main types—
parliamentary, extra-parliamentary and supra-parliamentary. The ‘par-
lamentary’ schemes undoubtedly form the core of the movement, and
involved proposals for the colonies to send members of parliament to
the British House of Commons. Normally these plans provided for the
continuation of an autonomous local legislature, rather on the lines
of Northern Ireland’s position within the United Kingdom between 1922
and 1971. A few more extreme suggestions favoured total colonial in-
tegration with the United Kingdom, on the lines of the Anglo-Scots
union of 1707. Occasionally there were also suggestions for the inclusion
of colonial peers in the House of Lords. ‘Extra-parliamentary’ schemes
sought to avoid the problems of reforming the House of Commons by creating advisory bodies, based on colonial agents, to advise parliament on colonial matters. This branch of empire federalism led to the Colonial and Imperial Conference system. However, mere advisory bodies were generally regarded as unsatisfactory, since ‘the best men in the Colonies would not come to an assembly which had influence but not power’. Thus from extra-parliamentary federalism there evolved ‘supra-parliamentary’ federalism, the ideas normally associated with ‘Imperial Federation’. An intermediate stage between the two involved proposals to graft the advisory congress on to the British parliament, to form an Imperial Senate as a third chamber. ‘Supra-parliamentary’ federation normally involved the creation of a full imperial congress to which the British parliament would be subordinate. In fact, one of its attractions was that it would provide a framework for the re-establishment of separate legislatures in Ireland and Scotland, without destroying the unity of the empire.²

Empire federalist proposals tended to be related to three other subjects: reform of parliament, regional unions among colonies, and relations between dependent territories and the central power. Colonel Thomas Modyford suggested to the Council of State in 1652 that ‘although it may seem immodest’, Barbados should return two members to parliament, while John Oldmixon in 1708 challenged his readers to explain why the British colonies had not as good a right to seats in parliament as Goa had to representation in the Portuguese Cortez. Modyford’s suggestion immediately preceded the Instrument of Government in 1653, Britain’s first unitary constitution, while Oldmixon’s immediately followed the Union with Scotland. Benjamin Franklin first gave sympathetic consideration to colonial parliamentary representation following the failure of the Albany Congress of 1754 to create an American union. Subsequently the idea was to appear both as an alternative and as a supplement to colonial federation. However, the major stimulus to empire federalist ideas came from the problem of reconciling local self-government with central control. Thus empire federalism was probably most widely debated in the decade after 1765, leading to the crisis of American independence, and again in the decade after 1837, as similar problems were resolved in Canada.

The Seven Years War cost money, and successive British ministries looked for new sources of revenue. Parliament was the recognised authority to superintend colonial trade, and the regulation of trade necessarily involved taxation. When even a Boston radical like James Otis could proclaim that only ‘rebels, fools or madmen’ would defy the authority of parliament, it seemed reasonable to extend the powers of regulation and taxation to the internal affairs of the colonies. Perhaps illogically, but certainly with some force, the colonists did not accept
the Stamp Act as a simple extension of an accepted principle. The first impulse, fanned by two pamphlets from Otis, was to fight the battle in parliament itself. Richard Stockton of New Jersey thought each colony should subscribe to send ‘one or two of their most ingenious fellows’ to speak for them in the House of Commons, ‘or else we shall be fleeced to some purpose’. Thomas Hutchinson reported to Benjamin Franklin that when news of the stamp duty first arrived, there was a general feeling in the colonies that it could only be tolerated in exchange for parliamentary representation, but ‘as soon as a suspicion arose that possibly representation might be admitted it was as generally agreed that a representation would be of no service’. The Stamp Act Congress flatly ruled it out, and Otis abandoned his campaign. For the next century enthusiasts were to debate whether ‘no taxation without representation’ was a plea for representation or, as realists pointed out, against taxation. John Hughes, Distributor of Stamps in Pennsylvania, was in no doubt.

One reason assign’d for not paying Obedience to this Act of Parliament, is that we have no Representation in Parliament, I then say let us Petition for Representatives O no we will not agree that...

By the end of the Stamp Act crisis colonial representation had virtually ceased to be a feasible solution. Rather its discussion had revealed deep differences between British and American ideas of representation. The British, largely as a result of their haphazard electoral system, subscribed to a view that members of parliament were merely accidentally elected in particular places, but really spoke for the whole realm. Americans, accustomed to greater local control over their legislators, maintained that only communities from which representatives were elected could be subject to taxation. The dispute degenerated into sterile wrangling over ‘virtual representation’, in which badly digested anarchistic borrowings from Rousseau were thrown on top of disquisitions about medieval precedent.

Clear-sighted men like Francis Bernard and Benjamin Franklin could see that ‘all the political evils in America arise from the want of ascertaining the relation between Great Britain and the American Colonies’ and until this was done ‘they will be often jarring’. Bernard wished to have thirty American and fifteen West Indian members temporarily admitted to parliament to agree on boundaries of legislation. Franklin and other colonial agents in London were privately attracted to permanent representation, but publicly were obliged to argue the more conservative case of their employers. As the dispute continued, Franklin became increasingly more pessimistic about the chances of justice in ‘this old rotten State’, and in 1773 he dismissed one persistent English pamphleteer as ‘a little cracked upon the subject’. The
representation issue forced men to choose – Otis and Benjamin Franklin for independence, while Joseph Galloway and William Franklin became loyalists.8

A major British objection to offering representation to the colonies was sheer metropolitan arrogance, which refused to treat colonials as partners. There was, however, a domestic complication: the late 1760s saw the rise of the powerful Wilkesite movement to reform the electoral system within the United Kingdom. Faced with a twin challenge, the ruling groups closed ranks on the sanctity of the constitution. This cleared the way for consideration of extra-parliamentary federal schemes, which were in turn helped, even if rather too late, by the development of a single colonial Congress after 1774, with which it was theoretically easier to negotiate. Joshua Steele in 1766 had argued for ‘a new sovereign council, consisting of deputies from each province of the Great Commonwealth’. Franklin thought that Ireland and the colonies should be ‘united and consolidated under one Common Council for general Purposes, each retaining its particular Council or Parliament for its domestic Concerns’. But he was pessimistic about realising the idea – such a body should have been set up during ‘the Infancy of our foreign Establishments’. There were other schemes for a more ad hoc joint committee to apportion taxation between Britain and the colonies, or to add an elective element to the Board of Trade, and convert it into a supreme legislative and judicial body. None the less, it was parliamentary federalism which attracted most attention. This was partly because, as Adam Smith argued, once American leaders had tasted the greatness of sitting in Congress, only something more glamorous could satisfy them. But the glamour which surrounded parliament was only an aspect of its ancient constitution, which made the bulk of Englishmen reluctant to tack on a hybrid element. Many pointed to, and many more sheltered behind, the practical problems of conducting simultaneous general elections on both sides of the Atlantic. The result was not that the forces of inertia triumphed, but that they gave way too late. In 1778 the British peace mission led by Lord Carlisle was authorised to offer representation in parliament, along with the acknowledgement of the practical supremacy of Congress in American affairs. Offered the substance of their independence, Americans rejected the rider as an irrelevance or a trap. Even in 1774 Joseph Galloway had omitted parliamentary representation from peace plans submitted to Congress because, although he secretly believed it to be ‘the only effectual remedy’, he recognised its unacceptability to American Whigs. At late as 1788 Galloway intermittently drew up schemes for a renewed Anglo-American connection through exchange of non-voting commissioners, but it was too late.9

To argue for a continuous empire federalist tradition from the mid-
eighteenth century, it is necessary to account for a forty-year gap in proposals between the 1780s and the 1820s. The interruption is not especially surprising. Over twenty years of French wars formed merely part of a longer period of repression, in which discussion of organic reform was discouraged. The settlement colonies which remained after 1783 were insignificant compared with what had been lost, and even the mighty West Indies were a declining force. Yet as soon as ideas of reform began actively to stir in the 1820s, empire federalism re-emerged. The debate involved frequent reference to the events leading to American independence, and it was spurred by the same three related subjects—local colonial union, parliamentary reform and the relations of the metropolitan power to its dependencies. In 1822 Robert Gourlay published a scheme for a British North American federation crowned by parliamentary representation, and at the other end of the political spectrum John Beverley Robinson argued that the dependencies should be grouped into six or seven circles, each returning an MP, as an alternative to the union of Upper and Lower Canada. The prospect of the actual reform of parliament similarly revived interest in the question. By 1830 the British were faintly realising that they were fostering new colonies which might rival those they had lost: Wakefield had already demanded a seat in the House of Commons for New South Wales. The Reform Bill itself offered what seemed an unexpectedly drastic surgery to the representative system which apparently shifted its basis altogether away from ‘virtual’ and ‘indirect’ ideas of representation towards one of equal territorial constituencies. In fact the process still had a long way to go, but the abolition of rotten boroughs through which, theoretically, a colonial interest might previously have been heard, prompted consideration of direct representation for the dependencies. In December 1831, the Duke of Richmond suggested to the cabinet that the Reform Bill should be amended to bring in colonial members. But when Joseph Hume gave the Commons a night off its serious work by introducing a motion asking for nineteen MPs for the empire, it appeared that the colonial interest fell neatly between the two stools, and altogether out of sight. While some accepted the colonies as territorial communities, entitled to MPs as Manchester or Birmingham, others thought of them as an interest group—and the most vigorous campaign of the early 1830s urged the claims not of the colonies of settlement but of the East India Company. After 1837, the problems of Canadian self-government and the introduction of free trade obscured the older view of a colonial ‘interest’, but the increasing agitation for a more equitable distribution of constituencies within the United Kingdom made it harder to accommodate more than a token colonial contingent in any plan. Thus, perversely, in the mid-century decades when the colonies themselves were being taken more seriously, their claims to a share in the
central legislature were increasingly relegated to those of a special and marginal interest.

None the less, Canada's developing autonomy revived colonial parliamentary representation as a means of containing colonial pretensions within the unity of the empire. Canada was a problem which recalled failure in America and also suggested an American model for imitation. Optimists glossed over the real problems which had obstructed the admission of American MPs to the unreformed parliament, and boldly asserted that representation would have prevented the breach of 1776. If Canada were similarly alienated, she would certainly join the American Union and send her best men to Washington. Why not prevent this by allowing Canada to elect representatives to that greater legislature at Westminster? The particular attraction of the American model was that the United States, like the British empire, was expanding: if the Congress could admit representatives from a 'Colony' like California, why should not parliament do the same? The emphasis on Canadian problems and American precedents totally obscured the parallel systems of France and Portugal. In 1849 Russell, spurred on by reports of rising annexationist sentiment in Canada, began to consider the admission of colonial MPs. Elgin, as Governor-General, looked to an eventual federal solution, and in 1856 he publicly predicted that Canadian self-government would have to be completed by representation in parliament. Disraeli was also attracted to the idea, partly because it would give the Conservatives a unifying rallying cry which might transcend the feuds of urban and rural interests. His leader, Lord Stanley, was sympathetic but discouraging: colonial MPs would introduce precisely the democratic influences the Conservatives wished to keep out, while their devotion to protectionist theories would make it harder for the party to make its necessary compromise with free trade. His son, Edward Stanley, agonised to find some way round the obstacles. The main reason, he explained to Disraeli, why colonial members should be introduced to Westminster was that the local assemblies had sunk so low that they carried no weight among colonists. The first problem was to find a way of demonstrating this without alienating colonial politicians and adding to the reluctance of the British to take them in. Even if this could be solved, there remained practical problems. Thirty new MPs would 'frighten' the Commons, but introducing colonial MPs piecemeal as boroughs were disfranchised for corruption would produce grievances on both sides of the ocean. Colonial MPs would have to be salaried, and their introduction would reopen the question of franchise qualifications. Distance too remained a problem, for although the Atlantic was no longer such an erratic barrier, the empire had travelled further than the steamship. Sydney would never be closer than fifty days to London, and four months would be the minimum length of time for the
return of members — ‘awkward enough if parties were nearly balanced’. Beyond that there loomed the larger imponderable of dependencies where the people were ‘exclusively native’. Small wonder that Stanley found ‘I can hardly resolve my own doubts, much less other people’s’. And 30 years later Edward Stanley, then earl of Derby, noting a revival of interest ‘in the question of “Imperial Federation” whatever that may mean’, commented on the ‘generalities’ which its supporters relied on to disguise their lack of any plan, and added, ‘I have never seen one yet which would bear argument’.

The difficulties surrounding the introduction of colonial MPs to parliament seemed however to point to extra-parliamentary or supra-parliamentary schemes. By the 1850s Canada had clearly passed the point where a token delegation to Westminster could contain her constitutional aspirations, and the revival of parliamentary reform seemed to make it harder to accommodate the colonies at all. ‘Their fitting and far more effectual place would be in the executive, not in the legislative department of the State’, concluded W. R. Greg after toying with the idea of colonial MPs in a scheme for reform in 1852. The Westminster Review put forward a full federal scheme later the same year, and was strongly criticised by The Times for doing so. The Times pointed out that any consultative body drawn from the colonies would in fact become virtually sovereign in its own field, simply because parliament was never sufficiently well informed to form its own policy. It seemed an odd way to increase the autonomy of the colonies, however, since ultimate authority would still rest with a body in which they were unrepresented. These contradictions sprang from a larger error, that the empire was some sort of federal system. If the colonies all separated from Britain, they might find themselves compelled to federate. But ‘the greatest obstacle’ to such a development was that they were colonies, depending on their British connection for defence and superintendence.

Make the colonies into a federation, and they will soon cease to be colonies, because you will have taught them to seek their support from each other instead of from the mother country. Keep the colonies attached to the mother country, and they will need no federation, because the mother country already gives that support for which alone a federation is valuable.

It is difficult not to conclude that all forms of empire federalism were at a discount by 1860. Parliamentary federalism was by now generally abandoned. Joseph Howe of Nova Scotia took advantage of the shock of the Crimean War to argue that Britain needed closer links with the colonies, but his ideas came off badly in the ensuing controversy. The Times was unmoved by Howe’s peculiarly florid oratory and
flatly stated that if the colonies wished 'to participate in Imperial powers they must also participate in Imperial burdens'. Nothing came of a proposal to form a Colonial Representation Association in 1859. Nor were extra- and supra-parliamentary schemes filling the void. They were condemned sympathetically by John Stuart Mill and cuttingly by Goldwin Smith. To cap it all, the model federalists had so often looked to, the United States, dissolved into civil war. When a Cape Colonist complained of the absence of a colonial voice at the centre of empire in 1862, he recognised that it was 'futile to think of procuring a legislative change in the constitution', and fell back instead on an idea which had begun to attract interest, the nomination of colonial peers to the House of Lords. Even so, the Westminster Review could still argue in 1861 that only massive parliamentary reforms could prevent Canadian independence.9

It would be tempting to conclude that the mid-nineteenth century debate on empire federalism had completely discredited and destroyed it. Intellectually, this was true, but the idea of a federal empire was to prove remarkably resilient. Its basic attractions — an appeal to imperial sentiment and an innocent love of constitution-mongering — only needed some immediate stimulus to produce another upsurge of interest. The period around 1868, usually regarded as the start of 'Imperial Federation', was simply one more cycle of its popularity. Once again, it was stimulated by a local colonial union. As early as 1862, Galt, the Canadian minister most committed to the ideal of British American unity, predicted regional groupings of the American and Australian colonies, 'not impossibly in the end producing a confederation with Great Britain rather resembling that of Germany than that of America, which now appears to have failed'. Empire federalists like the Nova Scotians T. C. Haliburton and P. S. Hamilton worked for Canadian Confederation, the latter admitting years later that he regarded it 'as but a step towards the Union of the British Empire as a whole'. J. M. Ludlow, a London barrister, published a series of letters in the Spectator early in 1867, contending that any local colonial union was a step towards closer union of the whole. The Spectator itself disagreed, thinking token parliamentary representation the only constitutional connection remotely worth considering. On top of local colonial union came the renewed question of Anglo-colonial relations. The apparent coolness of Gladstone's first ministry provoked a reaction among the imperially minded. New Zealand interests tried to summon a meeting of colonial delegates in London, to fill the extra-parliamentary vacuum, but were 'graciously snubbed' by the government. The Royal Colonial Institute was founded in 1868, and in the following years enthusiastic pamphleteers produced more, if not exactly new, schemes for the federation of the empire.
Certainly, the late 1860s were not the dawn of the movement. J. A. Froude in 1868 privately confessed that his dream of 'an Imperial Parliament sitting at Westminster with representatives from Canada, Australia & India dealing only with Imperial questions' was a 'crotchet' which 'will never be tried'. The Westminster Review republished its 1852 article in 1870, while two commentators wrote of the whole movement as a dying echo of the past. C. B. Adderley in 1869 admitted that he had 'submitted reluctantly' during a controversy in the Spectator in 1854, to 'complete conviction' that parliament would never brook the interference of colonial MPs, and a supra-parliamentary Congress was 'far too great an innovation to find any acceptance with Englishmen'. Merivale in 1870 claimed that no scheme 'has ever been more thoroughly ventilated' than colonial parliamentary representation over the previous century, with the sole result of highlighting 'the insoluble nature of the difficulties' which lay in its way.7

This increasing revelation of difficulties did not deter its advocates, but the latter decades of the century saw a shift of emphasis towards extra-parliamentary forms of federalism. Russell abandoned his earlier preference for colonial MPs in favour of an annual Congress of Britain and the dependencies, through which the latter might contribute to common expenditure, in exchange for guaranteed protection by the former. Like many less prominent proponents, he recognised that the idea might seem 'impracticable to many', but added, with pardonable smugness, that the same had been said of the 1832 Reform Act and the repeal of the Corn Laws. Disraeli similarly moved away from parliamentary federalism to share Franklin's regret that 'some representative council in the metropolis' had not been created when the colonies were given self-government.

Even so, colonial representation in parliament did not disappear from sight. Jehu Mathews, a Canadian writing in 1872, and who is regarded as a conventional exponent of the movement, was primarily attracted to supra-parliamentary union, but saw advantages in the older idea— one being that it involved a less violent shock to the conservative British, and avoided any clash between a United Kingdom and an imperial legislature. Mathews thought parliament might hold two sessions a year, one with and one without colonial members, in order to maintain its function as a domestic legislature. However, this scheme would require the cumbersome arrangement of two distinct ministries. Grey in 1879 still thought it necessary to refer to the 'insurmountable objections' facing parliamentary representation. But by 1891 Goldwin Smith regarded it as 'laid aside', and E. A. Freeman in 1892 described it as theoretically possible but practically not worth consideration. But there were still those who argued that 'British Federation can only become effective through representation in one Parliament'. Laurier briefly toyed with
the idea in 1897, the premier of Natal made similar noises in 1902, and G. K. Gokhale advocated it for India in 1905. But India and Natal were among the least constitutionally influential areas of the empire and what might satisfy them would not answer for Canada or Australia. After 1886, token parliamentary representation for the colonies became entangled with the question of Ireland’s relations with Westminster under Home Rule.*

The gradual elimination of parliamentary federalism did not result in any agreement to concentrate on either an extra- or a supra-parliamentary alternative. This was well illustrated by the career of the Imperial Federation League, which was formed in 1884. Indeed, even the title of the League was misleading – its first president, W. E. Forster, was embarrassed by the name, and another prominent Liberal member, James Bryce, wrote of its ‘inaccuracy and absurdity’. One historian has suggested that ‘some sort of closer union’ would have been a more accurate description of the aims of most members. Charles Tupper, the Canadian High Commissioner, served notice of his disagreement at the first meeting: he had long opposed any parliamentary or supra-parliamentary scheme of union, and would go no further than extra-parliamentary conferences. Rosebery, who succeeded Forster as president, also thought consultative bodies represented the limit of possible achievement. The League’s only success was to persuade the government to hold an official conference when colonial leaders attended the 1887 Jubilee celebrations. Rosebery vigorously insisted that this achievement had in fact federated the empire. ‘If that was not imperial federation, I don’t know what is.’ Most Leaguers were less definite. ‘What is meant by Imperial Federation?’ asked J. N. Dalton in their journal, Imperial Federation. His article was mainly devoted to sketching the modern trend towards federalism in advanced countries, and carefully sidestepping the problem of what detailed plan could be applied to the British empire. ‘We might as well talk of a formulated scheme for promoting the blooming of roses.’ Others were more positive about what schemes were impossible than in arguing alternatives. The League survived for a decade by the simple expedient of avoiding any definite commitment and confining itself to unexceptionable generalities. Its journal contained little more than useful news summaries from the colonies, verbatim reports of meetings and items, pregnant with supposed significance, announcing such triumphs as the election of a Leaguer to the presidency of the Oxford Union. The League was finally forced to adopt some definite scheme in 1892. The scheme adopted was intended to be a compromise, and not surprisingly it failed to satisfy anyone. Tupper provoked an open breach by denouncing it as a device to force the colonies to subsidise the British armed forces. In some desperation the League turned to the government, sending a deputation to Glad-
stone in April 1893 to see if something might be salvaged as a rallying point. But in his last ministry, as in his first, the premier would offer no more than a gracious snubbing to the federalists. This rebuff forced the League executive to turn more fiercely on Tupper, and thus compounded its internal disarray. On 24 November 1893 the executive abruptly dissolved the Imperial Federation League. Even in its last act, the League demonstrated the hopelessness of its own case: not a single overseas branch was notified of the final meeting. A few colonial branches, like Victoria, continued as a lonely focus for imperial patriotism, and the metropolitan factions formed various committees and dining clubs to keep their ideas alive. The attempt at a mass movement had failed.9

Twenty years later another empire federalist movement, the Round Table, was to concentrate less on mass agitation than on influencing leadership, having learnt the lesson that in successful federal movements popular support is only valuable after politicians have raised the issue. It was a lesson derived from the career of Joseph Chamberlain. Chamberlain had believed in ‘one supreme and Imperial Parliament’ since 1886, and showed his belief in the empire by opting for the Colonial Office in 1895. At first Chamberlain was mainly interested in creating an Imperial Council with limited executive powers, designed to coordinate law and communications and move towards reciprocal tariffs. Once a body could be created to regulate trade, it would logically consider the protection of trade. Once it assumed responsibility for defence, such a council ‘would be little, if at all, distinguished from a real federation of the Empire’. However, the Jubilee of 1897 provided an occasion for a second Colonial Conference, and Chamberlain abandoned his evolutionary approach to imperial federation and tried to persuade the premiers to accept it at one gulp. They declined the bait. All refused to commit their colonies to taxation by any imperial body on which representation was based on population, while Chamberlain could not consider any alternative scheme by which the British Isles might be outvoted. As Kendle concluded, ‘evidently imperial federation was impracticable’. Chamberlain then pressed for a consultative body, but was supported only by Seddon of New Zealand and Braddon of Tasmania. But when Chamberlain asked Seddon if New Zealand would actually delegate plenipotentiary powers to its representative, his most vocal supporter suddenly backed away. Even Chamberlain was disheartened by the response, and largely abandoned the subject for several years.

Once again, it was a problem of metropolitan–colonial relations, and the question of local colonial union, which revived interest in empire federalism. The South African war evoked more sustained colonial support for a British war than ever before: some in the colonies believed
they should have a share in the decisions they were now actively underwriting, and many in Britain believed the moment had come to cement unity. Furthermore, Chamberlain and Milner saw the war as a means of uniting South Africa as a cornerstone for further imperial unity. At the same time an Australian federation was taking its place in the imperial pattern. Australian politicians were assertive of Australian autonomy but many leaders of the federal movement did see it as a step to imperial union. Sir Henry Parkes, whose speech at Tenterfield on 24 October 1889 made Australian federation a public issue, wrote to Salisbury ten days later urging the creation of ‘a great National Council in which all parts of the Empire should be represented on terms of equality’. Subsequently both Deakin and Barton lent their names to the Imperial Federation League of Australia.

Chamberlain attempted to turn this renewed interest in a federal empire by privately sounding out the colonies with a tentative proposal for an imperial council. Reactions were unfavourable and, following the rebuff of 1897, made omens for the Colonial Conference which accompanied the Coronation of 1902 still more unpromising. In his opening speech to the colonial premiers, Chamberlain voiced his belief that ‘the political federation of the Empire is within the limits of possibility’. It was, however, for the colonies to take the initiative in offering to join such a body. The colonies declined to take the hint, and proved unexpectedly reluctant to shoulder additional military burdens, or extend commercial advantages to Britain without some reciprocal preference. The premiers did take one positive step: they agreed that conferences should be held every four years, independently of imperial pageantry.

 Ironically, this one solid achievement for imperial unity did not stem from Chamberlain’s own tactics. Circumstance—and indeed pomp—had twice brought colonial leaders to London in his term of office, and the two conferences had thus compelled him to fight on the weak ground of trying to build a federal edifice from the roof down. In 1903 he reverted to his original belief that an imperial union could only grow out of closer trade relations. He broke with his party over ‘Tariff Reform’, a campaign which was almost hopeless from the start. The entire Liberal party and many of the Unionists refused to abandon free trade, and it was unlikely that the colonies, which were fostering their own industries, would ever press their own interest in reciprocal preference far enough to integrate their economies with Britain’s. If there was ever to be an imperial council, it would have to grow out of the conference system.

One group which believed this was the Pollock committee, a dining club of influential academics and politicians. Among its members was Alfred Lyttelton who in 1903 succeeded Chamberlain as Colonial
Secretary. Pollock and his group ruled out parliamentary and supra-parliamentary federation, and concentrated on ways of giving the Colonial Conference a more continuous existence as an advisory body. Early in 1905 Lyttelton submitted a version of the committee’s proposals to the self-governing colonies. Broadly, it was proposed to rename the conference ‘Imperial Council’ and give it a permanent secretariat. Colonial Office staff criticised the duplication of machinery, while several colonies reacted with suspicion. Elgin, Colonial Secretary in the incoming Liberal government, dropped the plan, and it only received any hearing at the 1907 Colonial Conference because Australia’s Alfred Deakin was attracted to any scheme which would give colonial leaders access to the British government independent of the existing bureaucracy.

Deakin’s version of the Lyttelton–Pollock scheme was rejected after a muddled debate at the Conference. Deakin’s plan was not entirely clear to the other premiers, but what was clear was that they did not intend to submit to irresponsible central machinery – a feeling held even by the Cape’s jingo premier, Jameson. But it is misleading to see the Conference as a crucial turning point in the fate of imperial federation. The idea of a federal empire was not rejected; it was merely agreed that only through an extra-parliamentary system could it be operated. For what it was worth, the premiers agreed to rename their meeting the ‘Imperial Conference’ as a sign of its enhanced status. Even Elgin was open-minded about the future: he merely felt that ‘the time is not yet come’ for Lyttelton’s scheme, but was prepared to consider the eventual creation of a third, imperial, house of parliament.16

‘South African union is in itself a great step forward in the direction of imperial consolidation.’ A unified South Africa not only encouraged empire federalist sentiments, but led to the formation of an organisation dedicated to closer imperial unity. The ‘Kindergarten’ who believed that they had seized the opportunity to press for union in South Africa, now formed the Round Table to await a similar moment for the creation of a federal empire. Alexander Hamilton was their patron saint, Milner their idol and his belief in ‘a permanent organic union’ their creed. The Round Tablers avoided the mistakes of the Imperial Federation League. There was no attempt at an undiscriminating agitation for divided aims. Major policy problems, like the role of India in a federal union, were thrashed out in secret memoranda. Lobbying was confined to the powerful: only when an obvious crisis had arrived would the Round Table put out its own Federalist Papers. Such tactics were not without their drawbacks. In the Dominions there was much suspicion of the Round Table. Its success in using New Zealand’s Sir Joseph Ward in 1911 was a warning in itself: Ward proposed an ‘Imperial Parliament of Defence’ at the Imperial Conference. It was
the most detailed scheme of unity since 1897, and it was equally unsuccessful. But if one Dominion leader could be seduced, why not others?

The crisis the Round Tablers had waited for came with world war. In 1914, as in 1899, a common enemy faced the empire with the challenge of defining common aspirations and building common institutions. Before the war the empire had operated on quasi-federal lines, with extra-parliamentary meetings approximately filling the constitutional void. But the war meant that the Dominions were supporting, in manpower, foreign policy decisions over which they had no control. Logically the Dominions had either to be given a voice at the centre, or they would have to breach imperial unity by controlling their own external affairs. With hindsight, the trend of events may be discerned towards the latter, but in the heat of war Dominion leaders looked rather to London. This was the moment for the Round Table: in 1915 Lionel Curtis published *The Problem of the Commonwealth*, which prominently stressed control of foreign policy. With Milner in the British war cabinet, and an Imperial War Conference to be summoned in 1917, there was much speculation that the extra-parliamentary conference system might at last make the leap forward into a supreme federal body.

As befitted a meeting called in such confused circumstances, the Conference of 1917 marked both the greatest triumph and the final defeat of the imperial federation movement. The Conference spawned the Imperial War Cabinet, which became the British empire delegation to the peace conference. For the first time there was at the constitutional apex of the empire, some more than merely transient body in which all autonomous governments were represented. True, its effectiveness was limited: political considerations obliged it to become a larger body than the close executive originally contemplated, and it gradually lost its semblance of executive power—a process marked by the absorption of the ablest Dominion leader, Smuts, into the British war cabinet. None the less, the Imperial War Cabinet existed, and was a triumph for closer unity enthusiasts. But even so, it remained, in Borden’s phrase, ‘a cabinet of governments rather than of ministers’. Even in unity, the Dominions maintained diversity. The Imperial War Cabinet was answerable to no legislature. Smuts carried a resolution at the Conference recognising the autonomy of the Dominions, stressing that it ‘negatived by implication’ any future possibility of a common imperial legislature. Publicly he called for the abandonment of imperial terminology, and spoke of ‘the British Commonwealth of Nations’. He still wished to see annual meetings of Dominion leaders, and even adhered to the idea of a common foreign policy. None the less, his admirers were right that he had ‘put the lid on Messers [sic] Lionel Curtis & Co’.
In the half century following the First World War, the conference system became less a substitute for an imperial legislature and more a regular intergovernmental meeting, drawing on some residual sense of unity. Hopes that the Commonwealth would fill the empire’s place as a ‘third force’, between America and Russia, proved illusory. Extra-parliamentary federalism peacefully disintegrated. That basic ingredient, parliamentary federalism, proved remarkably resilient. Although the problem of constitutional relations between Britain and the Dominions no longer seemed to point to an all-embracing federal solution, there remained the puzzle of what to do with smaller or more backward dependencies. When Dominion status collapsed in Newfoundland under a weight of debt in 1933, two British MPs argued that parliament should not attempt to rule the island without the assistance of Newfoundland representatives. One even urged that as other Dominions subsided into bankruptcy, they too should be absorbed into an imperial legislature. The Second World War accelerated interest in the economic and political development of non-European parts of the empire, and the Fabian Colonial Bureau noted in 1942 that this had been accompanied by suggestions for the introduction of overseas MPs to parliament. In 1956 Malta actually voted in a referendum for integration with Britain. Curiously, the proposal was discussed in ignorance of the long tradition of suggestions for colonial representation. French and Portuguese precedents were referred to, but overall the affair demonstrated how resilient the idea was. As late as 1969 it had reappeared, this time in the remaining Mediterranean dependency, Gibraltar.12

It is probable that the supra-parliamentary impulse may be traced even after there was an empire to unite. Global unity and world power remained attractive, and the impulse simply transferred itself to other areas. The optimistic faith shown in the League of Nations and, during its early years, in the United Nations too, may owe something to the more idealistic side of empire federalism – its desire to impose a British peace on the world. Certainly British hopes for the UN were based on a belief that it would be underwritten by an Anglo-American alliance, an illusion rudely shattered at Suez in 1956. Belief in a ‘special relationship’ with America stemmed from the same notions of late Victorian Anglo-Saxondom which had nurtured empire federalism. By the early 1960s it was clear that the United States did not require a British guiding hand to exercise its world role, and British leaders turned to Europe instead. L. S. Amery, one of the architects of the Imperial War Cabinet, became an exponent of European unity in the late 1940s, and his son’s biography of Chamberlain closes with a survey tracing the link between Tariff Reform and the Common Market. Certainly many of the arguments advanced in the 1960s and 1970s for British membership of the EEC had a familiar ring, thus demonstrating that empire
federalist sentiments had bitten far deeper than is acknowledged by historians who confine their judgement to a brief dismissal of the Imperial Federation League.

The empire federalist debate was virtually continuous from the mid-eighteenth through to the early twentieth century. Even the break in active discussion during the French Revolutionary period does not invalidate the generalisation: in the mid-nineteenth century the views of Burke and Adam Smith were cited as of contemporary relevance, and as late as 1907 a plan of 1770 could be republished by an academic as 'well worth attention now'. The later Victorians similarly debated the views of mid-century writers like Mill and Goldwin Smith, and the wave of interest generated in the late 1860s was not the beginning of a movement but simply a revival of a sentiment which had always gone through cycles of popularity. Certainly Cheng's analysis of arguments used in the late nineteenth-century debate may be equally applied to discussions after 1765 and before 1870. Joint control of foreign and defence policies, the need for constitutional completeness, the fear of dissolution, the hope of encouraging British migration and investment—all these were regularly urged throughout. On the other hand there remained the same objections—lack of geographical unity, reluctance to endanger colonial autonomy, British distaste for colonial pretensions. Franklin believed in colonial parliamentary representation, but 'the Pride of this People cannot bear the Thoughts of it'. He and T. C. Haliburton eighty years later complained of the arrogance with which ordinary Englishmen talked of 'our' colonies, and so relegated colonials to inferiors. Even in 1907, civilised English leaders repeatedly dismissed Alfred Deakin as a bore when he presented at least a plausible analysis of the structural problem. Not surprisingly, the majority of colonial spokesmen reacted with suspicion of the British, more especially as they would be outvoted in any legislature based on population. 'I have never heard of a more idiotic proposal', Smuts commented on Ward's 1911 scheme, which would have given the Dominions 77 seats out of 297. Not only would they be outvoted, but colonial patriots feared their leaders would be actually seduced by the wily British. 'A Representation in parliament wee are afraid of wee think they will Corrupt our Members and Rule over them', wrote an American Whig, fearful of taxation, in 1770. Similarly, an Australian socialist, fearful of conscription, asked in 1917 'Could we be sure that they would be quite impervious to the subtle and pernicious influences which would surround them?' In the circumstances, the insoluble problems—the apportionment of taxation, tariff unity, the assimilation of franchise, the position of India—were symptoms rather than causes of the impossibility of federating the empire.

Perhaps the most significant point about empire federalism is that it
should for so long have attracted so many—including men of great ability—despite its obvious impracticability. It is testimony to the enduring attractions of imperial unity. Yet a movement which fed so powerfully on the sentiment of empire ironically played a part in destroying it. A favourite argument was the ultimatum, 'federate or disintegrate'. For many a colonial, loyal to the British connection, for many an Englishman who felt affection for the empire, the ultimatum helped force a choice. Federation was impossible, and therefore the path to separation had to be accepted. Perhaps the chief contribution of the empire federalists was to make possible the peaceful dissolution of the association.

NOTES


9. Kendle Colonial and imperial conferences 6n; Tyler Struggle for imperial unity 184, 203–8; Imperial Federation i (1886) 37–9.


7 The partition of Africa: a critique of Robinson and Gallagher

Africa and the Victorians by R. E. Robinson and J. A. Gallagher is subtitled 'The official mind of imperialism', and as a general analysis of the phenomenon of the political mind at work (rather less the departmental civil service mind—not quite the same thing) the book is a brilliant study and one not easily cavilled at. The authors' central intention, however muted, was to offer an interpretation of the partition of Africa, and their book has certainly been read chiefly in that context. As a result it has been criticised for its narrowness and its concentration on government records; Hargreaves comments that 'the effect is sometimes as if Ulysses had been compiled from the records of the Dublin police force'. Defenders of Robinson and Gallagher might argue that explaining the partition was not the authors' primary aim, that they did not mean to rewrite Ulysses but simply to study the records of the 'Dublin police force' in their own right. Nevertheless, as C. S. Lewis suggested in An experiment in criticism, it is a perfectly valid proceeding 'to judge books by the way they are read'; and any doubts about the real intentions of the authors were removed by their analysis of 'The partition of Africa' in volume xi of the New Cambridge Modern History. This essay was ambitious. The African side was examined more fully, and the chronology of the partition refined. The chief advance of the essay over the book was the attempt to distinguish a 'paper empire' of the 1880s, purposeless, freakish, irrational, casual, from a quickening territorial occupation in the 1890s.

The European pretensions provoked new African resistances, and these compelled further European exertions. So the partition gained a new momentum. The quickening occupation of tropical Africa in the 1890s, as distinct from the paper partitions of the 1880s, was the double climax of two closely connected conflicts: on the one hand, the struggle between France and Britain for control of the Nile; on the other, the struggle between European, African, Christian and Muslim expansions for control of North and Central Africa. Having embarked so lightly on the African game, the rulers of Europe had now to take it seriously.
The trouble with this striking suggestion is that it implies initial seizures were not seriously intended and not positively, even aggressively, implemented; the chronology is also difficult to certify. Dubious chronology marches with some boldly speculative ventures into the dynamics of African history.

So much of the history of African policies [? politics] runs through very-short-term cycles of expansion and contraction. . . . How they reacted to the inroads of Europe, therefore, was partly determined by the point they had reached in their cycle of growth and decay. At a time of down-turn, their rulers would have strong reasons for striking a bargain with the new invaders. But challenged during a period of upswing, they might choose to fight it out to the end. . . .

. . . The plain fact is that the longest and bloodiest fighting against the forces of Europe was carried out by Muslims.

This passage now has a decidedly dated air. A great deal more is known today about African resistance, certainly enough to cast doubt on the pre-emminence given to Muslim resistance, and the connection between cyclical down-turn and collaboration. The Maji-Maji rebellion and the revolt of the Shona and Ndebele show with what determination and fierceness societies neither Muslim nor Christian could fight. The newly emerging Ganda elite co-operated at a time of upswing; so did the Lozi of Barotseland: while the Sotho and Zulu resisted at times when their fortunes were very low. Response to Europe was infinitely variable.

It is not, however, with these exceedingly interesting flights of fancy with which we wish to deal in this essay. We turn rather to that part of the Robinson and Gallagher thesis which relates the partition of Africa to British imperial history.

Robinson and Gallagher argue that the calculations behind British annexations were the product of the ‘official mind’—a phenomenon for them dominated by Salisbury. They do not deny that the causes of Africa’s partition were complex. Indeed, their thesis is argued with much subtlety and they insist that ‘any theory of imperialism grounded on the notion of a single decisive cause is too simple for the complicated historical reality of the African partition’. Nevertheless their thesis involves such a strong shift of emphasis away from previous explanations that it gives an impression of rejecting so much as to leave almost a monocausal argument.

In their attempt to make ‘a contribution to the general theory of imperialism’ Robinson and Gallagher tended to confirm previous interpretations which had discounted a Marxist approach, but by emphasising strategic factors forced a continuing revision of the notion that late nineteenth-century ‘imperialism’ was a climax of optimistic expansion. Briefly, they argue that
The so-called imperialism of the late-Victorians began as little more than a defensive response to the Irish, the Egyptian and the Transvaal rebellions. Their ‘imperialism’ was not so much the cause as the effect of the African partition.

The ‘crucial changes’ leading to partition ‘were taking place in Africa rather than in Europe’. As Robinson and Gallagher themselves observe, this constitutes a radical break with the inherited historiography of the partition.

Scanning Europe for the causes, the theorists of imperialism have been looking for the answers in the wrong places. The crucial changes that set all working took place in Africa itself. It was the fall of an old power in its north, the rise of a new in its south, that dragged Africa into modern history.

Despite the emphasis on three crises at one point, two at another, the causal relationship chiefly postulated is between the British occupation of Egypt in 1882 and the scramble for Africa. Searching for ‘adequate compensation’ France took territory elsewhere on the continent which, Robinson and Gallagher argue, there is no reason to suppose she would have seized but for her humiliation in Egypt. The British, for their part, ‘moved into Africa, not to build a new African empire, but to protect the old empire in India’. Both the British occupation of Egypt and the subsequent decision to annex territory on the east coast of Africa at the expense of claims on the west stemmed from the ‘imperative’ of the strategic need to safeguard the route to India. ‘In the main, British Africa was a gigantic footnote to the Indian empire...’

At its first publication, the novelty of the Robinson–Gallagher thesis lay not simply in its break with the views of earlier historians but also in its departure from the kinds of explanation which had been put forward by informed contemporaries and participants. If nothing else it was a valuable corrective to ‘Eurocentric’ views of African history. However, precisely because of its challenging novelty, in the decade following its adumbration the Robinson–Gallagher thesis has so dominated all discussions of the subject that it may now be regarded as a myth about the partition of Africa: and one over-ripe for revision.

The interpretation of the partition as a strategically dominated response to local ‘nationalist’ challenges is open to criticism in several respects. Perhaps the most fundamental weakness of the theory is that the partition which was taking place was not so much one of Africa as of the whole world. This was not a dream confined to the overheated imaginations of Chamberlain and Rhodes, but something accepted as a factual commonplace even in the most responsible quarters. Rosebery spoke of ‘a partition of the world’ as something ‘which has been
forced upon us’. Elgin, as Viceroy of India, referred to ‘an era of delimitation, all over the world’ and ‘the struggle between civilisation and barbarism which is going on more or less all over the world’. The Spectator wrote of ‘the work of occupying unused spaces of the world, and drilling its savage races into decent order’. If the partition which resulted was largely one of Africa, it was mainly because Africa was the largest area which could be divided without major damage to the relations of European powers. The Spectator, confidently assuming that Germany had to have colonies of her own, discussed four possible areas for her activity. One was the absorption of Holland and her eastern empire. The second was an arrangement with England to secure territory in Africa, possibly even including the Afrikaner republics. The third was a similar arrangement with the United States to conquer part of Latin America. Fourth came seizure of ‘the most potentially profitable dependency in the world – fertile, but depopulated Asia Minor’. German expansion elsewhere, it explained, might provoke ruinous warfare. In fact, three of these four possibilities were unlikely of realisation, which left Africa. But the Society for German Colonization was concerned with more than Africa when it complained that Germany was ‘without a voice in the partition of the world’. The real weakness of Robinson and Gallagher’s ‘but for Egypt’ argument is that it hardly explains why the Pacific was partitioned, and why China (at a time of ‘nationalist’ challenge to Europe) and later Persia only just escaped more than division into spheres of influence. An explanation incapable of extension outside Africa is necessarily functioning at only a secondary level of causation.

There was a feeling that no nation could afford or even manage to stand still. The Quarterly Review warned in 1885 that ‘Germany cannot and will not stop where she is’. The Spectator thought it impossible that Germany could ‘consent to remain cooped-up on a large but over-populated strip of loam and sand, while there are new and rich territories to occupy or conquer’. France’s conquest of Tunis must lead her into Tripoli, her adventure in Tonkin would entangle her in Siam and so bring her up to the borders of British Burma. The British empire was faced with the need to run just to stay still, for ‘growth and existence are but synonymous terms’, warned Carnarvon.

Faced with this irresistible pressure, weaker peoples not only had to yield, but were under a moral obligation to do so. The Spectator reflected the view of most British commentators: the French invasion of Tunis was a squalid and small-minded adventure, but none the less the south side of the Mediterranean ‘ought to belong to Europe, – that is, to the progressive section of the world’. The peoples of north Africa were incapable of civilising themselves. ‘They have been tried for a thousand years, and they have failed. . . .’ They had produced or
created nothing, 'have shut up Africa from Europe', and had 'deteriorated' to become 'a lower people' even than their forebears whom Charles Martel had driven out of France.

They have not even multiplied or cultivated, and can show morally little more claim to their vast territories than the Maoris to their islands or the Red Indians to North America. They diminish instead of increasing the small possession of mankind on which it is dependent for its future progress.

The indictment, as the adverb 'morally' indicated, was evidently intended to be a serious one. Similarly, when Queensland annexed eastern New Guinea, The Times referred to a 'spontaneous natural force' impelling populations which have learnt to extract from the soil its utmost resources to compress within narrower limits races less habituated to the lessons of practical economy. Wherever there is a fertile land not peopled up to its powers of sustenance, it is evident that, by compulsion or by persuasion, its residents will have to make room for more energetic foreigners.

In 1898 Salisbury suggested a rough categorisation of the nations as 'the living and the dying'. In the latter, 'disorganisation and decay are advancing almost as fast as concentration and increasing power are advancing' in the former. Thus 'the weak states are becoming weaker and the strong states are becoming stronger'. The imbalance would continue until the strong devoured the weak.

For one reason or another—from the necessities of politics or under the pretence of philanthropy, the living nations will gradually encroach on the territory of the dying, and the seeds and causes of conflict among civilized nations will speedily appear.

It is noticeable that while philanthropy might provide the pretext for annexations, politics compelled the necessity, and politics meant the relations of 'civilized'—mainly European—nations. Moreover, Salisbury's use of the future tense indicates that he thought of the partition of Africa as merely a step in a wider and continuing process (as indeed Louis has demonstrated it to have been in Ruanda-Urundi). One of its precipitants was the persistent assumption in Britain and elsewhere that France was one of the dying nations, which spurred the French to encroachments on those weaker than themselves.⁶

If the partition of Africa is seen as only a part of a larger division of the world, several consequences would seem to follow. One is that there is less reason to think of the African continent as a single unit: different balances of motive may have operated in different areas. Second, if
the process was so irresistible and long-drawn out as Salisbury and others seem to have assumed, there is less reason for ascribing to it a single dramatic opening date. Above all, unless Europe was facing simultaneous 'nationalist' crises all over the world, it seems reasonable to seek once again root causes among the Great Powers themselves.

The traditional interpretation which emphasised European factors rested on such remarks as Gambetta's 'In Africa France will take the first faltering steps of the convalescent' and Bismarck's contention that his map of Africa lay in Europe. On the face of it, if jealousy or the search for compensation was the motive behind French expansion, the national humiliation suffered by France in Egypt in 1882—if indeed it was humiliation—was nothing to the humiliation she had suffered in 1871 on her own soil. The French certainly resented their political rebuff in Egypt, but expressed their resentment by trying to prise the British off the Nile. There is much less evidence to suggest that the same motive led them to fasten themselves on the Niger or the Congo. It was Alsace-Lorraine, not Egypt, which figured most in their rhetoric. 'Must we hypnotize ourselves with the lost provinces', asked Ferry, the architect of France's colonial policy, 'and should we not take compensations elsewhere?'

The chief argument for discounting the events of 1870–71 as a precipitant of French colonial expansion is the time-lag involved before any definite African result emerged. But the time-lag was not particularly long and it is perfectly understandable. Common sense pointed, for a time at least, to concentration on domestic recovery, and this in turn involved avoiding needless quarrels with Britain in west Africa. But even so the French did not abandon their colonial aims. In 1873 Garnier raided Hanoi, and between 1877 and 1881 Brière de l'Isle pressed frontiers forward in Senegal. By 1881, a minor Anglo-French race had developed in Senegambia, and as early as 1879 Salisbury had expressed alarm at the effect in Paris of an extension of the Lagos colony. Nor should it be forgotten that France had an active pressure group, the Geographical Movement, at work in the 1870s preparing the way for her African intervention. Robinson has however expressed doubts about the role of this pressure group, suggesting it was 'the military, far more than the geographers and intellectuals, who felt the need to restore the national honour'. They stood to gain most from (they hoped) easy colonial victories, and they carried the political weight to have their own way. But this only strengthens the emphasis on 1870–71. France may have been politically humiliated in 1882, but it was not her army which suffered military defeat at Tel el Kebir. Even if it were conceded that Egypt triggered off partition, it remains to be explained why Egypt should have been capable of bringing such rivalries to a head. At best it explains only how, and not why, the con-
tinent was divided. France had begun her convalescent steps in Africa at least a year before Gladstone entered his Egyptian bondage.

Neither the French occupation of Tunis in 1881, nor the activities of King Leopold’s agents on the Congo, receive the extensive treatment from Robinson and Gallagher which they give to Egypt. Yet each episode antedates 1882 and indicates that a different balance of motives operated in different areas of Africa, and that political and commercial rivalries from Europe were paramount considerations.

The French occupation of Tunis is dismissed by Robinson and Gallagher as no cause of Anglo-French rivalry in Africa. This is largely true, but the episode is not to be so brusquely discarded. Why did Tunis not displease Britain? Why did Britain’s concern for the routes to India not extend to alarm about France in Tunis? Why was Salisbury prepared to go such a long way to meet France in Tunis, which was a much better acquisition than Cyprus? Why did Britain withdraw from one of the three north African states (the other two were Morocco and Egypt) which she had traditionally deemed essential to control in order to secure her route through the Mediterranean? The conclusion from reading Marsden’s study seems inescapable: Britain in 1878 regarded an accommodation with France as more important than the traditional security of the routes to India. The route to India was not, it seems, sacrosanct in British policy. Tunis was the link between the eastern crisis of 1878 and the partition—the Powers which met at Berlin in 1884 to divide Africa were the same ones which had dealt with Turkey in the same city six years earlier. Tunis was clearly seen as the start of France’s new career both as a colonial and a European power, and the episode not only placed some strain on Anglo-French relations but went far towards cutting the ground from under French objections to the British occupation of Egypt. Both governments had begun with punitive expeditions and ended as controlling Powers: the difference was that the French government had intended to do so, the British had not. When the French demanded territorial compensation for loss of influence in Egypt, it was in the form of British support for outright annexation in Tunis, not colonies elsewhere.

Although border affrays into Algeria were a powerful incentive for a punitive expedition, they explain neither the timing of French action, nor the virtual annexation of the whole country which followed. Algeria had to suffer equally serious incursions from Morocco and the southern desert. British observers had little doubt that the real motive was ‘a commercial and political rivalry with Italy, in which each power fears to be outstripped by the other’. If there were two hundred Frenchmen in Tunis needing protection, there were also perhaps twenty thousand Italians. Italian ambitions in Tunis were no secret, and the financial embarrassments of the Bey seemed likely to bring European
intervention before long. Whoever got Tunis would also get Bizerta, the finest naval harbour in north Africa. Bizerta plus Leghorn would give Italy command of the Mediterranean. Bizerta plus Toulon would make it a French sea. Significantly, France attempted to square every interested Power except Italy. Britain she did not need to deal with, for Salisbury had apparently promised Waddington privately in 1878 that Britain would give France a free hand in Tunis in exchange for her acquisition of Cyprus. Here is a reminder that different motives may have applied in different parts of Africa. The first major conquest in the African partition was a footnote not to British India, but to the eastern crisis of 1878. But Robinson and Gallagher argue that the British government chose not to be affronted by Tunis and that therefore it may be dismissed as a cause of the partition.

It is strange that a thesis which relies so heavily on one European occupation of a collapsing north African polity should be so summary in dismissing another. Tunis cannot be so easily put aside. First, it did create an atmosphere of Anglo-French suspicion. Some were bitter at what appeared to be a French attempt to strangle the route to India, while 'a large party in this country would think that the Power which holds Malta ought to be consulted as to the disposal of Tunis'. Tunis had its effects on co-operation between the two governments in Egypt. Second, the French occupation of part of the Turkish empire revived the 1878 suggestions of a larger partition: it was well known that such ideas had been canvassed. This led to demands in the press that Britain's interests in Egypt 'must be safeguarded at any cost' and that warnings should be given 'that the method of attack on Tunis makes England distrustful of her partnership with France in Egypt'. If the events of 1882 made it necessary for England to secure a traditional objective by new means, it was partly because the events of 1881 had strained her relations in Egypt. Despite Disraeli's purchase of shares in the Suez Canal Company, its controlling interest and management were French and thought to operate 'with a view to the benefit of the proprietors, and this without due regard to the fair trade requirements of the rest of the world'. Four-fifths of the traffic was British, using a canal built 'with a scarcely concealed purpose of aiding French ascendency in Egypt'.

Above all, the unsettling factor of Tunis was that, unlike the territorial adjustments of 1878, it was a unilateral action, which affected a European balance. According to The Times:

The fact is that so delicate is the poise of international interests throughout the Mediterranean and its shores that no Power can stir a step without arousing susceptibilities which are far more easily excited than allayed.
The *Spectator* regretted that 'in regions so entirely within the range of European international law, and... the scope of European statesmanship, any conquest should be permitted by a single State'. It would be better to have European regulation by agreement which could legitimise the French position, but 'the arbiter of the moment, Prince Bismarck, wishes to see France quarrelling with Italy'. Because the French action so abruptly reopened the settlement of 1878, it could not be expected that 'France will remain without rivals, or that proposals for partition like those formerly rejected more than once by the British Government will not be renewed'. The partition feared, however, was of Turkish North Africa, rather than of the whole continent, although European occupation of the north was hopefully expected to improve trading contacts with the peoples further south. The north coast of Africa, 'by tacit consent regarded as, in some sort, neutral ground,' seemed now destined to become 'the battle-ground of European influences'. Tunis was the product of European, not African, factors. 'France is becoming a Great Power again', exulted Gambetta. France is not to be congratulated on the occasion of her re-appearance in active European politics', lamented *The Times.*

There is thus much reason to give weight to the older view that France's colonial impulse was a product of European considerations which antedated the occupation of Egypt. What effect, then, did the British occupation of Egypt have on France? Stengers, in a study of French policy in west Africa in 1882–3, argues that at most Egypt excited French public opinion, rather a different interpretation from that of Robinson and Gallagher. Hargreaves commented that the French rebuff in Egypt sharpened already existing local rivalries in west Africa,* but Stengers finds no evidence that the coup de poing of Robinson and Gallagher had anything to do with the inauguration of the protectorates policy in 1883. Brunschwig's close study of the origins of French policy suggests that Egypt was a minor irritant compared with Leopold II's rapid expansion in the Congo, and that it was the events of 1870–71 rather than those of 1882 which were constantly referred to.¹⁴

Contemporary commentators in Britain took the same view. The Tunis adventure strongly suggested 'that France would like to find in Africa an outlet for the energies or ambition which may have received a check on the Continent of Europe'. What the British did in 1882 was

---

*Footnote:* This was in *Prelude to the partition*. The effect of the 1882 crisis is discussed in his *West Africa partitioned* 1 (1974) 32–3: he differs here from the thesis of *Africa and the Victorians* (and more generally too, e.g. 21–2). For a recent and more or less uncritical acceptance of the 'Egyptocentric' thesis, however, see R. J. Gavin and J. A. Betley (eds) *The Scramble for Africa: documents on the Berlin West African Conference and related subjects 1884/85* (1973) xxi–xxiii.
either not thought to matter, or at most was secondary. French interest in the Congo was suggested—no more than that—to represent an intention of recouping herself for territorial curtailment in Europe or for political losses in Egypt. Nor were British commentators dreaming up explanations which might quiet their own consciences. In 1883 The Times thought the most likely explanation of the forward policy of France in Madagascar and elsewhere where no great resistance is likely to be met was contained in a speech made by Challemel Lacour in the French Senate: 'The reverses of some ten or twelve years ago have rendered it necessary for France to make her influence felt among distant populations...'. Not all Frenchmen agreed. Léon Say denounced the colonial policy, and extracts from his speech appeared in a leading article of The Times.

All these galvanic efforts to regild prestige deceive no one. This restlessness betrays wounded vanity rather than superabundant strength; this spasmodic energy abroad is a revelation of the consciousness that France has lost power on the Continent...

It became almost a commonplace that the French had no 'irresistible impulse towards colonization', merely 'a feverish restlessness which seeks in distant adventure a compensation for reverses suffered at home, and is in reality an indication of weakness rather than of strength'.

Consequently, The Times at least referred to French colonising adventures in tones of pitying contempt. 'Terrorising savages' was 'a poor way' to retrieve her credit in Europe. France was 'always peeping through the keyhole to see what Prince Bismarck is doing', and whenever he seemed involved elsewhere 'she sets off to amuse herself in her own old fashion in some unoccupied corner of the world'. And what did she gain from her colonial adventures? 'We all know by heart the stale pretexts for them'. Yet in reality, it was no use 'to distribute flags to the tribes of the Congo', and parade a show of force against moribund China,

if in Europe she is still forced to watch every movement of Germany with bated breath, and to shape her policy in obedience to Prince Bismarck's rod. It will not help her to escape from this mortifying position that she has obtained barren successes against contemptible foes in different parts of the world.

France was 'practically powerless' in Europe and would do better to build up her strength there.

Nothing is sadder or more calculated to aggravate a feeling of distrust, than the manifest desire to satisfy injured national vanity by a series of barren adventures in search of shadowy objects.
So deep ran the belief that the French had no talent for expansion, and were merely gratifying injured self-esteem, that it was calmly argued that even the incompetent Portuguese would do less to harm the development of commerce on the Congo than the selfish French.\textsuperscript{18}

If British 'official thinking' helped to paint the map red, British unofficial thinking helped to sting the French to plant the tricolour. Just as the British listened to the debates of their neighbours, so did the French overhear the comments of theirs. Théodore Colani, a French journalist, complained that the British and the Germans took it as axiomatic that 'the French do not know how to colonise'. Colani insisted that the French expeditions to Tunis, Madagascar and Tonkin had been justifiable attempts to uphold rights which had been encroached upon because of 'our enfeebled and sorely wounded condition'. As a Protestant who believed in the need for alliance with Britain, Colani may not have been typical, but his only comment on Egypt was that it proved the need for co-operation between the two nations. He placed very much more emphasis on the losses France had suffered in the Franco-Prussian war, calling the peace of 1871 'hitherto the capital fact of the second half of the nineteenth century'.\textsuperscript{37}

Tunis, then, may have counted for more than Robinson and Gallagher allow. It represented the beginning of a burst of French colonial activity traceable to European origins. It was the turbulence on the Rhine not the Nile which sent a tidal wave across not just Africa, but southeast Asia too. This certainly moves the balance of explanation away from a single African cause which embraced the entire continent. Egypt, for obvious chronological reasons, does not explain Tunis. The further from Egypt, the less plausible does the argument become, as Robinson and Gallagher admit with respect to south Africa. In a 'roundabout way' the British occupation 'triggered off at least a secondary rivalry for possession of tropical Africa', claim Robinson and Gallagher. In fact in central Africa a different mixture of motives led to European rivalries before 1882. The Nile was irrelevant to the Congo: contemporaries certainly did not see any connection.\textsuperscript{18} To understand the situation in central Africa in 1884, they looked back to the year 1877, when Stanley's expedition aroused keen interest on geographical, philanthropic and commercial grounds. There was speculation as to why each of the Powers seemed anxious to snatch or secure its share of this prize. Perhaps they wished to emulate the success of Britain in India or the Dutch in Java. Perhaps Germany wanted to divert German emigration to the United States into colonies of her own. Perhaps Belgium wished to corner markets in which Britain could not compete. It was all 'perhaps'. But there was little doubt that it was Leopold II of Belgium who brought European rivalries to the Congo. Leopold was an interloper. True, he was King of the Belgians, but the Belgian
government would have nothing to do with his International Association. It was precisely the uncertain status of the enterprise which made it a matter of European concern. It seemed likely that the Association would have to pass under the control of some Power if it aimed to exercise territorial sovereignty. At one moment it seemed as if the United States would step in, at another that Leopold might even win over the Belgian government. Leopold was, after all, a Coburg, and his family connections alone were enough to keep the Third Republic alert. Furthermore, the Congo basin in unfriendly hands would embarrass the French in their languishing colony of Gabon. Brunschwig certainly finds evidence that the French were concerned about Leopold more than about Egypt, and regards him as the spur which translated French geographical and colonial theory into reality. While its status was still doubtful, the International Association could not claim territorial authority, and it was a French adventurer, de Brazza, who ‘first raised the awkward question of sovereignty’ in his ‘treaty’ with Makoko in 1882. But plenty of enthusiasts had induced various African chiefs to sign away rights they could not enforce to territories they did not own, and European governments had quietly pigeon-holed them. This time the French ministry was forced to abandon this traditional device of the official mind, and submitted the treaty to the unanimous ratification of a Chamber which proved itself ‘vraiment française’. Why did this happen? Stengers argues that de Brazza mounted a public relations campaign which succeeded in convincing the press of the Congo’s fabulous fertility. But why did he succeed? Here it seems Egypt was an irritant in stirring up public opinion. The Congo was ‘la meilleure et la plus sûre revanche’ for Egypt. But this is not to say that without Egypt there would have been no ratification of the treaty with Makoko. Once again the inconvenient chronology of Tunis puts the role of Egypt into perspective. In French colonial activities in west Africa during the following year, Stengers finds no trace of the Egyptian irritation at all.

What was at stake in the Congo? The major prizes were trade and Katanga. It was true that there was little commerce on the Congo, and not much hope that Africans would reach ‘even the moderate standard’ of civilisation which had created markets in other river valleys. But still the prize was valued ‘by that sort of imagination which proverbially turns the “ignotum” into the “magnificum”’. Its existing trade was mainly in Dutch, French and British hands. Consequently the main interest of Britain was that the Congo should be free to the peaceful enterprise of all the world. The Times regarded British annexation as out of the question, and the Spectator wished ‘some decent third-rate European power’, perhaps Belgium or Holland, to have the valley ‘for the time being’. Basically, Britain had enough to do and wished the Congo to
lie fallow, but if every one else moved there, she could not afford to remain motionless. According to the *Quarterly Review*, experience indicated that 'trade may be hampered or fettered if the dominion or the territorial administration should fall into exclusive, illiberal or unfriendly hands'. To open up the Congo would require the construction of short railway lines to bypass dangerous stretches of the river. If the owners of the railway wished to penalise British trade, 'how easily might rates of freight and other local regulations be devised to fulfil this desire!' Eventually the Congo was given to 'that anomalous new "State"' which Leopold created – an example of how European rivalry was ultimately contained by negotiation.²⁰

This points to a further major weakness of the Robinson–Gallagher thesis, its underestimation of economic factors. It is one thing to reject an all-embracing Marxist interpretation, but quite another to reject any economic expectation as central. Nor is it sufficient to prove that Africa attracted little interest from British manufacturers, merchants and investors until after 1900: those who engineered the partition may have hoped for economic gains, even if they were rapidly disillusioned. There had long been British interest in various parts of Africa as a potential source of cotton supplies, and Palmerston had always been anxious to secure economic concessions from African rulers. Contemporaries either regarded the motives for the partition as economic or, like Ramsay MacDonald, believed it had been justified by its economic benefits. Lugard retrospectively regarded the Anglo-German rivalry of 1884–5 (not Egypt) as the 'immediate cause', which itself sprang from the events of 1870–71. But fundamentally the partition, he wrote,

was, as we all recognize, due primarily to the economic necessity of increasing the supplies of raw materials and food to meet the needs of the industrialised nations of Europe.

In 1885 Britain's colonies could be described as 'vital to her now', and they 'might become a source of untold wealth and strength in the future . . .'²⁰

Future raw materials, however, mattered less than current trade. Salisbury may have refused to take territory for economic reasons when he judged that Africa's trade was not worthwhile, but he was not indifferent to such considerations. He wanted 'not territory, but facility for trade', but recognised that the one might involve the other. In 1893 he insisted that

we cannot suffer, more than we can help, that the unoccupied parts of the world, where we must look for new markets for our goods, shall be shut from us by foreign legislation.
Africa may not have been a vast prize, but in a competitive world it was worth hanging on to every opening. Hence the interest in the Congo.

In 1885 Sir George Goldie wrote of the Niger:

With old-established markets closing to our manufacturers, with India producing cotton fabrics not only for her own use but for export, it would be suicidal to abandon to a rival power the only great remaining undeveloped opening for British goods.

According to Sir Harry Johnston, by 1889 the Foreign and Colonial Offices shared his and Rhodes’s views on

the necessity of extending the British Empire within reasonable limits over countries not yet taken up by European Powers, to provide new markets for our manufactures and afford further scope for British enterprise.

In fact as early as 1883 Anderson of the Foreign Office, while regarding protectorates in west Africa as ‘unwelcome burdens’, realised that it was ‘a question between British protectorates, which would be unwelcome, and French protectorates, which would be fatal’. Like Salisbury, he regarded partition as something forced on the British: ‘Protectorates, of one sort or another, are the inevitable outcome of the situation’.21 The Robinson-Gallagher emphasis on Egypt obscures the intensifying rivalry between European interests in other parts of Africa. The most conspicuous feature of the ‘scramble’ at local level was concession-hunting. In Swaziland King Mbandzeni granted away more than the total land area of his kingdom. On the west coast the 1870s and 1880s saw intense commercial rivalry leading to local disputes over differential customs duties. European governments were already being drawn into the interior by their own nationals and local traders. Newbury argues that only partition could have remedied the situation. Both British and French administrators wished to extend their area of customs collection to secure an effective revenue, and each advance by one spurred on the other. In 1879 Salisbury had suggested that Britain and France might avoid their disputes by adopting a common tariff along the coast, but the two could never agree which goods were luxuries and which necessities. Failing agreement there had to be division. ‘We cannot,’ said The Times, ‘with so many eager competitors in the field, afford to neglect any country likely to yield new fields for commercial enterprise.’ Flint traces acute Anglo-French trade rivalry in west Africa from at least 1880.22

This prominent economic aspect of the question detracts considerably from the emphasis on the strategic factor. Robinson and Gallagher themselves accept that strategy was not an end in itself: the route to India mattered chiefly because India conferred economic benefits.
Furthermore, the role of government was still conventionally limited, and it is likely that economic considerations might be obscured in the official record, precisely because policy would be discussed in the more acceptable language of strategy. It is striking that the government's apparent preoccupation with strategy did not conflict with its traditional devotion to economy. Sir Harry Johnston regarded the Treasury as a formidable block to annexations—which no cabinet would support if vital interests were really involved—and Anderson reconciled himself to expansion in west Africa, 'for expenses could be managed by manipulating the traders'. Robinson and Gallagher dismiss Nigeria, annexed through a trading company for trade motives, as an exception, although by any consideration it must be a highly important one. But with British acquisitions in the supposedly 'strategic' areas of central and east Africa, the precondition for take-over equally seems to have been the existence of a patriotic commercial company prepared to carry the administrative burden. Strategic imperatives notwithstanding, it seems that if the price of taking territory had been the imposition of fresh burdens on the British taxpayer, the price would have been prohibitive. Moreover, Roland Oliver commented on *Africa and the Victorians* by suggesting that the strategic importance of east Africa was a secondary discovery, made when the company was falling: an excuse to hold on, rather than a motive for going in. Nor is it at all easy to see that the partition represented a process of 'selling west to buy east'. As Flint has shown, Britain did well in west Africa (before the advent of Chamberlain), and neither in the 1880s nor the 1890s did she make any west African concessions to France to relieve the pressure on Egypt or the Nile Valley; those pressures were eventually met by the reconquest of the Sudan. Still less can it be argued that economic ideas were developed only in the 1890s to pay for the strategic acquisitions of the 1880s, since the truth of the matter is that acquisitions were made in the 1880s at a time of economic alarm, and that in the next decade, when strategic fears genuinely developed, the newly acquired areas were then reassessed realistically according to their strategic value.

If the emphasis on the strategic argument distorts the causes of the partition, it seems just as likely that the emphasis on Egypt distorts the strategic argument itself. The strategic importance of east Africa was at least as great on account of the Cape as of the Suez route to India. Granville was concerned about the coast as much as the Nile headwaters: the 'seizure of a port' by France or Germany would be 'ruinous' to British influence on the coast, and French activity in Madagascar made it 'all the more necessary to guard...our sea route to India'. This was the route along which Britain had felt compelled to take the Cape and Mauritius to keep out European rivals before, and
for which Gladstone now thought it right ‘to have a continuous line of coast in South Africa’.  

What gave this consideration an enhanced force at the time the retention of Uganda was being considered was the laying of the cable intended to link Cape Town and India, via Mauritius. The cable reached Zanzibar by 1879 and Mauritius early in the eighteen-nineties, and was planned to be developed as Britain’s first line of communication with India and the fleet in eastern waters in time of war. The French established themselves at Diego Suarez in Madagascar in 1893. Zanzibar, as the turning point of the cable, had to be held at all costs, and it was in any case almost equally important to secure Mombasa for the use of shipping in the Indian Ocean. Lugard thought it ‘chimerical to suppose that in time of war the Suez Canal would continue to be a highway to India’. Convoys would require protection which the navy could not provide, and the high premiums would make it impossible to insure ships and cargoes. With Britain dependent on imported food, control of the Cape route, ‘the only alternative and only feasible route in case of war’, was ‘an object of supreme importance’.

It is possible too that Uganda had a ‘strategic’ value of an entirely different kind. The European powers feared militant African ‘proto-nationalism’ very much less than militant Islamic jihads. Uganda appeared to be a Christian bastion against further Muslim expansion southwards, and was protected partly for that reason. Sir Harry Johnston saw it as a bulwark in Equatorial Africa, which would gradually radiate Christianity to the surrounding areas. Portal feared

a desperate and perhaps long continued struggle in the centre of Africa between the advances of European civilisation from the coasts on the east and west, and the old class of Arab traders. . . . In determining both the nature and the result of this contest, the position of the Christian country of Uganda is of vital importance.

While it remained under ‘European supervision’ there was no chance of Muslim disturbances sweeping the whole of the interior. Similar arguments were put forward for Nyasaland, which Anderson feared would become an Arab stronghold if left alone. In either case it was the British position on the east coast, not in Egypt, which was at stake.

Viewed in this light, it would appear that a Power with world-wide interests could have a ‘strategic’ interest in almost any part of the globe. The Spectator in 1881 poked fun at those irresponsible persons ‘whose theories about the route to India would logically compel England to wage war with the whole world, except, perhaps, Germany and Sweden’. To say that Britain took particular territories for ‘strategic’ reasons tells everything and nothing. Salisbury was certainly able to keep strategic arguments in proper perspective. He believed that ‘the constant study
of maps is apt to disturb men's reasoning powers', and declared that strategists (to say nothing of Rhodes) 'would like to annex the moon in order to prevent its being appropriated by the planet Mars'.

It would seem, then, that any single all-embracing labelling of motive as 'strategic' or 'economic' blurs greater complexity. Nor are these the only classifications possible. Uganda and Nyasaland acquired their strategic value because of missionary work, and the missionaries—heirs to the popular hero, David Livingstone—had a public following which made them a force to be reckoned with. They were responsible for a perhaps vaguer and more secular feeling that Africa was a field for some kind of philanthropic activity. C. W. Orr in 1911 felt that while the economic motive 'was undoubtedly the primary cause' of European and British activity in tropical Africa,

it would be unfair and unjust not to recognise as well that it was prompted also by a real and genuine desire for the welfare of the inhabitants, by substituting an era of law and order for the pitiful condition of insecurity and inter-tribal warfare in which they lived.

Stopping men from killing each other was a precondition either for giving them Bibles or for selling them textiles, but it was also an end in itself.

In addition to humanitarian motives, there were some purely irrational overtones to British expansion which should not be discounted. Robinson himself has asked whether in practice British activities in Africa were 'any less hysterical, any more rational' than those of France. The French were not the only European nation to be going through a crisis of declining power. The British had not suffered the same humiliating shock, but even they had a persistent fear of a nation hardening its arteries, of the old woman being overtaken by the Prussian pedlar going to market. The Germans were (as one journalist wrote)

spreading rapidly over the Pacific Isles. As the spirit of adventure is dying out among Englishmen, it appears to be increasing in other nations. The genius for colonization appears to have fled from us to Germany.

It is significant that it was the government's failure to uphold Queensland's annexation of New Guinea which roused the deepest feelings in Britain. Carnarvon wrote of 'a strong sentiment and pride of race, and a conviction that the South Pacific was the heritage of the Anglo-Saxon family'. The Times similarly wrote of the 'emotion of pleasure' which the news of annexation excited in Britain. The virile young Germans had been outbid by the virile young Australians, and all was not up. Although the Queensland initiative was disallowed, the indecision of the Gladstone government over both New Guinea and South-West Africa
showed that the British public also cared about its standing in the world. The extent of public fury at the murder of Gordon in Khartoum suggests that feeling on this point was not entirely rational. The move into British Bechuanaland in 1884 was hailed by The Times as a lesson to the Boers 'that England is no longer to be trifled with', and by 1889 it argued Britain could not afford 'to allow any section even of the Dark Continent to believe that our Imperial prestige is on the wane'.

R. J. Hammond suggests that for much of its career the British East Africa Company subordinated administrative and financial considerations - its raison d'être - 'to the acquisition of territory for its own sake'. J. S. Galbraith confirms the view that the directors' interest was more patriotic than economic. Sanderson's monumental investigation of activities in the Upper Nile region shows clearly that at the turn of the year 1888–9 considerations of national prestige and imperial possession were more decisive than any supposed defence strategy for the headwaters of the Nile. Salisbury lamented: 'The national or acquisitional feeling has been aroused.' The condominium of the Sudan set up in 1899 went far beyond anything required by strategic considerations, but was necessary because the British public wanted a tangible reward for its exertions, and regarded Gordon and Kitchener as heroes to be permanently honoured. The quarrel culminating at Fashoda was essentially about the relative international status of France and Britain as European Powers. And when all other explanations failed to convince, the late Victorians, like their fathers, could always fall back on the will of God. The Spectator in 1884 commented that it was no longer considered proper 'to talk of the Providential government of the world'; it was necessary to talk of the 'progress of events' or the 'march of destiny', meaningless phrases, but ones 'which are held to indicate mental emancipation'. But less enlightened generations would have pointed

to the situation growing-up in Africa as evidence that an external power, certainly sentient and presumably good, was urging Europe forward to a new and an immense task. Without any visible necessity, and with no immediate gain in prospect, she is beginning from all sides at once to open up, and ultimately conquer, the immense African continent. . . .

To connect such an argument with Egypt it might be easier to turn to the Old Testament than to Africa and the Victorians.

The more it is allowed that the partition was a complicated phenomenon, the more the occupation of Egypt in 1882 seems incidental to a larger process. Dating the partition from Tel el Kebir seems like beginning Macbeth with the murder of Duncan. There is a case for dating the partition - of the world, not simply Africa - from 1874, when Queen Victoria was almost amused by the annexation of Fiji, and
when Sir Bartle Frere wrote of the east African coast: 'Heretofore we have had things pretty much our own way, and we have succeeded in keeping other Powers at arm's length. But it is different now'. Or perhaps 1877 might be selected, when the Transvaal was annexed - partly from fear of German influence - and Leopold II actively began to create an atmosphere of suspicion in Africa as he tried to secure 'une part de ce magnifique gâteau africain' (Stengers). Richard Gray suggests 1869, the date of Baker's Sudanese expedition, as critical. Certainly in Egypt it might be better to select the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 as the event which made the country a European pawn. An event which brought Verdi opera to Cairo might plausibly be expected to bring Wolseley in its train. The theory that 'imperialism' was simply a 'reactive' phenomenon in the face of a nationalist challenge itself involves the curiously 'imperialist' assumption that nationalism is an irritation which occurs of itself. 'Imperialism' may or may not be 'reactive': but nationalism almost certainly is. The collapse of the Khedive's authority provided the occasion for a British occupation, but the opening of the Canal, Disraeli's purchase of Company shares, and the defence need to substitute Alexandria for Constantinople, made an occupation likely at some stage even without Urabi's 'nationalist' rising. It has been suggested by his biographer that 'from his first occupation with the question', Salisbury was convinced this would be the case. As early as 1877 he felt that Britain should abandon its traditional policy of safeguarding Turkey, and seek to uphold her interests 'in a more direct way by some territorial arrangement'. It was probably the unsettled international situation between 1876 and 1878, coupled with the extent to which Egypt had already been drawn within the British system sufficiently to serve objects then in view, which restrained the Conservatives from occupying the country. Farnie, in his study of the Suez Canal, takes 1878 as the beginning of the partition. The year 1882 made the British 'an Egyptian government', but it was arguably only a reluctant response to circumstances which had evidently been changing for some time. Contemporaries who tried to account for the partition certainly regarded the occupation as anything but a novel element and central cause. This was probably because it was assumed for many years that Britain was only temporarily encamped in Egypt: on sixty-six occasions between 1882 and 1922 Britain declared her intention of withdrawing. This assumption was most important, making it hard to think genuinely of the British action as disturbing the African scene so fundamentally as French or German annexations, the permanency of which was not in doubt. Nor is it proven that the occupation of Egypt necessarily led Britain to take more African territory; if anything it increased her reluctance. If it was a springboard for advance, why was the Sudan not reconquered until 1899? The fact that Britain did annex territory
is only partly to be explained by the collapse of conditions under which she had hitherto exercised informal control – a result of a breakdown of political order in Africa, which was itself partly the result of earlier European influences. It was much more forced on her by French and German decisions to take territory for reasons of their own – reasons traceable at least in part to the effects on Europe of the upheaval of 1870–71. As Sir Edward Grey remarked in 1902: when other Powers had decided to embark on the development of Africa, ‘it was impossible for this country to stand aside’.26 Contemporaries regarded the French and German annexations between 1883 and 1885 as the real beginning of the partition of tropical Africa. The British occupation of Egypt had not fundamentally upset the existing situation since it had not been intended as either a unilateral or a permanent action. Even Leopold’s Congo venture, important as it was in heightening the atmosphere of suspicion and uncertainty, did not radically interfere with existing spheres of influence, as did some of the French and all of the German annexations. Hence it is of paramount importance to explain the actions not simply of France but also of Bismarck. And for Bismarck’s part, the idea of ‘imperialism’ as a series of hardening responses to local nationalisms is totally useless. It was certainly not Togolese nationalism which drew Germany into west Africa. Britain’s embarrassment in Egypt made it easier for Bismarck to go through the motions of picking colonial quarrels (or perhaps meeting commercial demands for territory), but it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that for European reasons, whether diplomatic or domestic, he would have followed the same policy in any case.26

If the actual mechanics of partitioning Africa are seen as merely a phase in a much longer period of changing relations between Europe and Africa, their most striking feature becomes not the rivalries between the Great Powers, but the extent to which these were contained, and the way in which mutual co-operation helped to channel potentially dangerous passions into harmless outlets. There were several areas of Africa which appeared to Europeans at the end of the nineteenth century to be power vacuums, created as a result of the breakdown of the old indigenous regimes and the progressive weakening of traditional authority, sometimes hastened by the shattering effects of previous European influences. At first the widespread absence of formal European control enabled adventurers and concession-hunters to pursue their rivalries without much restraint. Vast quantities of firearms were poured into an already chaotic and explosive African situation. Lugard pointed out the dangers to which this could give rise. Furthermore, increasing warfare among Africans imposed severe handicaps on European trading. The prosperity of Sierra Leone depended on political conditions outside the Colony’s control. In 1879 the number of caravans getting through
to Freetown fell by four-fifths. In west Africa European traders who sought to draw trade to their own warehouses, and thus avoid customs duties, exploited the antagonisms of local rulers and so in turn tended to involve existing colonial authorities. In its potentially dangerous state, Africa was a source of concern to British leaders. If African warfare should become entangled with rival or overlapping European spheres of influence—either those of traders or missionaries—then Europeans on the spot might be drawn in to fight each other, and so perhaps embroil the Powers themselves in war. These fears were nourished by repeated small incidents involving Europeans, by atrocities carried out against Africans in the Congo as early as 1879, as well as by the classic example of missionary involvement in politics in Buganda. One of the aims of the Berlin Conference was to limit the effect of dangerous ignorance about African disputes on international relations in Europe; another was to prevent the increase of an anarchical influx of traders of all nations into countries without European forms of government; there was even a move to neutralise the whole continent.37

In Britain there was certainly a feeling that civilising the dark continent had to be a European, or at least an Anglo-German, task. Salisbury felt that ‘it was impossible that England should have the right to lock up the whole of Africa and say that nobody should be there except herself’. The Spectator argued that even with conscription and an alliance with the United States, Britain could not ‘undertake to maintain the Roman peace in all uncivilised lands, and has no moral right whatever to block up the way of all other races than her own’. Others believed that ‘Africa is large enough for the Teutonic and the Anglo-Saxon races’, and that German and British interests could be kept from clashing by an unprejudiced reliance on international law. Like Gladstone, The Times refused to be flustered by the German annexation of South-West Africa: ‘The establishment of each new settlement in South Africa is an advertisement to the world of the existence and advantages of the old’. The Spectator was even more enthusiastic: ‘A German India flung across the Dark Continent would be a pure good to us, as well as to mankind’.38

Britain withdrew her option on a strip of territory linking the Cape to Cairo under the Anglo-Congolese agreement of 1894 because of German hostility: the option was ‘of small importance in comparison with the forfeiture of the co-operation and friendship of Germany in our civilising mission in Africa’.

If the British were less anxious to share the burden of ‘civilising’ Africa with France, they were just as concerned to keep their two countries at peace. When in 1879 the Lagos Colony government occupied Ketenou, without regard for the possible reaction in Paris, Salisbury feared ‘resentment on the part of the Power with whom more
than any other it is the interest of the country to live on terms of friendship'. If it is possible to throw light on British motives for taking African territory by examining the policy pursued after acquisition, the significant fact would seem to be an overriding concern with the imposition of peace and order. Priority was given to policies designed to reduce any possibility of conflict among European nations. It was for this reason that the British gave priority to the pacification of Northern, rather than Southern, Nigeria, establishing first effective control along the French boundary. For the same reason, the Powers collaborated in suppressing disturbances, as Britain helped Germany in putting down the Maji-Maji rising. Not to have done so would have rendered impossible the fulfilment of one of the main reasons why they had taken formal control. In 1906 the colonial secretary minuted on a west African file: 'Both the French and ourselves are interested in the peace of these countries; indeed, we are here for that purpose'. Similarly in 1910 Sir Edward Grey declared that although the British were in Egypt first of all as trustees for the people, they were also 'trustees for the interests of Europe', and that their title to remain depended on the continuation 'of good order and public security there'.

Even where 'African' or 'strategic' factors predominated in the acquisition of a territory, 'European' ones remained paramount. Somaliland was 'protected', according to Curzon, for three main reasons. First, Britain had to prevent the anarchy consequent upon the dissolution of the indigenous governing power. Second, Britain had to secure the area because it was the major source of food supply for Aden. Third, Britain had to avoid the danger of foreign encroachments on the line of communication to India. This explanation is certainly in line with the Robinson-Gallagher thesis of a response to local conditions dominated by the need for Indian security, although it is worth remarking how deeply it shows a more fundamental British concern with the anarchical condition of Africa. But Elgin, the Viceroy of India, was reluctant to administer this footnote to his domains. Somaliland was not significant merely as on the route to India. He transferred responsibility for it to the Foreign Office, arguing that however convenient it might be for the Indian government to run it from Aden:

we are not and cannot be fully cognisant of the political considerations which ultimately must decide the action to be taken in this as well as other parts of Africa, because they are inseparably bound up with European politics.

The secretary of state for India, Lord George Hamilton, commented in 1896 that the satisfactory precedent was now established that outside Egypt and the Sudan 'Africa generally is not so directly connected with
Indian interests as to justify expenditure from Indian revenues’ to meet costs incurred in east Africa and elsewhere.  

Everything was, as Elgin said, inseparably bound up with European politics, and in the last resort all the Powers regarded their African interests as less important than peace. In this context Aron’s dictum is highly relevant: the partition was ‘the consequence – indeed the inverse picture’ of the general state of peace. There is a sense in which the partition was undertaken partly to impose control on a dangerous international situation, and so keep the peace. Several historians have pointed to the vast and increasing disparity in power between Europe and Africa as providing both the necessity and the means for intervention. Viable non-European countries were not partitioned, although one or two escaped but narrowly. Here Salisbury’s analysis is pertinent. The collapse of the dying nations was likely to provide ‘seeds and causes of conflict among civilised nations’ – unless governments could impose strict control on the whole situation. This was an analysis with which the historian W. H. Lecky agreed.

The idea that political leaders were in fact in control of a potentially dangerous situation conflicts in large measure with the Robinson–Gallagher thesis of an ‘official mind’. This theory stresses the extent to which British statesmen were prisoners of circumstance, dragged along by situations which they could not control. ‘Inherited notions of policy in mature bureaucracies sometimes carry ministers along with a logic and momentum of their own.’ Official thinking, in its inherited form, thus becomes a possible cause of the partition in its own right.

Despite their very full descriptions of the process of official thinking, Robinson and Gallagher assume rather than define the existence of an official mind – and there is a considerable difference. If the official mind was simply a sum of the parts, then there was a good deal of official schizophrenia on more than one issue. Presumably the official mind has two major components, lobes or manifestations. One would be the civil servants, whose task is to define the choices, and the other the politicians, who have to make them. Here a bibliographical point may be appropriate. Africa and the Victorians relies heavily on the evidence of Foreign Office and Colonial Office Confidential Print. It might be thought that this represents an ambiguous mid-point in the ‘official mind’, for it essentially reflects the arguments put by the civil servants in the hope of influencing the politicians in the cabinet. Confidential Print is not addressed to the foreign or colonial secretary, the crucial person; it is a simplification addressed to ministers not primarily responsible for the problem at issue at all. Thus it may not explain all the arguments which have weighed with the civil servants, nor does it necessarily touch upon considerations which may be paramount to the cabinet. There is much less use of original correspondence and minutes
in the Colonial and Foreign Office records, and, despite illuminating use of the Salisbury papers, there is no claim to familiarity with those of Gladstone or Chamberlain.

The theory of the 'official mind' is analysed in an ultra-academic way when it almost implies inability on the part of politicians to think things out intelligently for themselves. Robinson and Gallagher are inclined to discount the opinion of participants who offered an analysis of events and to stress the apparent bewilderment of those who took the major decisions. It is significant that the picture of Cromer they paint is one of their few unconvincing portrayals: his views on Egypt were at least plausible, but the authors seem obliged to doubt the validity, or even the relevance, of his analysis. Ministers often did seem bewildered, but more by the suddenness with which new circumstances emerged than by the problems themselves.

To believe that informal methods of expansion were abandoned only when changed circumstances made them inadequate, implies two misleading notions: the first that it did not matter which party was in office, and the second that there were no conscious imperial planners among British statesmen. The fact that it was Gladstone, the great believer in pacific international relations, who occupied Egypt is central to the belief in a potent, abstract 'official mind'. But the precondition of the events leading up to the occupation was Disraeli's decision to buy shares in the Canal Company. As MacDonagh argues, had Gladstone been in office in 1875 the Khedive's offer would probably have been refused. The decision was very much a personal and positive one by an individual minister, Disraeli. Again, there is not much about Carnarvon in *Africa and the Victorians*. Although hesitant and indecisive in execution, Carnarvon's conception of policy was, as Goodfellow has made plain, one far from being made up of 'involuntary responses to emergencies'. Perhaps his plans for South African confederation could be seen as a far-sighted attempt to prevent such future problems. They did not arise from any obvious local 'nationalist' crisis already in existence, although there was certainly a background alarm about the potential problem of the ever-increasing distribution of firearms among Africans. The failure of Carnarvon's policy in fact lay in his attempt to impose an imperial blueprint from Whitehall without sufficient regard for local circumstances. The Transvaal Afrikaner national movement was a reaction to Carnarvon, not vice versa. There was such a thing, occasionally, as creative imperial thinking before Chamberlain, and the slow indifference of Salisbury has (as Louis says) to be offset against the burning sense of mission in Rhodes and others.¹⁴

Most of all, the 'official mind' approach has to bypass Joseph Chamberlain. He was perhaps an aberration, particularly in his more extreme views of empire, but it is easy to overlook the point that he
was unusual mainly because he took to their logical ends ideas which were equally present in less rigorous minds. Nor can his impact on the African scene wholly be denied. Yet in explaining the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War in 1899, Robinson and Gallagher relegate Chamberland, his ministerial colleagues and Milner to the role of ‘captive’s and ‘prisoners’ of Rhodes, the Johannesburg business houses and British South African opinion. It is difficult to avoid feeling that such a view underestimates the personal determination of Chamberlain and Milner to triumph over Kruger, by force of arms if necessary, and thus to strengthen the weak link in their chain of empire. It was true that the Uitlander franchise became the chief grievance at issue in the immediate pre-war crisis, but it was used as a means to an end: it was not the end itself. Garson rightly argues that far from being captives of the magnates or of British South African public opinion, Chamberlain and Milner successfully influenced the former and manipulated the latter.48

The Robinson–Gallagher explanation of the Anglo-Boer War has much in common with their account of the earlier phases of the partition: the paramountcy of a local African crisis, and the programmed response of the ‘official mind’. Robinson and Gallagher do not deny that there was an interrelationship between the European and African situations, but they consider a description of the interlocking of crises in the latter with rivalries in the former to be ‘only secondarily’ necessary to explain the taking of territory. In practice this becomes a dangerously monocular error. If we discard so narrow an ‘African’ emphasis, it does not mean re-adopting a crude ‘Eurocentric’ alternative. Hargreaves, for instance, convincingly stresses the interaction between international necessities and local problems. Thus, in his view, partition was not merely an episode in late nineteenth-century European history, but the culmination of a long period of relations between Europe and Africa. His case-study of west Africa surely provides at least as sound an approach to the whole problem as Africa and the Victorians. The growing European involvement in the 1880s, he writes, ‘can only be understood as an interaction’ between the general ‘changing needs and attitudes of Europeans’ (which we still need to look at) and ‘specific crises and developments which were taking place along the frontiers of Afro-European relations’.46

NOTES

4. F. D. Lugard *The rise of our East African empire* (1893) II 585; MSS. Eur. F.84/15/Appendix, p.95 (India Office Library) Elgin to secretary of state for India, 15 Sep 1897; *Spectator* 8 Nov & 20 Dec 1884.
5. Quarterly Review (Jan 1885) 260; *Spectator* 20 Dec 1884; The Times 28 May 1883; *Contemporary Review* (1884) 2.
10. A. Marshen *British diplomacy and Tunis 1875–1902: a case study in Mediterranean policy* (1971). Wilfrid Blunt thought the partition 'may be said to have begun' at the Congress of Berlin in 1878, when the joint financial intervention in Egypt was arranged with France and, as he put it, 'Tunis was given her in return for Cyprus, a scandalous beginning' (W. S. Blunt *My Diaries* part ii 1900–1904 72, entry for 31 Aug 1903.)
12. *Fortnightly Review* (1885) 566–74; *Spectator* 14 May 1881; The Times 7 and 25 Apr 1881, 27 Apr 1883.
13. Spectator 23 Apr 1881; The Times 4, 7 and 12 Apr 1881, 16 Jun 1881.
15. *Quarterly* (1885) 184; *The Times* 4 Apr 1881, 19 Mar, 16 Apr, 18 May 1883.
17. T. Colani in *Fortnightly* (1884) 163–74.
18. Quarterly (1885) 184; *Fortnightly* (1884) 819; *The Times* 24 Feb 1883.
19. Stengers *JAH* iii; P. T. Moon *Imperialism and world politics* (1926) 92; *Quarterly* (1885) 184; *The Times* 24 Feb 1883; *Spectator* 6 Dec 1884; G. Shepperson in *EHR* lxxxvii (1963) 345–7.
24. [F. D. Lugard] 'Imperial interests in East Africa' Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine 155 (1894) 860–1; see also report of Royal Commission on Colonial Defence 1881 (Africa and the Victorians 59–60).


26. Spectator 14 May 1881; G. Cecil Life of Robert, Marquis of Salisbury iv (1932) 323; PRO Cromer Papers FO. 633/6/357 Cromer to Lansdowne 27 Nov 1903, recalling Salisbury's remark; Earl of Cromer Political and literary essays (1913) i 125.


30. Spectator 6 Dec 1884.


34. A. P. Thornton For the file on empire: essays and reviews (1968) 254.

35. APD 116, 11 Dec 1902, 516.


37. Hargreaves Prelude 241–4, 337; R. Anstey Britain and the Congo in the nineteenth century (1962) 84; R. W. Beachey 'The arms trade in East Africa' JAH iii (1962); 'Papers on firearms in sub-Saharan Africa' JAH xii (1971) nos 2 and 4; E. Axelsson Portugal and the scramble for Africa 1875–91 (1967) 13–26; Oliver and Mathew (eds) History of East Africa i 274, 381; M. Perham Lugal i (1956) 438–9; Gavin and Betley (eds) Scramble for Africa 116–19 (Malet to Granville 21 Feb 1883). On the danger to peace the Spectator commented (23 Apr 1881) that the general process of strong states absorbing weak ones without the consent of their populations was 'precisely the form of immoral violence which most threatens peace, and to which collective civilisation is most anxious to put an end': a rare reference to African feelings, but neither altruistic nor effective.

38. Cecil Salisbury iv 226; Spectator 20 Dec 1884; The Times 15 Dec 1884; Fortnightly (1884) 390.


40. MSS Eur. F.84/14/79, Elgin to secretary of state for India, 9 Jun 1896 and 14/51 secretary of state to Elgin, 1 May 1896; 5 PD Lords 5, 6 Apr 1910, 557–8, speech by Curzon; I. M. Lewis The modern history of Somaliland (1965) 40–62.

41. R. Aron Imperialism and colonialism (17th Montague Burton lecture on international relations (1959) 7.


43. Louis Ruanda-Urundi 11–17, 97; G. N. Sanderson 'African factor in Anglo-German relations 1892–95' in Gifford and Louis (eds) Britain and Germany in Africa; W. H. Lecky Democracy and Liberty (1889) i 308.


46. J. D. Hargreaves 'Towards a history of the partition of Africa' JAH i (1960) 98–109, West Africa Partitioned i The loaded pause, 1885–1889 (1974) 29–30. (This book was published too late for any proper use to be made of it in this essay. And the announced special 'partition' number of the JICH (in 1974) still has not appeared at the time of going to press.)
When the British Liberal government in 1906 granted self-government to the Transvaal it is highly unlikely that ministers were moved by genuine magnanimity towards the defeated Afrikaners. It is equally unlikely that the Afrikaner leaders before 1914 felt any genuine sense of reconciliation to the British empire. The Liberal government pretended to be acting magnanimously, while Jan Smuts and Louis Botha pretended to be pursuing a policy of conciliation. Both sides projected these attitudes for purely tactical reasons. Neither trusted the other, but each independently thought that they could attain their objectives by behaving as if they did; and yet out of this unpropitious situation of double deception a workable relationship was in fact hammered out. The key fact is that the Liberals never intended Botha and Smuts to form the first ministry when responsible government was established in the Transvaal, but, turning a failure of planning to good account, gave the clear impression that they had intended it; and they thus perhaps began the process of turning Smuts's marriage of convenience to the empire into a love relationship with the Commonwealth.

The idea of magnanimity has proved irresistibly attractive, even to those historians rightly sceptical of the influence of Smuts on this supposed British policy; and to advance such a set of contrary propositions is of course to challenge some of the most treasured orthodoxies enshrined both in imperial history and in the hagiographies of Smuts and the Liberal prime minister Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman. And we personally wish to take the argument tentatively advanced in Elgin and Churchill at the Colonial Office much further—to abandon the equivocal inverted commas which (in an excess of caution) were placed around the word 'magnanimity' in the book, and to follow the logic of the evidence to its ultimate conclusion. In attempting to do so, we are encouraged by interpretations put forward by Donald Denoon and Rodney Davenport. Denoon rejects the idea of magnanimity, though we think for the wrong reasons; while Davenport has convincingly pointed more than once to the purely tactical nature of the Afrikaner
policy of conciliation. Moreover, Le May has shown how Botha's energies in the post-war years were primarily devoted to reuniting and reconciling Afrikaner factions. We are now in a position to suggest a historical reinterpretation relevant to British and South African history as well as to biographies of Smuts and Campbell-Bannerman and, ultimately, in the context of the evolution of the Commonwealth, one which throws light on the curious, confused and slender mechanisms which can sometimes bring about surprising changes in relationships between states, after transfers of power.

In chapter 1 we express scepticism about heroic interpretations of British policy, and assert that considerations of power were fundamental. The case of the Transvaal, even in 1906, suggests that we should doubt whether magnanimous foresight could govern imperial affairs, and perhaps return to a more Gibbonian conception of politics as a register of the crimes, follies and misfortunes — to say nothing of the deceptions and self-interest — of mankind. This is not to deny that there are good intentions (and even some happy endings): for example, we suggested in chapter 1 that the British government was far more anxious to help black African interests than has usually been supposed. This intention, however, only makes sense in the context of demolishing the myth that the priority of British South African policy between 1905 and 1910 was magnanimity towards the Afrikaners.

On 31 March 1905 the Unionist government issued Letters Patent granting to the Transvaal a representative constitution, known almost at once, and to history, as the Lyttelton Constitution. This constitution never came into force; it was abrogated in February 1906 by the new Liberal government, who decided, at a dramatic cabinet meeting on 8 February, to grant responsible government instead. General J. C. Smuts had come to Britain on a mission to persuade the Liberal government to grant responsible government, and oral tradition for long regarded the Smuts mission as 'the climax in the drama of the South African settlement'; it assumed that Smuts 'convinced' Campbell-Bannerman that immediate responsible government should be granted, and that the prime minister then persuaded the cabinet.

The myth was based largely upon the subsequent recollections of Smuts himself. In his later years, Smuts referred repeatedly to his meetings with the Liberal ministers. The first version of these verbal recollections to be published was the account he provided for his biographer, S. G. Millin.

'I went', says Smuts, 'to see Churchill, Morley, Elgin, Lloyd George and Campbell-Bannerman...'

'The last man I saw was Campbell-Bannerman. I explained our
position to him, and said we were anxious to co-operate with the English. He asked me why, if that were so, we had refused to join Milner’s Legislative Council. I answered: What would it have led to but friction? . . . There was only one thing that could make the wheels run: self-government.

‘I went on explaining. I could see Campbell-Bannerman was listening sympathetically. . . . He told me there was to be a Cabinet meeting next day, and he said: “Smutz, you have convinced me”. ‘That talk’, says Smuts, ‘settled the future of South Africa’.

In private conversation with H. U. Willink, minister of health, in 1944, Smuts recalled:

I had been sent over to try to get self-government for [the Transvaal] . . . The Colonial Secretary . . . said it was quite impossible, out of the question. . . . The others said the same, but at last I got a long evening with Campbell-Bannerman, and I persuaded him. He said he would raise it with the Cabinet. It was only years afterwards that I learned that he had raised it as his own proposal, and not one member of the Cabinet had spoken in opposition. Leadership!

In an account written forty-two years after the event, Smuts wrote:

My mission failed with the rest. . . . But with Campbell-Bannerman my mission did not fail. . . . I used no set arguments . . . and appealed only to the human aspect. He was a cautious Scot, and said nothing to me, but yet I left that room that night a happy man. My intuition told me that the thing had been done.

Smutz apparently reminded Campbell-Bannerman of his own speeches during the Anglo-Boer War, and put it to him that he had a choice between having another Ireland on his hands or a friendly country within the British empire.

In fact, some weeks before Smuts appeared the prime minister and the cabinet committee on the Transvaal constitution had already decided in principle to grant responsible government to the Transvaal. The cabinet decision on 8 February was, among ministers, a foregone conclusion. Campbell-Bannerman did not have to persuade his colleagues about this: Asquith in 1912 dismissed the story of opposition in the cabinet as ‘a ridiculous fiction’, since there was ‘never the faintest difference of opinion about it’.

Smutz thus certainly exaggerated the extent of his influence in claiming for the remainder of his life that he had persuaded Campbell-Bannerman to grant immediate responsible government. His recollections are not, in their recorded versions, wholly consistent, and so it is not for example clear whether Campbell-Bannerman said ‘Smutz, you have
convinced me' or remained silent. But there are in any case good reasons for supposing that his influence was unlikely to have been decisive. Ministers and officials were almost inordinately suspicious of Smuts at this time. Because Smuts later became the very paragon of a loyal Commonwealth statesman, it is all too easy to suppose that in 1906 he was ready to be reconciled, and also to forget that he was regarded by British politicians as the most dangerous of the Afrikaner leaders. Lord Selborne, the high commissioner, telegraphed a warning as soon as Smuts departed for London.

He is a very clever, well-educated man, agreeable to meet, and personally I much like him; but please remember that he is an absolutely unreconciled Afrikaner Republican, and that he has an ultimate ideal of a Boer South African Republic always before him, and all that he says or does politically has that ultimate end in view.

Selborne's views were at this stage taken more notice of than they were subsequently. After Smuts had gone, the colonial secretary, Lord Elgin, wrote to Selborne reviewing the decisions taken and the reasons for them, and he referred incidentally to Smuts.

I and many of my colleagues saw him; I am sure he cannot complain of any want of attention; he was as you foretold very pleasant and plausible; but so far as I can judge he did not leave behind him any undue impression.8

Smuts argued the case for granting immediate self-government to the Transvaal in a long and elaborate memorandum,9 nicely calculated to appeal to Liberal sympathies and predilections. This memorandum was not, however, printed until March 1906, a whole month after the cabinet decision had been taken, and so it is not at all certain how many ministers had read it before they took their decision.10 Over and above this, the very persuasiveness of his argument ought to have put them on their guard against accepting some of its main contentions without corroboration. When this memorandum was eventually printed, it was circulated with a commentary by one of the most senior members of the Colonial Office staff, Sir Fred Graham, head of the South African Department, who warned readers:

Mr Smuts is a Boer and a lawyer. His Memorandum . . . exhibits all the cunning of his race and calling. . . . a new line of argument, which forms the basis of [it], . . . is that, unless the Constitution is framed in accordance with the views of the Boer leaders, the Transvaal will be dominated by the Mining Houses, who will crush every other interest under foot for their own aggrandisement. Until lately the Boer leaders were somewhat indifferent on the subject of Chinese Labour and
absolutely indifferent to the interests of the Native population. Now the former is anathema and the latter is a matter which at least merits sympathetic consideration. Is it unreasonable to suppose that this new attitude on the part of the Boer leaders is not genuine, but assumed for the purpose of enlisting the sympathy of those who form so strong a party in the present House of Commons, and in this way influencing His Majesty’s Government to give them, what they really desire, a Constitution which will result in a Boer domination?

Graham thought Dr Leyds had been the moving spirit of the ‘clever unscrupulous gang’ who led Kruger into war, and who were now trying to regain in the political arena what they had lost on the field of battle.

Let us beware lest Mr Smuts prove to be his natural successor. There is a remarkable similarity between the two. Both are lawyers and very acute. Both are highly educated and of persuasive manners. Neither is to be trusted. There are at least two cases in the published Blue Books in which Mr Smuts appears in a shady light.

For these reasons Graham urged ministers to look suspiciously both on the honesty and the motives of the memorandum.¹¹

Although the assumption of the traditional mythology of these proceedings is that Smuts devoted his energies to persuading the Liberals to grant immediate responsible government, it is clear from his memorandum that he was at least as concerned with more specific constitutional points, irrespective of whether the constitution was on the basis of representative or responsible government; in particular, he devoted considerable space to attacking the principle ‘one vote one value’ in the delimitation of constituencies. The Lyttelton Constitution had adopted this voters basis in preference to the alternative population basis, which it was realised would be to the advantage of the Afrikaners.* (On the voters basis the size of constituencies would be calculated proportionately to the actual number of voters; on a population basis, the size would be calculated in proportion to the total number of inhabitants, whether voters or not.) Smuts knew the key issue was not the formal status of the constitution but the distribution of electoral power. With a population basis his party would dominate the legislature and practically dictate the terms of full self-government by refusing supply — a probability which the lord chancellor, Loreburn, had foreseen at least a fortnight before the crucial cabinet meeting. On the other hand, a responsible government constitution with a British majority would be worse than useless to the Afrikaners, and Smuts said they would prefer an indefinite period of Colonial Office rule to the threat of permanent domination by mining magnates. Thus Selborne had no doubt that

* Only white voters and populations were of course being considered.
Smuts would ‘make a great effort to induce H.M.G. to depart from the principle “one vote one value” in the delimitation of Transvaal constituencies’. He most earnestly asked Elgin to give no encouragement to such a proposal. Only one record of Smuts’s conversations with individual ministers appears to have survived, the one with Winston Churchill, parliamentary under-secretary of state for the colonies, in the Colonial Office on 26 January, and at this meeting, if the brief précis of it may be relied upon, the discussion was largely concentrated upon the ‘one vote one value’ issue. If Smuts succeeded in making any of the ministers change their mind upon any important point it was certainly not upon the basis for delimiting constituencies. He failed to impose his view on this most important matter, and the Liberals stuck to ‘one vote one value’ in their constitution.

Smuts found his meetings with Liberal ministers, in contrast to that with the prime minister, disappointing.

I found it very hard to deal with my new masters. I stated my case. Winston said he had never heard anything so preposterous. He said England had conquered South Africa only three years before, and here was I asking for my country back... I saw all the other ministers, too. I made no great headway. Morley was unsympathetic. He said he agreed with most of what I had said, but that British public opinion would never stand for it.

Smuts’s disappointment does not of course prove that ministers were not in favour of immediate responsible government. Their reticence may be explained by the necessity of preserving proper discretion upon a matter so controversial, and upon which even the high commissioner, when he asked for information, was told he must await the cabinet decision. It is not clear whether Campbell-Bannerman actually gave Smuts a hint of what would be done, but if he did say ‘Smuts, you have convinced me’, it should be remembered that he alone within a few hours of the cabinet which would decide was perhaps in a position to take Smuts rather more into his confidence. Some of his colleagues when they saw Smuts may have wanted to do the same, but were precluded from doing so; did not Morley, for example, seem to admit as much? Smuts wrote to Margaret Clark on 1 February 1906:

Kindest of all were C.B. and John Morley. The latter felt very deeply what I told him (and as I left he said, ‘I wish I could say what it is in my heart to say to you’. Keep this to yourself).

On the fundamental policy decision, whether or not to grant immediate responsible government, although he could not know it, Smuts had no need to persuade the Liberal ministers. He was in fact preaching to the converted. It was already an agreed policy, and the cabinet had merely to record it formally. The meeting on 8 February 1906 was
remarkable only because Campbell-Bannerman intervened to upset the recommendation of the cabinet committee to proceed rapidly with responsible government by amending the Lyttelton Constitution. He introduced two new ideas: scrapping the Lyttelton Constitution as the basis, and sending out a commission to ascertain up-to-date facts. His unexpected intervention left his most closely concerned colleagues puzzled and a bit resentful, while he himself went away with the elation of a man who had got his own way. The prime minister had apparently never given a hint previously that he would make these two recommendations, which suggests that if Smuts had any influence on Campbell-Bannerman, it was upon these two procedural points, both of which he had urged in his memorandum.

While the Boers think that responsible government will be the proper and natural remedy for many of the ills under which the new Colonies are at present suffering, and that the time has come when the grant of responsible institutions might fairly and safely be ventured, they wish it to be clearly understood that responsible government granted on the basis of the present Constitution will only make matters worse and is strongly disapproved of by them. Responsible government under such conditions will simply substitute the mine-owners for the Colonial Office in the government of the Transvaal, and the Boers would rather have an indefinite period of Crown Colony administration than see the Transvaal permanently put under the government of the financial magnates... it will simply add a new and most potent source of discord and agitation.

If the British government and people were still apprehensive of the Boers, he suggested that

it would be better by far to delay the grant of a Constitution until the truth has been fully ascertained, either by an impartial commission, or in any other way, and it has become possible for a policy of trust and reliance on the people to be inaugurated.

Perhaps even at this late moment Campbell-Bannerman had of his own accord come to the same conclusions, independently of Smuts, and then very cleverly had allowed Smuts to gain the impression that he had decisively influenced him, but it may equally well be that Smuts did indeed convert the prime minister to a view about the method of granting immediate responsible government, by suggestions about procedure he had not previously decided upon. Smuts certainly did not convert the prime minister to the principle of responsible government, though he may well have gone away with that impression. If Smuts had any influence at all, either on the principle or the procedure, we still have only Smuts's word for it; there is no corroborating. If Campbell-
Bannerman had been influenced over procedure he could never admit it, because, in view of the horror in which Smuts was held, to have done so would have been sure to bring fatal opposition to his proposals.

In the end, however, although the Lyttelton Constitution was formally scrapped, and a committee of inquiry (not a commission as suggested by the prime minister) sent out, it made little difference. Campbell-Bannerman did not press his views further, and ministers worked to mitigate the evil effects they believed would result from their adoption. The fundamental features of the Lyttelton Constitution were retained, and Smuts was totally unimpressed by the West Ridgeway Committee, either by its personnel or its procedure; its report he never saw—but it would only have confirmed his worst suspicions that the British object was 'simply to see how little they could give to the Boer without making the latter stand aside'. The terms of the new Transvaal Constitution were received without enthusiasm, and perhaps with disappointment; the voters basis was much disliked; and the delay in settling the future of the Orange River Colony was a bitter pill, creating a most unfavourable impression. On 28 November 1906 Smuts wrote privately of self-rule being South Africa's one aim, in order to avoid 'the malevolence of Conservative Government, and the stupidity of the Liberals'.

According to the myth we ought presumably to have found Smuts writing of the 'magnanimity' of the Liberals by the end of 1906. Not so. It was the 'stupidity' of the Liberals he commented upon. If in later years he began to talk of a 'miracle of trust and magnanimity' this was largely because it flattered his own ego to be able to claim that he had himself converted Campbell-Bannerman to such a policy and persuaded him to give what Smuts had asked for. Smuts no more than his followers really regarded the restoration of independence as magnanimous, but saw it as a tardy and imperfect act of repentance for 'A century of wrong'.

To come now to the central argument of the essay. What evidence is there for rejecting the idea of a deliberately magnanimous British policy? Denoon has called it in question by arguing that the project of strengthening the Transvaal as a British colony was doomed to fail by the end of 1905: 'Viewed in this light, the "Magnanimous Gesture", whereby the Liberal Government handed over power in such a way as to facilitate the electoral victory of Afrikaners in 1907, may be regarded as a realistic acknowledgement of defeat, rather than a deliberate and altruistic gesture of recompense.' With an understandable desire to make a neat ending to his own study of the 'reconstruction' period in the Transvaal, and his ability to phrase a striking aphorism, Denoon has unfortunately forgotten his historical sense, and foreclosed the future too
finally (though it is true he does not do so without a later qualification). There is no evidence that the Liberals were merely realistically acknowledging defeat. The reverse was true: they were fully determined to secure British interests and continue the search for British supremacy. When the 1907 election results showed that they had made a grave miscalculation, and that they had in effect, as Milner said, 'given South Africa back to the Boers', they sharply tried to turn this mistake to good account by saying, 'yes of course, this is what we always meant to do'.

But was it? Seven points can be made which controvert this interpretation.

First: in origin the Liberal government's decision to scrap the Lyttelton representative constitution instead of to amend it to a responsible government form was not so much a generous gesture as a party-political tactic. This was how it was seen at the time by those who wrote to Campbell-Bannerman: Lloyd George congratulated him 'on the way you saved the government from inevitable disaster', and Lord Carrington remarked: 'The Party would have been up in arms if we had capitulated to Lyttelton and the mine-owners.' They said nothing about magnanimity to the Afrikaners, but simply expressed relief that a means had been found to forestall further serious splitting in the Liberal ranks.

Second: on 15 March 1906 Winston Churchill finished a highly secret memorandum, saying that what people could not know—and what he intended they never should know—was that the government 'are absolutely determined to maintain, in the words of Lord Durham's Report, “a numerical majority of a loyal and English population”'. He poured scorn on the idea the Boers could be relied on.

I would do strict justice to the Boers; but when we remember that 20,000 of their women and children perished in our concentration camps in the year 1901/2, is it wise to count too much upon their good offices in 1906?

Altogether, Churchill concluded:

It would be far better to give the country back to the Boers as a great act of renunciation and of justice than to fritter it away piecemeal.

In other words Churchill believed that British policy had in fact become one of piecemeal frittering away by mismanagement and was never intended to be a great act of deliberate justice and magnanimous renunciation.

Churchill later took good care that nobody should ever see what he had written. It was too near the truth for comfort. He removed all
copies of this memorandum from all sections of the government archives. When the archives were opened at the end of the 1950s, every appropriate file was found to contain merely a slip stating that all copies of the memorandum were 'removed by Mr Churchill'. Among thousands of files from this period this procedure has no known parallel. However, Winston's son Randolph found the one single remaining copy among his father's private papers, and presented a photocopy to the Public Record Office.21

The third point is that colonial secretary Lord Elgin repeatedly insisted in the cabinet that 'an actual Boer majority in the new parliament is not desirable'. Electoral calculations governed the form of the constitution, and they were designed to secure a small British majority. The Liberals intended Sir Richard Solomon to be the first prime minister under the new Transvaal constitution, and not General Botha, who actually took office. Solomon, virtually prime minister designate, was defeated at the polls. Elgin had found Solomon of considerable assistance in drafting the constitution; Solomon was acting Lieutenant-Governor of the Transvaal at the time. Elgin had high hopes of his ability and adaptability and of his chances of getting the confidence, to some extent, of both sides.22 Solomon's political past was not unassailable. He was a hard-faced man who had done well out of the spoils of the Anglo-Boer War; he had worked for Milner and been in favour of Chinese labour; and although he had considerable ability as a lawyer and administrator, he was politically rather naïve.23 This then was the man to whom the British looked as a prime minister. The Afrikaners looked elsewhere.

The fourth piece of evidence is the Report of the West Ridgeway Committee. Its fundamental premise was as follows.

We regard British supremacy as vital and essential, and we have also looked upon a British majority at the coming General Election as a desirable outward and visible sign of that supremacy, which should be, if possible, obtained.

It contained a good deal more stuff in the same true-blue vein. This is one of the very few British government reports never to have been published because, in that bland official phrase, it would be 'contrary to the public interest'. Why? Because it was unduly revealing and showed that nothing magnanimous was being intended towards the Afrikaners. There was thus deep consternation when John Burns lost his copy of this report; an amateur journalist found it and sold it to the Evening Standard. The whole weight of government then descended on the newspaper to prevent its publication even in extract. It was 'not in the public interest'.24

The fifth consideration is this: the most important single matter to be
settled in the constitution was the basis for the distribution of seats, the method of carving up the constituencies: was it to be done on a voters basis or a population basis? On a population basis, Churchill believed that: 'the parties will be numerically equal' and Botha would have to be sent for. 'Is this what H.M.G. desire?' Obviously not, since they chose a voters basis, which gave an advantage to the unmarried British men in the mining towns over the large families of Afrikaner farmers in the rural districts. As A. B. Keith, then a clerk in the Colonial Office, wrote: the Boers would not be satisfied with 'one vote one value', and 'indeed however outwardly reasonable that basis, it must be admitted that its real raison d'être is to create a British majority'. There was nothing magnanimous, then, in the fundamental and crucial issue to be settled by the Liberals' constitution, since it adhered to Lyttelton's 'one vote one value' principle.26

For the sixth point we return to the grant of responsible government to the Orange River Colony in 1907. In Elgin and Churchill at the Colonial Office the following comment was offered.

The decision to grant full responsible government here too was an even more remarkable demonstration than in the Transvaal of the policy of trusting the Boers. For in the Orange River Colony there was no possibility whatever of a British majority, and the Orange River Colony had the reputation of being the most 'disaffected and illiberal' portion of South Africa.

We now repudiate this interpretation. The grant of self-government to the Orange River Colony provides no real clue to the intentions of policy. Once the Transvaal obtained it, the sister colony could not possibly be denied it. Furthermore, the Orange River Colony was regarded as a completely hopeless case from the imperial viewpoint. Self-government was thus granted to it without this being magnanimous. It was unavoidable, and its grant was based on two assumptions. One was that its power for mischief as a centre of Afrikaner disaffection would be temporarily counterbalanced by British supremacy in the Transvaal, and the other was that its nuisance-potential would eventually be nullified through absorption in a federation or Union of all the South African colonies.26

Lastly, by far the strongest piece of evidence is this. It had always been Chamberlain's intention to proceed with constitutional advance in the Orange River Colony before the Transvaal. The Liberals had a different order of priority. Why? The answer lies in their desire to get rid immediately of responsibility for Chinese labour. Elgin publicly admitted that the Orange River Colony had not 'the same urgency in the conditions of labour'. Chinese labour in the Rand mines was to the Liberals a major embarrassment. 50,000 Chinese in the womanless com-
pounds took to erotic improvisation enlivened only by occasional boisterous forays into the brothels of Johannesburg. There were several scandalous cases of their being flogged by the British authorities. Because of the success of the 'Chinese slavery' cry in the Liberal election campaign, it was important that a Liberal government should not have to administer the system which lent itself to this charge. Responsible government to the Transvaal, then, was speedily arranged not so much as a magnanimous gesture, but as a means of getting rid of the dangerous liability of Chinese labour. The lord chancellor, Loreburn, urged the necessity of divesting themselves of duties which only placed them in a false position: 'the one question of Chinese Labour makes it necessary that responsible government should be installed in the Transvaal', if possible by the end of July 1906, he wrote in January 1906. One of the most perceptive of the officials, Hartmann Just, noted that the first decision of the Liberal government was to stop further importation of Chinese labourers, but as long as a representative government lasted, responsibility for administering the labour system previously created would be incurred by the British government.

It would therefore be the wish of H.M.G. to escape all responsibility, by advising His Majesty to grant responsible government to the Transvaal at the earliest possible moment.

The foreign secretary Sir Edward Grey explicitly described responsible government in the Transvaal as necessary because it appeared to be 'the only way out of the impasse' over Chinese labour. Churchill, in a memorandum prepared on behalf of Loreburn, Elgin, Ripon, Asquith and Bryce, warned that the difficulties of the House of Commons situation might be considerable if the government were forced for a prolonged or indefinite period to be responsible for the day-to-day administration of the Chinese Labour Ordinance, with its 'various objectionable features and possible recurrence of improper incidents'. Time, they concluded, was therefore a factor which 'must powerfully influence, if indeed it should not govern, Cabinet policy'.

It seems almost certain that Balfour's prediction was right:

They will be confronted with their dishonest and insincere utterances about Chinese Labour by ... their followers, and I am convinced that they will extricate themselves from a painful dilemma by granting self-government to the new colonies sans phrase.

Where then in all this is the magnanimity? Surely nowhere at all. The clue to Liberal policy was expediency not magnanimity, and it was put into effect by a gamble rather than a gesture. The Liberal ministers did not trust the Afrikaners; they wanted to retain British supremacy. But they were undeterred by the fact that it was impossible to prove the
loyalty and reliability of the Afrikaners. Evidence of disloyalty was ruled to be irrelevant. They based themselves on Gladstone’s formula: Britain did not give Home Rule because colonies were loyal and friendly but colonies might become loyal and friendly because they were given responsible government. Responsible government was the last desperate remaining hope of making the Transvaal loyal. And so they tried it: but this was expediency – it was not magnanimity.

Moreover, contrary to carefully planned expectations, the Afrikaners won the election of 22 February 1907 in the Transvaal. In the distribution of the 69 seats in the legislative assembly, 34 seats were given to the Rand, six to Pretoria and 29 to the rural areas. This, it was expected, would result in a British majority of at least five, and possibly ten, seats. In fact Het Volk took 37 seats, and quickly buttressed its position by a coalition with the moderate British party, the Responsible Government Association, which won six seats. There were two Labour Party members and two independents. Thus the main British party, the Progressives, took only 21 seats, and Het Volk obtained a clear majority of five over all other parties. ‘We are in for ever,’ commented Smuts. They have ‘given South Africa back to the Boers’, growled Milner. Sir Richard Solomon failed to gain election. Botha became prime minister.

Thus it is obvious that the British had miscalculated their electoral arithmetic. As Denoon has remarked, ‘with better luck and better electoral management’, the Liberals might well have secured the selection of Solomon as prime minister and ‘precluded Afrikaners from direct and untrammelled control over the instruments of government’; although there would have been Afrikaner participation, the ‘Magnanimous Gesture’ would thus, he suggests, in theory have acquired a different complexion from that which it seemed to bear.39

How is their bad luck and inadequate management to be explained? The root cause was division among the British community. Although the permanent officials in Whitehall realised that the British were ‘hopelessly at variance among themselves’, knew of the tension between Pretoria and Johannesburg, and expected the British vote to be split between factional splinter parties, the Liberal politicians seem rather to have supposed that the community would behave monolithically in the election. They did not foresee adequately or early enough how some British would vote for Het Volk, including the mining magnate J. B. Robinson, or how Het Volk would pick up five seats on the Rand, or how a sense of ‘fair play’ would lead to a feeling that it was time to give the ‘other side’ a chance. Seven English-speaking MPs got in on the Het Volk ticket – and Het Volk thus obtained British money and organisational skills enabling it to campaign effectively in urban districts where it had been assumed it would exert no influence. The Labour
Party, regarding other British parties as 'capitalist', allied itself with *Het Volk*. The proportion of abstentions was large, amounting to almost one-third (32.5 per cent) throughout the Transvaal, but it was especially high in the British dominated urban-areas; *Het Volk* benefited also from ten uncontested seats. The British community was lulled into believing it could afford the luxury of disunity, and the true-blue Progressives suffered badly from the lack of internal cohesion. As early as 1903 Smuts had realised that the political unity of the Transvaal British was being disrupted, and he determined to take advantage of this. He coordinated the anti-Progressive campaign which led to the victory of *Het Volk*, while Botha stressed hostility to the mining magnates partly as a means of dividing the British; both promoted Chinese labour as the major issue, seeing its potential for ruining the Progressive cause. Arthur Mawby has further suggested that Smuts helped to guide the West Ridgeway Committee in its proposed constituency delimitation, and did so in a way which devalued British votes compared with the rural Afrikaner votes. It was expressly part of the committee's informal instructions that it should listen mainly to Afrikaner views, in order to counterbalance the British-orientated information supplied by the high commissioner. The committee apparently found what it heard to be plausible.\(^{50}\)

Smuts's success raises the whole question of how far he and his followers were genuinely following 'a policy of conciliation' after 1902. In 1905 Botha and Smuts made references to being 'bound' to the British flag, and wanting a united South Africa as an Afrikaner goal. Schalk Burger said he wanted an independent flag. General C. F. Beyers predicted a possible new Slachtersnek rebellion. Such remarks occasionally leaked out in unguarded moments in speeches in rural areas before all-Afrikaner audiences.\(^{51}\)

In 1914 Botha and Smuts took their country into the war against Germany, and did so, it may be suggested, not from any sentimental or loyalist desire to uphold the British empire, but from a hard-headed, calculating belief that it was the best and most expedient way to advance South Africa's own interests. They wanted to get hold of German South-West Africa for themselves. This they felt certain of achieving if they campaigned there. Colonial secretary Harcourt quickly realised what their strategy was.

I warned the Cabinet early in August, when they decided (rather against my inclination) to ask the Union Government to take German South-West Africa, that we could never take the bone out of the dog's mouth. Nor can we, when he gets it.\(^{52}\)

The South-West campaign caused an Afrikaner rebellion against Botha and Smuts. By far the largest number of rebels came from the Orange
Free State, which was severely rocked by it. Hertzog supported Beyers in refusing to fight in South-West Africa. Many of the rebel leaders, like J. H. de la Rey, had been bittereinders in 1902. Some Afrikaners looked uneasily to Botha and Smuts for a lead: van Rensburg believed they would pronounce in favour of independence when Britain's hands were tied, and others were convinced that if a blow were struck for freedom, General Botha would not fire upon them. General de la Rey planned to call the burghers of Treurfontein together, and march them to Pretoria, where a republic would, he supposed, be established with the full cooperation of Botha and Smuts; Botha persuaded him to abandon this enterprise. An Afrikaner historian has written of this episode: 'It is worth noting how many Afrikaners, even those in high positions, believed that Botha and Smuts were well-disposed towards the proclaiming of a Republic in South Africa. It was a time of unparalleled confusion.'

To understand this confusion we have to go back to 1902, the year of Afrikaner surrender. In order to obtain the signing of the Peace of Vereeniging, there is a little evidence — though it is inconclusive — that Botha and Smuts and others held out the hope of a future rising to regain independence. President M. T. Steyn alleged that he received a private letter from Smuts in May 1901, saying that if they gave up now it would be with the intention of fighting again when Britain might be in difficulties. This letter was apparently seized by the British military authorities, but Smuts denied all knowledge of it in 1921. While it may be doubted whether any of the leaders used such an argument formally, it is undoubtedly the case that many Afrikaners believed that their old leaders, including Botha and Smuts, would one day lead them again in the field against Britain in order to regain their republican independence. It is perfectly possible that Botha might have spoken of this informally in private behind the scenes at the time of the Vereeniging negotiations. The peace offer was accepted by 54 to six by the commandants, with Hertzog, Steyn, C. R. de Wet, and Beyers among those who wanted to fight on to the bitter end. It is equally certain that the restoration of a republic remained a secret article of faith. Thus in 1914 there were those who felt Botha and Smuts had gone back on their word.

After 1902 official and public expression of the republican ideal was almost non-existent; it was specifically renounced by Botha, Smuts, Schalk Burger and others. It was to be quietly stored up in the heart. Displays of disaffection had to be suppressed in order to keep the British community divided. But as a result Botha had considerable trouble with his 'extremist' followers. Selborne, touring the eastern Transvaal in February 1906, noted:
In every district I found a bitter irreconcilable minority, formed of the remains of the corrupt and obscurantist Kruger party, and always clustering around the Hollander and Stellenbosch influence, a minority which is fast transferring to Botha the feelings it has about us.\textsuperscript{36}

Davenport argues that 'a campaign for a limited restoration of rights conducted in a mood of conciliation' was the only realistic course open to the Afrikaner leaders.

Even for Botha and Smuts\ldots conciliation was probably not in the first instance the fruit of any irrational desire to bury the hatchet, but above all a practical expedient dictated by urgent political necessity – the only available course, perhaps, to men deprived of effective bargaining power.\textsuperscript{36}

On the whole the British government was prepared to take the gamble of believing that Botha and Smuts meant what they said about conciliation. They were under no illusions about the other Afrikaner leaders, however. Selborne said that no one outside 'a lunatic asylum [could] believe that ex-President Steyn was reconciled'. In the Colonial Office Graham referred to the 'ample evidence' they had 'of the persistent efforts of the ministers of the Dutch Church and others' to encourage race-hatred between British and Afrikaners 'in the surest way' – through the education of the young. Furthermore, however loyal Botha might be, or however enlightened Smuts was, H. W. Just felt that the 'terrible deadweight' of rank-and-file opinion would 'always be pushing them towards indefensible acts'.\textsuperscript{37}

Conventionally, the tragedy of South Africa in the twentieth century has always seemed to be the more poignant because of the presumed magnanimity of 1906: the British, it was argued, held out the hand of partnership to the Afrikaners whom they had previously wronged, and so reconciled the white communities, but the whites as a whole not only never extended the gesture to the black majority but proceeded to do it even greater injustice. It would be naïve to argue that the whites in South Africa were never 'magnanimous' towards the Africans because the Liberal government had in fact never intended to be generous towards the Afrikaners, although there can surely be little doubt that Smuts at least knew how circumscribed was the role of the liberalism in the business of government. The basic defect in the traditional view was not so much its belief that kind-heartedness was infectious, as its failure fully to recognise that the British government and English-speaking South Africans were two distinct forces, and that the first could only imperfectly rely on the second. Chamberlain and Milner had used the Uitlander franchise issue to prise concessions from the
Transvaal before the war, but even then there had been doubts whether British miners would in fact uphold imperial interests. The Liberals did not depart from Chamberlain’s grand strategy of securing British predominance: they merely pursued it with something less than his cunning. With hindsight the Liberal government’s blunder seems almost incredible. They ought perhaps to have seen the danger-signs of division among the Transvaal British, especially since exactly the same divisions among English-Canadians in the 1840s had then thwarted an attempt to produce a British majority, and the key Liberal ministers professed themselves to be influenced by their study of Canadian experience. At the very least, the rising force of the Labour Party at home might have given them a sixth sense that tensions within the Transvaal British might prove too strong for a common front; but in both Britain and the Transvaal their perception of the class basis of electoral behaviour was blurred. Yet it is also important to remember that the Afrikaners too were less than monolithic. For Het Volk to win the Transvaal election it was necessary to draw together the bittereinders, hensoppers and those who had fought alongside the British as National Scouts. For Botha and Smuts, conciliation towards the British was part of the more important strategy of reconciliation inside the Afrikaner volk. It was necessary to adopt as lowest common denominator the policy of co-operation with the empire favoured by hensoppers and National Scouts, while doing nothing to dispel the bittereinders’ belief that Jannie and Louis would lead them to the republic when the time was right—a double game which crashed in the rising of the irreconcilables in 1914. Vital to this strategy was the winning of some British South African support: it brought added electoral strength; it ensured that white South African divisions were confined to the British community, obscuring British and Afrikaner tensions; and it gave Smuts a weapon with which to contain the wilder spirits of the rural areas. Fundamentally, however, conciliation was never a policy holding much significance for the rank-and-file: what really interested the electors in 1907 was not relations with the empire but, as the Bloemfontein Post put it, ‘Scab Law and Locust Destruction, Railway rates for farming material and sheep dip, grain rates and stock disease, irrigation problems and wool prices’.28

Unfortunately Smuts’s political balancing game became harder and harder to play. In 1907 Het Volk virtually absorbed the moderate British on its own terms, but by 1920 Afrikaner nationalism had become so strong that Smuts was obliged to lead his South African Party into junction with the Unionists, the old true-blues, and so limited his freedom of action. Viewed in this perspective, the Chinese labour issue assumes a more sinister aspect than that of a small people struggling against the cynical manipulation of big financial interests. The Afri-
kaners cared little about the fate of Chinese labourers, but they used the issue to rally their own factions and divide the British. It was a sad precedent: later attacks on the Cape African franchise and on the Indian community in Natal followed the Chinese labour issue in making an alleged threat to white standards out of a non-European group. Far from moving outwards to embrace all South African communities, Smuts accepted attacks on non-whites as a price of appeasing his own followers. Ironically Smuts lost power in 1948 not because he had failed to satisfy a majority of white South Africans, but because he repeated the electoral error of his hero (C.B.)’s government. The weighting of the rural electorates which he had unsuccessfully lobbied for in 1906 now enabled the Nationalists to win power on a minority vote. The elections of 1907 and 1948 were perhaps both lost mainly as a result of similar psephological misfortunes. If the Nationalist government brought a new feature to the South African scene it lay not so much in their determination to exercise power selfishly as in their efficiency in securing their electoral base.

NOTES


3. See, for example, G. B. Pyrah *Imperial Policy and South Africa 1902–1910* (1955) 164–5, 171–3. Pyrah was able to see the original Colonial Office records only down to 1902.


8. Elgin Papers (Broomhall, Dunfermline), Selborne to Elgin, private telegram, 28 Dec 1905; Elgin to Selborne, private, 22 Feb 1906; B. B. Gilbert *The grant of responsible government to the Transvaal: more notes on a myth* *HJ* x (1967).

10. Smuts certainly sent a copy to Bryce: see Elgin Papers, Bryce to Elgin, 5 Feb 1906.

11. *African (South)*, no. 837 (a), 1 Apr 1906; CO. 879/92.

12. Elgin Papers, Selborne to Elgin, private telegram, 28 Dec 1905.


15. Hancock *Smuts* 213.


17. Smuts memorandum, paras. 15 and 16.

18. SSP 247, 318; Ripon Papers, B.M. Add. Ms. 43640/17, Emily Hobhouse to Ripon, 29 Sep 1906.


22. Cabinet memorandum by Elgin 6 Mar 1906; E&G 153; Elgin Papers, Elgin to Selborne 23 Nov 1906 and 23 Feb 1907.


24. *African (South)* 853, ‘Report of the Committee appointed to enquire and report upon certain matters concerned with the future constitutions of the Transvaal and Orange River Colony’ 8; E&G 146–8.

25. CO. 291/97/10356.

26. E&G 177ff.

27. E&G 104 (Grey), 109 (Cabinet memo. 4 Feb 1906), 122–3.


29. Denoon *A grand illusion* 230.


32. Earl of Crewe Papers (ULC), G/10, Harcourt to Crewe, 2 Dec 1914.


34. N. J. van der Merwe *Marthinus Theunis Steyn* (1921) 75; G. C. A. Arthur *Life of Lord Kitchener* (1920) 39; J. Kirstein ‘Some foundations of Afrikaner nationalism’ (Hons. research essay, University of Cape Town, 1936).

35. Elgin Papers, Selborne to Elgin, 15 Feb 1906; see also 2 Dec 1907.

36. Davenport *The Afrikaner Bond* 253–63, 324.

37. Elgin Papers, Selborne to Elgin, 10 Mar 1906; CO. 48/586/33666; CO.
291/117/23161. J. D. du Toit of the Dutch Reformed Church declared in 1903 that the people must re-establish all the lines which fixed the boundary between them and all Uitlanders, for the power of Afrikanerdom lay 'in the isolation of our principle': S. R. Ritner 'The Dutch Reformed Church & Apartheid' *Journal of Contemporary History* ii (1967).

38. Davenport *Afrikaner Bond* 261. Milner declared: 'It is not true that our generosity has made a deep impression on the Boers': Lord Milner *The Nation & the Empire: speeches and addresses* (1913) 181.

39. The irony was that in 1906 Smuts attacked the British insistence on one vote one value for constituency delimitation in the Transvaal, while in the 1948 election, on a strict one vote one value basis he would have won the straight fight with Dr D. F. Malan by 20 seats, instead of losing it by eight. He had long known that the complex electoral arrangements were damaging to his party. From 1943, however, he had enough parliamentary power to change some of them, and he was pressed to do so. He refused, apparently for entirely honourable reasons. Notice, however, that he also failed to pursue with any tenacity the political gestures and concessions which he was prepared to make to the African community. Smuts was in many ways a dilatory statesman. As Hancock mildly comments on the 1929 election (which Smuts also lost despite obtaining a majority of votes): 'Smuts possibly should have paid more attention to the arithmetic of elections'—and that is precisely our contention about British Liberal policy in 1906. (Hancock *Smuts* in *The fields of force 1919–50* (1968) 217, 499, 505–06.)
The politics of partition in southern Africa, 1908-61

The Union of South Africa Act had the effect of uniting South Africa but of dividing southern Africa. The partitioning of the whole area, with imperial responsibility retained in the Rhodesias and Nyasaland, and in the High Commission Territories of Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland, was not intended to be a permanent arrangement. The Union as formed was expressly regarded both in London and Pretoria as a provisional union. The Act of 1909 laid down a procedure for the incorporation of Rhodesia, and the Schedule prescribed the terms for a possible future transfer of administration in the High Commission Territories. However, the expectations of 1908–10 were not realised, and the formal political expansion of the Union in southern Africa did not materialise.

Perhaps the fundamental reason for this ‘unconsummated union’ was determined in 1908. The British government’s decision to retain control of the High Commission Territories after Union meant that the first setback to dreams of a Greater South Africa were registered even before the Union came into being. This important decision conflicted with the known wishes of the white South African leaders. The general strategy of the British government in 1908–09 was well expressed by Winston Churchill, who had just moved from the Colonial Office to the Board of Trade. He wrote to the colonial secretary, Lord Crewe:

The only securities which the natives have are first of all our power to delay by a variety of methods the handing over of the Protectorates. I have always been in favour of this Fabius Cunctator Game as simple, obvious, safe and practical: and I am still. . . . We should assert our intention to hand over the Protectorates, should frame in general terms the necessary adhesion or inclusion clauses—the more S.A. will swallow the better for House of Commons—and should then play steadily for time with all the cards in our hand. There is only one way to steer this question through that assembly. . . . Confront Parliament with a complete scheme—majestic, beneficent, far-reaching. Prove to them that you have done your best for the native. Console them by assurances that you have no immediate intention
of handing over the Protectorates — on the contrary that you intend to wait and watch. Invite them to ratify or reject — and they will acclaim your settlement.

Crewe did not wish to seem to be applying pressure to the South African governments, but he insisted absolutely on dealing with the High Commission Territories before the Union was created. He did not share Churchill's view of letting the South Africans settle everything for themselves 'for good or ill in South Africa for South Africa'. He agreed with Sir Francis Hopwood, permanent under-secretary of the Colonial Office: 'It would be pleasant to allow them to go their own way but there are obvious reasons why they must treat with us for our own'.

Pre-eminently these reasons involved meeting some pressure upon the government to do something for African interests, a pressure which coincided with their own predilections. Thus, during the passage of the Union bill through parliament, the government gave pledges (which proved to be central to subsequent discussion) that both Africans and the British parliament would be consulted before transfer took place. But if British concern was with trusteeship, South African policy was much more self-interested.

Smuts repeatedly from 1895 declared for South African expansion — doubling the area to form a united state stretching from Simonstown to the Zambesi and possibly to the Equator, and including South-West Africa and at least southern Mozambique. With Rhodesia, Mozambique and the High Commission Territories absorbed, Pretoria would be the true geographical capital of a Greater South Africa. Smuts was thus an expansionist, an empire-builder, on the grandest scale: 'I like to browse on hopes for the future', he wrote, after six weeks' motoring in central Africa in 1930. But dreams were matched by some large-scale concrete proposals. His territorial designs on South-West Africa and Mozambique need to be emphasised. These cannot, however, be discussed here (since this is an essay in Commonwealth relations), but they form an essential part of the context of his plans for imperially-controlled British territory. Although immediate objectives were bounded by the Zambesi, Smuts also looked beyond it to an economic and political hegemony in the equatorial north, which nature linked to South Africa by what he called a 'broad backbone' of mountainous plateau. This euphoric geopolitical interpretation of the map led him to take a great interest in Kenya and Tanganyika in the 1920s — and this is worth dwelling on here for a moment.

He refused to accept 'the stupid [1930] White Paper on paramountcy' of native interests in east Africa. He was impressed by the settlers: they were, he wrote, of an 'extraordinarily good type'. He was anxious to help east Africa in every way he could. In 1922 he sent a small delega-
tion to examine the region from a commercial point of view, 'to see how we can assist its development and at the same time help our own industries'. He also sent two senior officials for East African railways. In 1928 he wrote to Philip Kerr:

If sufficient land is reserved for elbow-room for white expansion and civilisation on this continent, we may have the makings of something very big in future south of the Equator. There is land enough for white and black, but I am afraid that with the somewhat negro-philistic temper which is about today, due regard will not be given to these larger points of view, and to the necessity of keeping the widest door possible open for the future white settlement over all the highlands of South Africa.

In 1924 he sent E. F. C. Lane to look around Kenya and bring him first-hand information. There was a danger, he thought, of its becoming 'a purely Native state' with an Indian trading aristocracy in charge. Yet the whole area could, he believed, 'be made into a great European state or system of states during the next three or four generations'.

It is one of the richest parts of the world and only wants white brains and capital to become enormously productive. But the present tendencies seem all in favour of the Native and the Indian, and the danger is that one of the greatest chances in our history will be missed. The cry should be 'the highlands for the whites' and a resolute white policy should be pursued. The fruits of such a policy will be a white state in time more important than Australia... a chain of white states which will in the end become one from the Union to Kenya.

Looking then, to 'grandiose dreams' of creating 'one of the greatest future Dominions of the Empire', which would take 'a high place with Canada and Australia', Smuts was constantly working upon L.S. Amery as the man who might give a lead in Britain to this project, perhaps the 'next great phase of Empire development'. Amery was not uninterested. He agreed that South Africa should keep the development of the eastern plateau in view, because whatever the future arrangements of those states, 'the interest of each part in its neighbours will grow increasingly stronger', especially as air communications developed.

To turn from plans to proposals: Smuts worked hard to bring Southern Rhodesia into the Union in 1921, and continually involved himself in negotiations for the transfer of High Commission Territories. These efforts failed. It is apparently necessary to justify the telling of this story of failure at all. The new school of revisionist South African historians, led by Shula Marks and Martin Legassick, is, it seems to us, in danger of adopting a neo-Whig interpretation of history as its basis. Being interested primarily in seeking the historical roots of today's
system of white supremacy, the concept of a ‘failure of South African expansion’—of its formal political, territorial expansion between 1908 and 1961—is one which holds only marginal interest for them. What really mattered, they say, was the success of informal economic and cultural influence in southern and central Africa, especially after 1961; and therefore that the real history of the earlier period ought to hinge upon tracing the crucial origins of that success story. Now whilst we do not deny that uncovering the origins of these informal ties is indeed an important exercise, the fact still remains that what South Africans at the time wanted, and primarily sought during the period down to the end of the 1950s, was formal political control of neighbouring territories, and that they failed to achieve this. Although Smuts was in a far-sighted way trying to explore an alternative method, this should in no way detract from the historical importance of studying the abortive diplomatic negotiations for a Greater South Africa, and of exploring the containment of her political ambitions by the imperial power. ‘Status’ and ‘prestige’ should not be dismissed by the neo-Whig historians merely as elitist abstractions or ‘quasi-psychological’ explanations—unless they wish also to establish themselves as neo-Marxists, concentrating cynically on narrowly economic interpretations, and regarding government as merely about conspiratorial adjustments and self-interested exploitation.  

For fifty years there were nearly continuous unofficial discussions between the Union and British governments about the possibility of transferring the three High Commission Territories. The only breaks were in wartime, 1914–18 and 1940–49, together with a gap in 1927–32 as a result of L. S. Amery’s insistence on postponement for a while. Every South African premier from Botha to Strijdom initiated informal discussions. Despite misunderstandings and the National Party’s electoral propaganda in the 1929 election, there is no reason to suppose that Hertzog was much less interested in some sort of South African expansion than Smuts was; indeed he moved with extraordinary speed to start discussions after becoming prime minister in 1924, and the strategy of northward influence worked out by his lieutenant Oswald Pirow bore strong resemblances to the views of Smuts and Hofmeyr. Unlike Smuts, who thought expansion might be undertaken as part of an imperially agreed plan, Hertzog insisted on it as an act of indemnity. But although they had motives which sometimes differed, and they might disagree about timing, their fundamental objectives were not dissimilar. The most spectacular of the South African overtures was made by Smuts alone just after war broke out in 1939, when in order to strengthen his hand against the Nationalists, he mistakenly tried to take advantage of Britain’s supposed preoccupation with the war in order to prise at least one of the High Commission Territories out of her control. He hoped
that faced with a demand for all three Territories, Britain might transfer Swaziland as a compromise. He met with a sharp and displeased rebuff. The British government made it clear to him that they could make no such bargain.

It would be a grave mistake to underrate the public interest in this matter at the present time. Nothing could make a worse impression than if we were to appear to hand over these Territories in time of war when we were fighting for the interests of small nations.

Britain was caught between her intentions, constitutionally provided for, to transfer, and her pledge not to do so without paying some attention to African wishes, which were plainly hostile throughout. In this situation she was able to take refuge in the doctrine of the Unripe Time and, from 1933, to point to a strong (though not unanimous) body of public opinion in England as evidence of this. Margery Perham led opposition to transfer; Lionel Curtis and The Round Table disagreed with her. Nor was British official opinion of one mind. Two high commissioners, Lord Gladstone in 1913 and Lord Harlech in 1943, were ready to negotiate a deal with the South Africans, and Sir William Clark was tending towards that conclusion in 1940, at least in respect of Swaziland. On the other hand, high commissioners Lord Buxton (1914–20), Lord Athlone (1924–30), Sir Herbert Stanley (1931–5) and Sir Evelyn Baring (1944–51) took their stand on delay. Secretaries of State Lord Milner, L. S. Amery and Malcolm MacDonald were inclined to be more sympathetic towards Union policies than Lewis Harcourt and J. H. Thomas. But one of the most interesting conclusions to emerge from the British archives is that the permanent officials of the Colonial and Dominions Offices were consistently opposed to taking any initiative to alter the status quo in the control of the Territories. The most they were ever prepared to consider was an experimental transfer of Swaziland, but they were less willing to entertain even that compromise after 1925. Thus, as South African irritation and pressure mounted in the 1930s, the lines were all set to make this question a major problem of Commonwealth relations. It became exceedingly troublesome to British politicians, second only to Ireland as the major Dominions Office headache in Commonwealth affairs, and second to none in its intractability. The peak of discussions was reached in 1935–7, by which time references to the British Cabinet had become frequent.

The reasons for this South African pressure arose out of desire for land, concern about administrative convenience and above all considerations of status. The attraction of the Territories, particularly Swaziland's pastures, for land-hungry South African farmers is obvious. But there was also interest in the north of Bechuanaland, where it was hoped Ngamiland might, through irrigation, be able to support a large
surplus population from the Union. In the House of Assembly in 1946, Mr. J. M. Conradie outlined 'very great possibilities' if they could incorporate Bechuanaland: 'We could then develop the waters of the mighty Okavango River and, as it were, create a new province of South Africa out of the desert-like Kalahari.' But there were fears also. Increasing alarm was felt about soil erosion caused by rivers. There was worry lest Basutoland should be half washed away before South Africa could acquire it. Farmers in border districts were also alarmed about stock diseases: Mr. P. J. du Plessis MP called Bechuanaland a 'hot-house hatchery of disease and vermin' in 1934. Other reasons were advanced too, such as the necessity of comprehensive planning of native policy and land legislation in 1913 (and again after the Tomlinson Report of 1954), or the implications of railway development in the early 1920s, or the hopes of speculative mining concerns in the 1930s, or problems of strategic defence from the 1950s. All of these interests were advanced to justify South African demands. Yet essentially, South African interest in the Territories was more political than economic, and much more than the desire to make the desert rejoice and blossom like a rose. Prestige loomed prominently throughout. Deep-seated within this motive there was a historic grievance about British imperial presence in southern Africa. It was openly admitted that the Territories would be an economic burden, but the 'manifest absurdity' and humiliation of their being administered from London rankled with the Nationalists, who saw this continuing British presence as a possible obstacle to the attainment of a republic. The chief interest was thus negative: not so much a positive desire for the Territories, as a determination to get rid of an intolerable reminder that the Nationalists were still not entirely masters in their subcontinent. Eventually prestige became tied up with the question in another form. By 1939 South African ministers were clearly smarting under the realisation that Britain thought them incapable of a humane native policy. William Clark (high commissioner 1935–40) observed: 'The Territories are not a vital concern to them except in so far as refusal to hand over becomes part of the British attitude of reprobation on Union native policy generally, about which they are extremely sensitive.'

What caused the British government to seek to hold up implementation of the intentions of 1910? The turning-point was in the early 1920s. Up till that moment Smuts's Greater South Africa policy was viewed sympathetically by the British government. Britain found Smuts's local war aims by no means incompatible with her own, and would have been happy to see him realise his surprisingly large territorial objectives in South-West Africa and Mozambique. The British government's bias was 'a little in favour' of Rhodesia's joining the Union in the 1921 Referendum: but it wished to keep its options
open, despite pressure from Smuts for a clearer British lead. And she was seriously prepared to consider transferring the administration of Swaziland to Smuts. But this favourable disposition was altered by two events: the Rhodesian decision to run its own internally responsible self-government, and the accession to power of Hertzog in 1924.

The Rhodesian decision altered the whole prospect of British planning in southern and central Africa. From the imperial point of view, Rhodesia’s function was to act as a counterpoise to Afrikanerdom, preferably inside the Union, but if not, then outside it. The decision cast doubt upon the future of the High Commission Territories. The Union’s terms of incorporation for Rhodesia involved the purchase of railways through Bechuanaland and the acquisition of British South Africa Company rights there. Acceptance must have made the transfer of Bechuanaland a matter of practical politics. The Rhodesian decision to stay outside the Union meant that the chief ground for assuming the inevitable destiny of Bechuanaland must be transfer to the Union disappeared. By 1931 the high commissioner (Stanley) was writing:

... it seems to me quite essential, on grounds of high policy, that we should hold on to the Bechuanaland Protectorate. The Protectorate may very likely become the key to a satisfactory solution of the problem of building up a strong British state or group of states in Central Africa...

The configurations of a possible future Central African Federation were only vaguely perceived, but Southern Rhodesia laid claim to at least part of Bechuanaland, and British policy-makers felt they could not make plans without allowing for this aspiration, and were increasingly glad of an excuse to move Bechuanaland gradually out of the South African orbit.

On the South African side, the Rhodesian decision was a great disappointment to Smuts. His desire to incorporate it has to be seen in the wider context of plans for South Africa’s northern expansion. Sir Lewis Michell, resident director of the British South Africa Company, wrote to the Company president, Lyttelton Gell, as follow:

Between ourselves his ambitions are not small. He desires to freeze out Portugal and with our railways in his hands he would have a great pull. The disappearance of the Imperial factor is part of his scheme.

Smuts himself described the Rhodesian decision as ‘a mistake... made in a fit of local patriotism’. Rhodesia had ‘gone wrong’ and it was ‘a great blow’ to him, although he realised that in seeking through its incorporation to ‘round off the South African state with borders far flung into the heart of this continent’, he was probably trying to move
too fast. If Rhodesia had come in, he felt that he could immediately have manipulated Mozambique and Nyasaland to his grand design.

I confess the result is a great disappointment as there were even bigger issues at stake than the incorporation of Rhodesia in the Union.

We should have had no difficulty in dealing with the Portuguese over Delagoa Bay if the result in Rhodesia had been in our favour, because they would have seen that with the Union in possession of Beira, it would be folly to stand out about Delagoa Bay.

At the time, Smuts was negotiating with Lisbon about the running of the Lourenço Marques docks, a section of which he wanted to place under Union government management. He also hoped to extend the influence of the Union to Nyasaland through the agency of the Nyasaland Company. This would have added, he thought, 'immensely to the importance of South Africa as a market'. A ‘favourable’ decision in Rhodesia would have meant, he wrote, ‘a tremendous thing in the development of Southern Africa’.18 It would also have given him a bridge to the north—he was watching developments in Kenya closely. The continuing difficulty of getting a foothold at Lourenço Marques meant that Smuts’s immediate interest in Swaziland, and a railway through it from the coalfields of the eastern Transvaal, was diminished. Whilst he continued to regard the adhesion of Rhodesia as eventually inevitable, he made no further positive efforts to forward it, being content to leave it to natural processes: the Rhodesians must in the end surely see their community of interest with South Africa: their position was ultimately untenable, and ‘in the long run this subcontinent has only one destiny, and it may be delayed, but cannot be prevented’.19

Only three years after the Rhodesian decision, Smuts fell from power. In retrospect the 1924 election can be seen as a major, perhaps crucial, turning-point. If Smuts had won that election, a transfer of Swaziland might well have followed. But the British did not trust Hertzog and had no ‘special relationship’ with him. He was entrenched in power for fifteen years, and his promotion of Afrikaner Nationalist objectives was distasteful to the British government. The British increasingly found his approach to negotiations about the Territories petulant, humourless, ill-informed and blundering. His lack of diplomatic finesse, and disposition to introduce a note of acrimonious wrangling, together with his inaccurate public statements, press leakages and misrepresentations, were ruinous to the presentation of the South African case, as Smuts himself was well aware. His domestic policy—a new flag, native bills, Havenga’s search for a more independent economic policy, and Afrikanerisation of the civil service—also made the British government less willing to meet South African demands. Hertzog’s government did
not seem to be maintaining the spirit of Union as understood in 1910. If South Africa moved further away from Britain, was it reasonable, Britain argued, that she should exert herself to meet South African wishes on the Territories? In fact, Hertzog's policy tended to promote a reassertion of the imperial factor as the shortest cut to the old goal of a great British South Africa — through the strengthening of Southern Rhodesia and the maintenance of imperial control in the Territories. Capt. Bede Clifford (imperial secretary and representative of the British government in South Africa 1924–31) argued that since Britain's hold on South Africa was weakening, and as the Nationalists looked more and more to 'independence', Britain should dig her heels into every foothold and nurse all 'the meagre "interests" we still possess'. Of these the Africans were important as 'one of our biggest allies in the country'. Everything possible should be done to retain their loyalty and confidence, 'as a buffer against the process of secession by attrition which is going on now'. When the Territories went, he added, direct imperial interest in South Africa would cease, and 'an important bridgehead' would be lost. These views were powerfully taken up by L. S. Amery as Dominions secretary. In 1927 he concluded that

the Protectorates are an undeveloped asset of the first importance. . . . The more we do for the development of the Protectorates the greater the prize that is dangled before the eyes of the Union and the greater the influence in keeping the Union straight.

The key to his whole policy was to delay transfer in order to build up British settlement in Swaziland, making it 'effectively British before it goes into the Union'. He saw in the Territories a 'by no means negligible opportunity for influencing the future political development of South Africa as a whole'. His view was cogently argued, even if it did not allow sufficiently for the difficulty of persuading fresh settlers into the area.

In the present close balance of forces making for Imperial unity in South Africa, and those which would keep South Africa in sentiment and action, if not formally, outside the Empire, . . . to create . . . centres of progress and British sentiment east and west of the Transvaal in Swaziland and in such parts of Bechuanaland as may be available to white settlement, . . . is something that may still make a very valuable contribution to the whole future of South Africa.

A policy of elevating the Africans in the Territories might provide 'a potent influence in shaping South African native policy on sounder lines', thereby enabling Britain to 'give a lead to the whole of South Africa as well as help to keep the British uppermost'. Amery achieved a delay, but five years later Hertzog began to renew
his challenge. The Dominions Office worked out a three-point policy: it sought to postpone transfer again, to find a compensating conciliatory political gesture (a détente achieved in the conclusion of the Hertzog–Thomas concordat of 1935), together with means of diminishing through co-operation the risk of South African economic pressure on the Territories. This policy was successful, partly because Hertzog’s ineptitude played into British hands.

Britain’s continuing desire to temporise on transfer stemmed mainly from an unwillingness to withdraw the imperial factor in the face of the growth of the Afrikaner national movement. As de Kiewiet observes, ‘it was not that those in Downing Street loved the natives more, but that they loved the Afrikaners less’. Britain did, however, also increasingly come to respect African opposition to transfer. This opposition had been consistently maintained from 1908, and from the early thirties it was given focus by the able exertions of Tshekedi Kgama of Bechuanaland. The Basutoland National Council also periodically reiterated its opposition.37 The attitude of King Sobhuza in Swaziland was apparently more equivocal, particularly in 1937–9, since his country (with two-thirds of the land alienated to Europeans) had less to lose, and possibly something to gain, by coming under South African administration on agreed terms. But the opinion of the African masses everywhere was strongly against transfer, disliking the obvious trend of Union policy, and especially being influenced by the Natives Land Act of 1913, and by fear of a republic. From 1933 public opinion in British became more vocal on the African side. This opinion weighed with successive British governments because it cut across normal party lines: the Left mistrusted Union native policy and the Right disliked handing over any territory. The passing of the Statute of Westminster had some bearing on this renewed public interest in the Territories, because it was realised that, as a result, the Schedule to the South Africa Act could no longer be relied upon as a legal safeguard: the most that could be hoped for was that the South African government would continue to regard it as morally binding: nevertheless the relevance of Union native policy was thought to be greatly increased for the Territories.

At the same time even J. H. Thomas (Dominions secretary 1930–35) realised the stern political implications of the problem.

I do not disguise . . . my absolute horror of handing over any natives to the Union unless there is a radical change in the South African policy towards the native . . . but . . . whatever may be the future, except with the goodwill and co-operation of South Africa we shall never make a success of it.

Therefore, he concluded (this was in 1934) that it was in the best interests of Britain and of the Africans to carry the South African govern-
ment 'with us rather than antagonise them'. It was in this cautious spirit that he arranged the 1935 concordat with Hertzog under which the two governments tried to work more closely together in the administration of the Territories. 18

There was also a basic restraint in the presentation of the South African case. In many ways, of course, it was expedient to allow the status quo to continue, since South Africa reaped the advantages of an informal control without its costs and liabilities, especially that of ruling unwilling African populations. Moreover, they were also reluctant to risk a head-on clash with the British government. This consideration weighed heavily with Smuts (but was not confined to him). Smuts wrote to Amery in 1937:

Relations between us and Great Britain are very good, but there is this small fly in the ointment, and the sooner it is got rid of the better. As a wholehearted supporter of what is called the British connection, I take a very grave view of this matter, which, however trifling in itself, may yet become an occasion and the cause of very far-reaching misunderstandings . . . this apparently small issue may very soon become one of first class importance. 19

Smuts had been advised by Sir Roderick Jones of Reuters that if friction was to be avoided, South Africa must approach the question with the 'utmost caution and moderation', with patient and reasoned arguments temperately and judicially presented; he pointed out that British opinion regarded the Territories as more a moral responsibility than as a territorial question; that Exeter Hall sentiments were not dead in a substantial and politically very potent section of British opinion, and that unless this opinion was handled with the utmost circumspection there might easily arise 'a red-hot controversy' between Britain and the Union, dangerous to the whole imperial relationship generally. The problem, he concluded, undoubtedly did contain the seeds of mischief, and he was 'burningly anxious' to see South Africa present her case so as to 'disarm, and perhaps win over, the critics and opponents of Transfer'. 20 Smuts needed little persuading to such tactics. He believed that it was not only valuable for South Africa to have Commonwealth friendship, but also for the good of the world that the empire should hold together and provide a solid nucleus in a fluid and chaotic international situation. His sudden and rather rash attempt to persuade Britain into a transfer in October 1939 is not really inconsistent with this wider consideration, since he appears to have felt that a transfer would greatly strengthen his hands domestically, by cutting the ground from under the feet of his Nationalist opponents, who were increasingly looking towards a republic, and who could argue Britain's recalcitrance over the Territories as a cogent reason for seeking it. Furthermore, he became
genuinely convinced that unless something was done, a serious 'running sore' would develop between the two governments.\textsuperscript{21} In addition, he was always attracted by the prospects of informal economic expansion to the north. In 1942–3 he was working on a plan for 'squaring a pan-African policy' (embracing states right up to the Equator, including the Portuguese colonies and the Belgian and French Congos) 'with the linking up of British territories in any form of closer union they may desire': they 'may yet be in the net. . . . After all, the days for these pygmy units are passed' – Hitler proved that. But it seemed impossible to make his countrymen grasp this 'prospect of future expansion and security'. Strongly advocating 'a policy of friendship and political rapprochement with the young British states to our north which are our real industrial and political hinterland', it was increasingly an aim with him to coax them 'as junior members of the family' into partnership with a dominant South Africa.\textsuperscript{22} This policy also prompted the necessity of keeping on good terms with Britain.

By the 1940s, however, official British dislike of Afrikaner National Party policies was generally so great that Britain was reluctant to conciliate South Africa over the Territories, as she felt unable to trust any government which might supersede Smuts's. Moreover, her sense of obligation to the Africans was now so strong that, as Baring put it in 1945, despite the increasing strategic imperial importance of South Africa, 'we should never sacrifice the true interests of Africans to a desire to remain friendly with a United Party Government at Pretoria'.\textsuperscript{23} She was even less likely to sacrifice these interests to National Party government. Thus, when Smuts lost the 1948 election to Malan, the vestigial hope of a negotiated transfer of any of the Territories finally disappeared. In winning the election the Nationalists ensured the defeat of South African formal territorial expansion. The continuing British refusal of transfer thereafter was no mere procrastination (though it was good politics for Britain to make it seem to be so), but part of a renewed positive policy of containing Afrikanerdom, of which the setting up of the Central African Federation was but another aspect. The defeat of Smuts thus promoted a further reassertion of the imperial factor. Dr Malan became very disheartened about failure to achieve transfer, and as de Kiewiet points out, 'Afrikaner disillusionment and outrage reached their climax' after 1948 as a result of what were considered to be broken promises and bureaucratic evasiveness; the rise of the homelands policy meant 'the acceptance of the failure of expansion and integration'. Thus, from the late 1950s, as Nationalists realised that Britain had no intention of handing the Territories over – indeed was preparing them for independence (achieved 1966–8) – they came to see that the Territories could be regarded as virtual Bantustans. They also realised that Smuts's vision of informal expansion to the north, in a
'co-prosperity' area embracing all Africa south of the Congo, held out much better prospects. By the time that the withdrawal of South Africa from the Commonwealth in 1961 brought a natural term to all possibility of transfer, the South African government was already launched on to this alternative new policy of expanding diplomatic and economic influences northwards.

NOTES

1. This essay is based upon R. Hyam *The Failure of South African Expansion 1908–1948* (1972), hereafter cited as FSAE. Since the book was published, both the Earl of Crewe Papers and the Smuts Papers have become available in Cambridge University Library (the latter on microfilm), and account has been taken of this new material in preparing this essay.


10. See Earl Buxton Papers (Newtimber Place, Hassocks, Sussex) and Lewis Harcourt Papers (Stanton Harcourt, Oxford), correspondence between Buxton and Harcourt Sep 1914–May 1915, and Buxton to Milner 10 Jul 1919.

11. CAB.23/27/8; FSAE 64–5.

12. DO.35/392/19, 9 Dec 1931; FSAE, 132.


22. Speech at Pretoria, 30 Apr 1929: SSP v 401; see also vr 241, 347, letters to M. C. Gillett 24 Jun 1940 and 31 Jan 1942; Smuts Papers vol. 70, no. 2.

23. DO.35/1172/Y.706/7, Baring to Secretary of State, 2 Apr 1945; FSAE, 178.
The changing relations between Britain and the self-governing Dominions in the years separating the two world wars do not constitute one of the most exciting phases of imperial history. A series of conferences, a report, a statute, whose effect was apparently negatived the following year by a dry series of economic agreements, and all fought out between two shifting groups of statesmen who did not always seem to know exactly what they were arguing over. Few periods appeared to cry more loudly for a unifying theme, which might make sense of events.

In 1969 such a unifying theme was suggested by D. W. Harkness. Harkness took his stand on a viewpoint put forward in 1937 by R. T. E. Latham. Latham argued that in 1921 'the immersion of a foreign body, the Irish Free State, disturbed the quiet waters' of the existing Commonwealth, creating a 'ferment' from which 'emerged' the Statute of Westminster in 1931. Latham, however, had offered no support for his assertion, and it was left for Harkness to examine the evidence of Irish participation in the Commonwealth association, concluding that the years 1921–31 formed

a decade of persistent Irish negotiation directed skilfully towards a desired end: the transformation of an Empire dominated by the Westminster Parliament into a Commonwealth of free and equal partner nations.

In December 1921 the British government signed an agreement, loosely called a Treaty, with the republican leadership of Southern Ireland. Although the Treaty caused further civil war, the Irish accepted it, thus acknowledging the partition of their country for the time being, and acquiesced in the shoe-horning of their republic, declared in 1916, into a Free State with 'the same constitutional position in the Community of Nations known as the British Empire' as Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. More specifically the Free State's relation to Britain was to be

that of the Dominion of Canada, and the law, practice, and constitutional usage governing the relationship of the Crown or the representative of the Crown and of the Imperial Parliament to the
Dominion of Canada shall govern their relationship to the Irish Free State.

Although the Irish expected that as Canada’s autonomy increased, so too would their own, it is possible that the British intended it to be a maximum line of concession rather than a springboard for further advance. The ‘Canadian’ relationship was explicitly modified by succeeding clauses. In 1923 Curzon, as foreign secretary, was adamant that concessions made then to Canada in the realm of treaty negotiation did not retrospectively apply to the Free State, and as late as 1930 a Labour lord chancellor, Jowitt, continued to argue that Ireland’s status was frozen at the Canadian position of 1921.\(^8\) None the less, the 1921 agreement was a fresh shift in a century and a half of attempting to decide whether Ireland was to be treated as a domestic or an imperial problem. Before measuring the impact of Ireland as a Dominion, it is worth looking at the larger issue, whether it could reasonably be treated as an imperial problem at all.

In 1921 the Irish Free State was given the status of the Dominions at that time. Part of the problem was that both before and after that date, the status of self-governing members of the empire tended to vary. The ‘Dominion’ solution had been partly anticipated by the act of 1782, which in theory freed the Irish parliament from many of the restraints previously limiting its autonomy, although in practice the British government maintained its control. The precedent was colonial: Grattan in 1780 demanded for Ireland as of right the relationship with Britain which had been offered to the American colonies as a concession in 1778. British statesmen tried to operate the 1782 constitution in much the same way as their successors hoped to work the settlement of 1921. The Duke of Portland in 1794 declared his policy was that ‘Ireland may be saved and made a peaceful and useful member of the British Empire’. But Grattan’s Ireland was to have problems in living alongside its larger neighbour, problems remarkably similar to those of the Free State. There were problems over ‘the external legislation’ in 1782 which were to be paralleled in uncertainties over extra-territoriality in the 1920s: the abdication of 1936 had been superficially foreshadowed by misunderstandings between the British and Irish parliaments in the Regency Crisis of 1788.\(^9\)

The Union of 1800 attempted to solve these problems by bringing Ireland back into the domestic sphere. But it did not break the connection between Irish and imperial problems. Lord Liverpool in 1810 feared that every endeavour would be made in Parliament to connect the questions of the Government of Canada with the Catholic question in Ireland.
He even admitted that 'some connexion might not unfairly be considered as existing between them'. It is thus hardly surprising that when autonomy was found to be the way to pacify Canada, the same was considered for Ireland. 'How would Responsible Government do for her?' asked Nova Scotia's Joseph Howe in 1848. The analogy bulked large in the Home Rule debates in 1886, and was thrown in the face of Unionists at every colonial advance thereafter. Tim Healy greeted Australian federation by asking why an Irishman could not 'be trusted with Home Rule unless he has first been transported'. For the theoretical analogy between Ireland and the colonies was complicated by the existence of large colonial Irish communities. Colonial legislatures regularly passed addresses in support of Irish Home Rule - to the annoyance of British ministers - and several Irish Nationalist MPs had colonial experience.

Considering the use which the Irish themselves made of colonial analogies, it is surprising that it took them so long to realise that Home Rule would not give them Canada's freedom. Perhaps this was because, as McDowell speculates, Irish Nationalists even before 1914 expected the difference between Home Rule and independence to disappear - an attitude which might accept Dominion status as a further logical step. In 1911 Erskine Childers attempted to substitute Dominion status for Home Rule as the Irish aim; but the idea received little support. The Irish convention in 1917-18 gave some unenthusiastic consideration to colonial precedents, but did not explicitly argue for a Dominion solution. Various obstacles still seemed to rule it out. One was the widespread expectation that some kind of imperial federation would emerge from the war: Dominion status thus seemed less a path to independence than to continued subordination. Another was that the idea of 'a government on the colonial model' in Ireland was largely a device put forward by southern Unionists in the hope of steering their Ulster allies away from partition. It was not with Ulster Unionists than an Irish solution would have to be reached, but with republicans in the south. True, Edward Lysaght, an independent Nationalist, told the convention in 1917 that 'Sinn Fein can be won if it can be persuaded that national freedom is possible within the empire', but there was little sign that he was right. In November 1920 Lloyd George challenged in public for 'a single Irishman who has got the authority to speak for his countrymen, who would say he would accept Dominion Home Rule'. Nor was Lloyd George keen to meet any such Irishman, until well into 1921. When in 1918 a former Nationalist MP, W. M. Murphy, told him that 'the only way Ireland could be made a source of strength instead of weakness to the empire' was by a full grant of autonomy modelled on 'the dominion of Canada', Lloyd George replied that Ireland could not be given 'powers the colonies possessed a thousand miles from our
shores'. As Ireland became more turbulent, a Dominion solution seemed even more inappropriate. Lloyd George in October 1920 asked, 'Was ever such lunacy proposed by anybody?' But that was partly because his rival Asquith had made the suggestion and—more important—because the British government believed it had murder by the throat. But once Lloyd George began to realise he had a choice between going all out and getting out, some face-saving form of withdrawal had to be found. Exactly when the change occurred is difficult to date: Pakenham argues that Lloyd George was convinced of the seriousness of Irish resistance by April 1921 and from then on 'the possibility of a Dominion offer was maintained'. Yet as late as May 1921 the Irish Dominion League did not receive 'so much as a printed acknowledgement from a private secretary' after sending the prime minister a memorial on the subject. None the less, it is understandable that Dominion status was almost inescapable by the time of the Treaty. Ireland had been a central issue in British politics for so long that not even a veteran Home Ruler like Lloyd George could countenance a total disruption of the United Kingdom, especially as the bulk of his coalition supporters were Unionists. For their part, as Michael Collins wrote in November 1921, the Irish were 'willing to co-operate in free association on all matters which would naturally be the common concern of two nations living so closely together'. De Valera called it 'external association' and expressed the idea diagrammatically: the Commonwealth was a large circle in which there were five smaller circles. Ireland would be a sixth circle, touching the larger circle but outside it. Leading the Irish delegation in London, Arthur Griffith was persuaded to move from accepting 'free partnership' with the Commonwealth to free partnership within the Commonwealth. 'All we ask you to do', Lloyd George had said to de Valera, 'is to take your place in this sisterhood of free nations'. Yet the Irish leaders accepted the treaty only after a threat that the British would renew the war with even greater ferocity. A treaty signed virtually at gunpoint was a long way from 'the only chain that can connect us' described by an Irish leader of 1782 to Lord Rockingham, '... the dear ties of mutual love and mutual freedom'. In the summer of 1921, the magazine of empire, the Round Table, had declared:

If the British Commonwealth can only be preserved by such means, it would become a negation of the principle for which it has stood.

In a very real way, the Irish Free State was never a member of the Commonwealth in the sense of accepting it freely and warmly, as some at least of the defeated Afrikaner leaders had come to do. At best they rationalised their position, arguing as FitzGerald did in 1926, that a nation as small as Ireland was 'pretty certain' to join some international grouping.
And I am satisfied that geographical and other conditions, the natural flow of commerce and many other agencies existing at present, would lead us to associate with our nearest neighbour, Great Britain, and with the Commonwealth of which she is a member.⁷

Precisely because Ireland was so close to the political head and centre of the empire, it could never be a Dominion in the same sense as distant colonies of settlement like Canada or Australia. True, it was in part a country of settlement, but the ‘settlers’ had little wish for autonomy from Britain. Because the Catholic Irish had chafed at their position inside the United Kingdom, the British had spasmodically thought of them as a problem in an imperial context—sometimes colonial, sometimes ‘Indian’. In doing so they had obscured the extent to which the Irish were a European, Catholic, peasant people. Yet this international context was complicated by another international overlay. Just as Irish settlers in the colonies complicated the imperial aspects of Anglo-Irish relations, so Irish emigration to the United States embroiled the problem in Anglo-American relations. To compound the confusion, the grievances of a conservative people came to be expressed in American democratic language. Certainly Ireland in 1921 was no *tabula rasa* on which Dominion status could be inscribed.

Of course, it may be argued that it is irrelevant to establish that an ‘imperial’ solution was an obfuscation of the Irish problem. It may be possible to establish that the disruptive bird in a nest is a cuckoo which should never have been there, but it may not alter the fact that the intruder may have made a violent impact on the fabric and the other inmates. Indeed, as R. T. E. Latham argued, the alien nature of the Free State may have added to its impact. But when a large part of the Irish contribution to Commonwealth evolution consists in the establishment of precedents—precedent in the nomination of the governor-general, precedent in the establishment of diplomatic missions, the issue of passports, the use of the League of Nations—it is worth asking whether the existing Dominions were actively interested in making use of them, or whether they needed Irish precedent to break their own new ground. Harkness himself explains that the Irish procedure for the nomination of the governor-general was not written into the 1926 conference report because ‘they would hardly have wished to force its adoption’ on others. ‘Why was dominion status extended to Ireland?’ asked Nicholas Mansergh. ‘There is a simple answer. It was imposed by the British.’ In 1921 it was unthinkable to give up Ireland altogether. But within a few years British politicians had made the happy discovery that their affairs could be managed pleasantly without Irish issues. Gradually the Free State could be allowed to drift right out of the Dominion orbit. ‘I think they have made up their minds not to class
us any more with the other Dominions', wrote one Irish official after negotiating in London in 1931. When, a year later, economic warfare was foreshadowed between Britain and the new de Valera government, the Dominions secretary, J. H. Thomas, flatly refused to submit the dispute to the forthcoming Commonwealth economic conference at Ottawa, seeing no point in 'dragging other Dominions into a dispute which did not affect them'.

This did not mean that the British were prepared to abandon all interest in Ireland, but rather that they could strip the question of sentiment and deal with it as a unique problem on a bilateral basis.

During their decade of active Commonwealth membership, the Irish certainly did make some contributions to the development of the association, mainly through the patient committee work of the External Affairs minister, Patrick McGilligan. Their achievements, however, were mainly in the field of detail, where their defeats were more numerous. In 1926, for instance, the Irish succeeded in gaining approval for a change in the procedure for the appointment of foreign consuls in the Free State, which had appeared to subordinate Dublin to London, but were unable to procure agreement on the parallel problem of the nationality of married women, and were obliged to accept the Balfour Report's substantial reservation that while the members of the Commonwealth were equal in status they were not equal in function.

The real problem in trying to argue for a decisive Irish contribution to Commonwealth evolution between the wars is that the process was well under way before the Free State made its first appearance on the imperial stage at the conference of 1923. At best, it can only be a question of Irish spin-bowling's mopping up after the South African and Canadian pace attack had broken through the batting. At worst, there is the possibility that far from the Free State's being the cause, and changes in the Commonwealth the effect, the two are both effects of an independent cause, the First World War.

The part played by the great Dominions in the War has really made an immense difference in their relationship with this country said Bonar Law in 1922, when he resisted definition of the status extended to Ireland. The Dominion manpower contributions to the war had been out of all proportion to their size, and the strain of fighting so great a war at such a distance caused deep internal divisions in Australia, as well as in Canada and South Africa. Dominion governments—even the Conservative Borden ministry in Canada—insisted on consultation, through an Imperial War Cabinet and on separate representation at the Peace Conference. Both at Versailles and at the League of Nations the Dominions occupied an ambivalent position—theoretically sovereign units, but actually grouped under the British empire,
along with India. Smuts was not satisfied with the widening gap between theory and practice, and presented a lengthy memorandum to the Imperial Conference of 1921, which, as Hancock has pointed out, anticipated the constitutional changes of 1926 and 1931. Indeed, Smuts's views were to be drawn on by Hertzog. But in 1921 Smuts failed to gain a hearing for his proposals, despite a wartime resolution by Dominion leaders that they would examine the whole constitutional issue when peace came. Why did Smuts fail, but Hertzog succeed? Is this evidence for the influence of the Irish? It seems unlikely. In 1921 there was a general post-war reluctance to disturb sleeping dogs. Australia's W. M. Hughes ridiculed the idea of definition. But Hertzog in 1926 was able to override the conservatism of the antipodes. Smuts in 1921 could not press his point: faced with a rising challenge of Afrikaner nationalism, his South African party had fused with the English-speaking Unionists a year earlier. Smuts in 1921 would have split his domestic political support by forcing the issue. Hertzog in 1926 would have run into trouble from his had he not done so. The fact that the 1921 conference did not set out to define imperial relationships should not, however, be interpreted as evidence of an inert association. With the occasional brilliant exception like Smuts, Dominion leaders were political operators rather than political theorists. In practice they moved closer to the positions Smuts wished to entrench in theory. Hughes—although like Smuts, a prisoner of a conservative following—was pressing for Australian nomination of Australia's governor-general before 1921. Canada in 1920 had decided in principle to appoint its own minister in Washington, thus breaching the diplomatic unity of the empire. The crucial event in this process was the Chanak crisis. A renewal of war in Asia Minor suddenly left a small British occupation force on the Dardanelles as the only force between the Turks and Constantinople. Churchill, the colonial secretary, followed his Gallipoli tragedy of 1915 with what might be charitably called his Chanak farce of 1922. An appeal for Dominion support was sent from London late on a Friday evening, and was publicly announced following a rapid New Zealand response the next day. Unfortunately at week-ends Canadian journalists worked more efficiently than Canadian civil servants, and the prime minister, Mackenzie King, learnt of the appeal from a journalist in Toronto. King, a Liberal with suspicions of imperial interference, promptly countered the appeal for immediate support by referring the matter to a Canadian parliament which was not in session. Even Hughes of Australia, although publicly acquiescent, delivered himself of a blistering confidential telegram to London. Years later, Smuts recalled that 'a merciful providence' had taken him into the depths of Zululand, beyond the reach of Downing Street, where he escaped having to reply.
Mackenzie King continued to raise difficulties. In 1923 he refused to ratify the Lausanne treaty, which ended the war in Turkey, since Canada had taken no part in its negotiation. The same year he insisted that Ernest Lapointe, a Canadian minister, should sign the Halibut Treaty with the United States. The British Colonial Office raised no objection, preferring to regard Lapointe as an imperial representative, just as Lord Elgin in 1854 had signed the Reciprocity Treaty as British plenipotentiary while governor-general of Canada. The Foreign Office, after some hesitation, took pleasure in concluding that if King wished to swim he should also take the risk of sinking, and subsequent difficulties encountered when the Halibut Treaty went to the American Senate for ratification made Canada's adventurousness a useful object lesson. None the less, King had established an important principle. The 1923 Imperial Conference recognised the right of Dominions to make independent treaties, and in this substantial advance in Dominion autonomy the Irish played no part.

Important as this advance was, there was already a distinction appearing between equality of status and equality of function. In 1921 Lloyd George had proclaimed that control of foreign policy was 'now vested in the Empire as a whole'. In the aftermath of war, this was an understandable view. But most diplomatic incidents do not end in world war: it soon became apparent that the advantages of a united front in world affairs did not outweigh the disadvantages of having to secure Dominion agreement. Other Great Powers were becoming restive at the 'panel' system which a joint empire representation required at conferences—in which Dominion leaders took turns to sit in with the British delegation. In any case, 'the affairs of the world do not stand still', as Austen Chamberlain said in 1925.

I could not go, as the representative of His Majesty's Government, to meeting after meeting of the League of Nations, to conference after conference with the representatives of foreign countries, and say, 'Great Britain is without a policy. We have not yet been able to meet all the governments of the Empire, and we can do nothing.'

The attempt to secure a united front at Chanak had secured unqualified support only from New Zealand and Newfoundland. The game was not worth the candle, and it was better to surrender equality of status. If anything the British were gainers, for they were not creating an equality of function. Grumble as he might, Mackenzie King was forced to ratify the Lausanne treaty in the end, because if he did not subscribe to the terms negotiated by the British, a state of war would continue between Canada and Turkey. As late as 1936 Canada had only three legations abroad, South Africa and Ireland five each. In other countries the Dominions had to conduct their affairs through
Britain. Thus in 1930 the British negotiated a *modus vivendi* with Russia, including provision for any member of the Commonwealth to adhere to its trade terms. The Irish protested, and then adhered.

In the practical changes which developed in the Commonwealth relationship up to 1923, the Irish took no part beyond observing them 'with considerable approval' from the sidelines. Nor, as the Free State began to look round for a place in world affairs, did the Irish choose to divert much energy to the association. The new Dominion chose to emphasise its European and American aspects rather than its imperial ones. The Free State joined the League of Nations, and hastened to register the Treaty of 1921 at Geneva. This was very much an Anglo-Irish rather than a Commonwealth matter. The Free State needed to have the Treaty registered precisely because it was not a treaty at all: it had merely been an informal agreement whose legal authority rested on parliamentary enactment. Incidentally the Irish registration made a hole in the British *inter se* doctrine, which argued that relations between Commonwealth members were 'essentially different in character' from those existing between other member states of the League of Nations. But here the Irish were establishing a precedent which other Dominions were not interested in. It was to the British Privy Council, not Geneva, that Canada and Newfoundland took the Labrador boundary dispute. In 1926 Ireland stood unsuccessfully for one of the temporary places on the League Council. Perhaps the Irish League of Nations Society was right in thinking that this helped Canada to get elected in 1927 but again the precedent should not be overstressed. Borden of Canada had secured a declaration at Versailles in 1919 that any Dominion member of the League would be eligible for election to the Council, despite the fact that Britain sat as a permanent member under the guise of the 'British Empire'. In 1926 South Africa was the only Commonwealth member to support the Irish candidature. The Free State was less a Dominion setting precedents for Dominions than a small Catholic state enjoying the illusion of an international role. In 1926 the Irish delegation only decided to stand for the Council when Spain dropped out. In 1930 a tentative decision to establish a legation in Ottawa was dropped, and a minister sent to the Vatican instead.\(^\text{13}\)

The Irish Free State similarly stressed its American links in its first diplomatic ventures. On 4 July 1921 de Valera requested Dubliners to fly the Stars and Stripes, and the city was festooned with American flags. The American consul broadly indicated that the move was as much anti-English as pro-American, and this motive was probably influential in the opening of Irish-American relations. In 1924 the Free State appointed a minister to Washington. Here Irish precedent did widen Dominion autonomy. Canada in 1920 had arranged to attach
its own minister to the British embassy, but had made no appointment. The Irish minister operated independently, and so, after 1927, did the first Canadian appointee. The British were not unduly concerned at the precedent. As L. S. Amery said in 1926,

it is only in those cases where a very special interest arises that any Dominion is likely to wish to take the actual step of trying to find a suitable representative and of burdening itself with the expense of separate representation.

Despite Harkness's attempt to argue that because the Canadians found plenty of work to do it is 'safe to assume' that the Irish embassy was 'no ornament either', the move was little more than a gesture. The Americans waited until 1927, when the international status of the Dominions had been made clearer by the Balfour Report, before returning the compliment, and Irish leaders themselves recognised that their Washington appointment had been 'an anomaly so long as the U.S. did not reciprocate'. It was largely as a gesture aimed at the USA that the Free State began issuing its own passports in 1924, to spare American Irish the humiliation of applying to British consuls for travel documents. Once again gesture and reality came into conflict when the British refused to extend protection to holders of Free State passports in the rest of the world.\textsuperscript{14}

It is difficult to avoid the impression that the newly established Irish government used the Washington and Geneva stages to strike harmless postures which might add to their national status and incidentally irritate the British. Thus in 1927 the Free State attended a Geneva conference on naval disarmament, although its navy was almost non-existent. A contemporary noted that the conference was 'a failure for all except the Irish. They have used it to assert their international status, in which they have fully succeeded.' By contrast, it seems that the Irish deliberately avoided the Commonwealth stage where they would have to deal directly with London over real restrictions on their autonomy. If the Irish Free State, as such, had really been the crucial force for change in the Commonwealth, then it would have been logical to expect such change to stem from the Imperial Conference of October 1923, rather than from that of 1926. In the aftermath of the Civil War, it would have been reasonable for the Cosgrave government to go to London in force, insist that Britain and the Dominions recognise who their true friends were in the south of Ireland, and make appropriate declarations and concessions so as to strengthen the pro-treaty party and help bury the wounds of the Civil War. They might have found a sympathetic response. Churchill in June 1922 was arguing that it was 'essential that we should give the Free State Government all the support that we could, or that they would accept, as they were
fighting for the establishment of a civilised government in Ireland'. There were certainly matters which an Irish delegation could have raised. In August 1923 the British law officers had warned the Irish government that the Free State was not competent to pass extra-territorial legislation. During 1923 the first Irish law cases were on their way to appeal before the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. Yet the Irish delegation took next to no part in the 1923 conference. Harkness is clearly embarrassed by this lapse, and his attempts to explain it away are unconvincing. 'The Irish leaders were too busy to give the Conference the attention it merited. They had a state to build at home'. And:

The Irish had not had time to prepare for this Conference. The Civil War and the establishment of the State were scarcely behind them when the Conference assembled.

But the whole question of the establishment of the Free State was entangled with the meaning of Commonwealth membership. The Civil War had been fought over a treaty linking Ireland with the British Commonwealth. The entire treaty debate was, in that sense, preparation for the 1923 conference. By establishing that the Irish ministers were efficient committee men and able political theorists, Harkness destroys his own argument that they were unprepared in 1923. Instead he is reduced to assuming that the Free State leaders had some sort of long-term plan.

The 1923 Conference was an Imperial recce by the Irish Free State. It was in due course put to good use, as the Irish achievements in 1926 and 1929 affirm.

Men in the position of the Cosgrave government need immediate achievements not the luxury of gradual concessions.

Why did the Free State take such a modest part in the 1923 conference? Probably because the advantages of a strong stance were outweighed by the dangers of a rebuff: as late as 1931 the British government would have no truck with the argument that concessions over the oath should be made to Cosgrave in order to prevent them from being taken by de Valera. The British were prepared to make concessions to Canada, but not to Ireland. Curzon, as foreign secretary, criticised Mackenzie King's proposed declaration on foreign policy as 'not applicable to India or Ireland'. King, however, forced his viewpoint by threatening to support the Irish who were reported to be introducing formal resolutions of dissent from the conference report. The Irish were a useful bogey, but on their own they could achieve little. The 1923 conference gave the Dominions substantial advantages without any Irish contribution. 'You ought to be satisfied', Smuts told King. 'Canada has had her way in everything'. And, as Wigley has
pointed out, the substantial achievement of 1923 largely predicated the theoretical advances of 1926.  

Harkness’s case for an Irish formative influence in Commonwealth development rests heavily on the 1926 Imperial Conference. The case deserves examination, but it is worth examining, too, some of the supporting evidence adduced for it. Harkness relies heavily on articles by R. M. Smyllie in the *Irish Times*. Smyllie was an able journalist, but he was covering a confidential meeting, as he himself had to admit. Furthermore the *Irish Times* was not only likely to inflate the role of its own delegation out of Irish patriotism, but as a former Unionist paper it would be naturally inclined to emphasise the benefits of the Commonwealth. Its London namesake delivered itself of a series of celebratory leading articles on the conferences of 1923 and 1926 with barely a mention of Ireland. More credence might be given to the evidence of the Irish journalists had not FitzGerald, after a coup at the League of Nations in 1926, complained that ‘they seem to get the wrong end of everything with perfect genius’. In 1926 the *Irish Times* predicted that

when the history of the Conference comes to be written, the part that is being played by the Free State delegates will receive generous recognition.

To convert such an optimistic guess into contemporary evidence seems something of a circular process. Harkness also follows closely the account of the conference given in T. de Vere White’s *Kevin O’Higgins*. O’Higgins was a striking figure, and his murder in 1927 was a political tragedy. It is understandable that White’s generally admiring tone tended to present the 1926 conference as the climax of O’Higgins’s career. White did, however, print comments by L. S. Amery, the Dominions secretary in Britain, which indicated that less emphasis might be placed on the Irish role. These reservations Harkness seems not to have considered. He also cites at length the speech Mackenzie King made in the Canadian parliament after the 1926 conference, in which he emphasised the relevance of the constitutional changes to the Irish Free State. But this was good politics. While King himself wanted to attack marks of imperial control, many Canadians deeply disagreed. For King it was good politics to secure what he wanted in London, and then turn the opposition’s flank in Ottawa by portraying the changes as moves to strengthen the empire by retaining Irish allegiance. The ploy was effectively countered by the Conservative contention that the most serious Irish difficulty, appeals to the Privy Council, had been shelved. Privately King felt hurt at the attacks on him ‘in view of what I knew I had accomplished in England’.

There is thus good reason to go even beyond Mansergh’s cautious
suggestion that 'it remains open to question' whether the Irish Free State had such a formative influence. It is perfectly possible to explain the genesis of the declaration of Dominion equality in the Balfour Report of 1926 with very little reference to Ireland. Three Commonwealth members are sufficient to explain how changes came about: South Africa, Canada and — a point not always sufficiently emphasised — Great Britain.

Smuts had drawn up comprehensive proposals for bringing imperial theory into line with Dominion practice at the conference of 1921. Both then and in 1923 his reliance on English South African political support had obliged him to pull his punches. In 1924 he was defeated at the polls by Hertzog, whose Afrikaner nationalist supporters insisted on action. On coming into office, Hertzog discovered Smuts's conference files, and made use of them. At Stellenbosch in March 1926 Hertzog made it clear he was going to the conference to secure recognition of South Africa's status, and made a veiled threat of secession from the Commonwealth if thwarted. Hertzog arrived at the conference with a draft memorandum which described Britain and the Dominions as

independent states, equal in status and separately entitled to international recognition, with governments and parliaments independent of one another, united through a common bond of loyalty to the King and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations. . . .

The key sentence in the Balfour Report defined Britain and the Dominions as

autonomous communities within the British Empire, equal in status, in no way subordinate one to another in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs, though united by a common allegiance to the Crown, and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations.

References to the British empire had been written alongside those to the Commonwealth in deference to Australian and New Zealand opinion, and Mackenzie King, leader of a nation founded on a repudiation of 1776, had secured the removal of the word 'independent'. While Hertzog was no doubt an elderly man who — according to O'Higgins — 'talks a lot and none too clearly', he had secured the substance of his aims.

The Irish thought that Mackenzie King had "disimproved" since 1923. King was not anxious to secure a general definition which might run him into difficulties at home. He was none the less anxious to secure specific changes, particularly in the role of the governor-general, which
had been at issue in the 'King versus Byng' affair following Lord Byng's controversial decision not to dissolve the Canadian parliament. King arrived at the conference largely unprepared for detailed constitutional discussions, but supported by a leading Canadian civil servant, O. D. Skelton. Skelton, like the Irish-Australian J. H. Scullin, appears in Harkness's account as some sort of out-rider in a Free State attack. He certainly worked closely with the Irish, but this does not justify T. de Vere White's comment that

Many of the balls fired at the Conference by the Canadians were, unknown to the other delegations, manufactured by the Irish.

Skelton had been at his task long enough to manufacture his own ammunition. In any case, the big guns were South African. J. W. Dafoe, a Winnipeg editor more critical of his leaders than Smyllie, concluded: 'We shall owe the declaration . . . chiefly to Hertzog, and probably Ireland'. Writing in 1932, J. A. Costello went very little further, attributing the Report to the 'mutual assistance' which accrued from the 'different methods' used by the Irish and South Africans. It would be difficult to claim that the Irish alone could have secured the Balfour formula. More likely the reverse is the case: even without the Irish the changes would have come.

For the other motive force for change was the British. The Times noted that the part played by British ministers had 'certainly not been over-expressed' and suspected that they had adopted a self-effacing role 'perhaps lest any suspicion of a lingering desire for domination should persist'. Costello admitted that there was 'no small measure of assistance from the broadminded attitude of some members of the Conservative British Delegation' and Dafoe at the time was prepared to guess at 'a considerable part' from British leaders.

There is this to be said for them, that they are always prepared to abandon a position when they think the time has come when they can no longer safely hold it.

Much of the initiative for this came from the Dominions secretary, L. S. Amery. He laid his plans for the 1926 conference so that Dominion leaders 'who came prepared to batter away at hostile gates found, not only open doors, but a clear and acceptable course marked out on the other side'. To Smuts, in opposition at Cape Town, Amery wrote that the conference 'worked very much on the lines which you and I have often discussed in the past'. This contemporary evidence adds to the value of Amery's later comments on White's biography of O'Higgins, which he felt was

a little inclined to overstate and to give the impression that the British Government was forced to yield to pressure by certain Dominions,
largely due to Kevin O'Higgins's personal influence. Without detracting in any way from the great impression his personality made on all of us, I think I ought to say that there was hardly anything in the outcome of those recommendations which had not been prepared beforehand and largely drafted in the Dominions Office and indeed to a very considerable extent by myself personally. The conception of complete equality of status is one for which I had worked for many years before 1926, and I have always regarded the results of the 1926 Conference, and other subsequent conferences put into legal shape in the Statute of Westminster, at least as much my own work as that of any Dominion statesman.

The British were by no means the losers in recognising Dominion autonomy. A clear line of separation reduced the need for consultation over foreign affairs. Moreover, as Amery recalled, under the old system 'the British Dominions were the only countries in the world in which there was no one to defend United Kingdom interests or expound the United Kingdom's point of view'. Explicit recognition of Dominion separateness would make possible the appointment of British High Commissioners, although it was to be a decade before Dublin was seriously considered.

It is then worth shifting the conference of 1926 away from the emphasis of what the Dominions were demanding and see instead what the British would concede. And there is reason to argue that the British would concede more to South Africa than they would to Ireland. Mansergh argued that South African secession from the Commonwealth would have been 'a serious, perhaps fatal, blow to its prestige and pretensions', an Irish secession would not have been so disruptive as the Free State was 'a dominion in name, not in spirit'. This is not wholly true, if only because Irish secession was thought to be a dangerous precedent for South Africa. What was much more serious was the question of naval bases. The three treaty ports in Ireland were valuable, but in the last resort they could be given up — as they were in 1938 — and their functions handled from within the United Kingdom. The base at the Cape was irreplaceable. If necessary, the Irish bases could be reoccupied with relative ease: once abandoned, the Cape could hardly be recovered. Starting from the recognition by O'Higgins that British and Irish defence questions were interdependent, it is easy to document the Irish weaknesses in 1926. For instance, although the Balfour Report insisted that equality of status was 'the root principle' of the association, it added a sizeable rider, which Balfour himself called 'One of the most fundamental considerations in the Report'.

But the principles of equality and similarity, appropriate to status, do not universally extend to function.
The South Africans and Canadians, much more isolationist in spirit, were not interested in disputing Britain’s functions. The Irish did not accept the qualification, but agreed to its inclusion ‘only in the spirit of give and take’. Alone they were powerless. An even more substantial defeat was a paragraph in the conference report which stated that certain international agreements did not apply to relations between members of the Commonwealth, because for those purposes they formed part of a single sovereign state. E. J. Phelan, the Free State’s representative at the League of Nations, queried its inclusion in the report in a letter to FitzGerald. FitzGerald admitted that it was ‘one of the worst features of the report’ but appealed again to the principle of ‘give and take’ – ‘we gave the minimum and took the most’. More realistically, he explained that ‘we were gravely handicapped by General Hertzog’. Hertzog’s acquiescence is surprising, in view of his desire to bury the imperial super-state, but what is clear is that without South Africa, the Irish could change nothing.\(^1\)

Much the same picture emerges from the years 1929–31. McGilligan’s experience and skill as a negotiator were at a peak at the Operation of Dominion Legislation committee in 1929, and the Imperial Conference of 1930 – although at the former meeting the Canadian Skelton was also a powerful force. Even McGilligan claimed no more than success within ‘limited terms of reference’ in 1929. The major change in these years was agreement to give legal force to the status declaration of 1926: the British parliament would exempt the Dominions from the Colonial Laws Validity Act, thus ending the power of disallowance of Dominion legislation. Each Commonwealth member would be able to legislate extra-territorially, and thus create its own merchant marine. These were not matters which the Irish forced, but rather benefits they received from the increased self-awareness of other Dominions. The major Irish achievement was the ratification of a treaty with Portugal on their own Great Seal, and not on that of the United Kingdom. Even this involved an Irish minister’s travelling to see the king in that foreign capital, London. Once again, the conferences failed to agree on many apparently straightforward matters. In one case, the form of appointment of foreign consuls in the Dominions, the 1930 conference appeared unable even to agree on a point which the Irish thought they had gained in 1926. Although the Irish Free State was included in the general self-denying ordinance which the British parliament passed in the Statute of Westminster, it gained less theoretical freedom than other Dominions. Had the terms of the 1921 agreement between Britain and Ireland remained simply embodied in legislation by their respective legislatures, the Statute of Westminster would have enabled unilateral repudiation by the Free State. But by treating the agreement as an international treaty, and so registering it at Geneva,
the Irish had given Britain an additional hold over them - Cosgrave himself admitting that the Treaty could 'only be altered by consent'. This hold the British were not prepared to abandon. The British refused in 1931 to remove the oath. Harkness himself recounts that the Irish felt they had been 'treated scandalously' over the question of appeals to the Privy Council. And these were major issues.

Throughout the 1920s, it is Irish weakness, not Irish strength, which is most striking. When Irish passports were issued in 1924, the United Kingdom government declined to extend protection to holders because they were not described as 'British subjects'. Since Ireland had no diplomatic representation in most foreign countries, an Irish passport was scarcely a valuable document to travel with. Worse still, in 1928 the British prevented the omission of the words 'Defender of the Faith' from the royal style on Irish passports - a phrase peculiarly galling to a predominantly Catholic country. Similarly, the Irish could not remove offensive descriptions from the royal style. True, in 1926, O'Higgins secured the alteration of the King's title from 'King of Great Britain and Ireland and the British Dominions' to 'King of Great Britain, Ireland and the British Dominions' - the portentous comma being designed to pave the way for the reunification of Ireland under a dual monarchy. But in 1930 when the Irish tried to secure the omission of the word 'Britannic', they were unsuccessful. In international affairs although the Free State had wished to adhere to the International Court of Justice as early as 1924, it did not do so until after British objections had been sorted out in 1929. The Irish were unable even to borrow money on the London market without subjecting themselves to tight control under the Colonial Stock Act of 1900.

This points to a major practical weakness in the Irish negotiating position with Britain. In 1925 the Free State sent 97·5 per cent of its exports to the United Kingdom, from which it took 81·2 per cent of its imports. De Valera's trade war reduced the latter figure to around 50 per cent by 1937, but the share of Irish exports going to Britain never fell below 90 per cent. Harkness explains the paradox that a country so economically dependent on Britain should have taken so small a part in trade talks at Commonwealth meetings by pointing out that Ireland simply had no bargaining counters. De Valera's attempt at economic warfare against Britain after 1932 imposed strains on large areas of the Irish economy, and its overall effect was 'to emphasise economic interdependence rather than economic separateness'. This was hardly a basis of strength to engineer change in a world-wide Commonwealth. Furthermore, up to the murder of O'Higgins in 1927 at least, there was a political restraint on the Irish leaders: they hoped for an early end to partition. Co-operation with the Commonwealth might wean the Unionists into accepting the idea of dual monarchy and a reunited
Ireland. Until 1925 there was an additional inducement of a boundary commission which might transfer Catholic areas of the Six Counties to the Free State: Lloyd George had indicated that the resulting adjustment would constrict Northern Ireland beyond survival. In the early years at least, the prize seemed real enough to avoid setting the Commonwealth by the ears. Nor did the Irish make extravagant claims for their part in the association. McGilligan in 1931, in a speech in which ‘a full record of the Irish achievement is portrayed’, referred to progress in the Commonwealth association between 1926 and 1931, adding: ‘I will not say at our whole behest, or even always at our instance. . . .

The Irish proved themselves not only cuckoos in the Commonwealth nest, but birds of passage. With de Valera’s electoral victory in 1932, all pretense of genuine acceptance of Commonwealth membership vanished, and in 1937 the Free State took advantage of the constitutional crisis caused by the King’s abdication to convert its membership into ‘external association’. De Valera ceased to attend imperial conferences, and in 1939 he refused to emulate John Redmond’s mistake of endorsing a British war. By the mid-1930s it is probable that a formal Irish secession would have caused little stir. The ruling Conservatives might have found some consolation to soothe their hurt imperial pride. If Ireland left the Commonwealth, Irishmen resident in Britain would become aliens, and the Irish Catholic vote was predominantly Labour. Stanley Baldwin cynically believed that de Valera avoided forcing the issue so that Free State citizens in Britain would continue to be eligible for unemployment relief and other welfare payments—an important, if indirect, subsidy to the Irish economy. Pakenham in 1935 deplored a common British attitude—‘Ireland has ceased to count. . . . Secede away, if you like’—which would welcome the chance to throw Irishmen off the ‘dole’. However, Ireland might still cause imperial complications. ’If Ireland hives off’, Smuts predicted in 1932, ‘South Africa is sure to follow sooner or later.’ But South Africa under the Fusion government of Hertzog and Smuts came to seem less insecure. The problem was now India, and de Valera’s 1937 constitution was regarded by Lord Zetland, the secretary of state for India, as a ‘dangerous example to Congress’. The success of the 1935 Government of India Act was felt to depend largely on the confidence of minority groups in British ability to protect them, through the Viceroy’s reserve powers. De Valera had reduced the governor-general to a figurehead—an embarrassing precedent. In 1942 the British government offered India post-war Dominion status, with a right of secession from the Commonwealth. Lord Harlech wondered whether de Valera would take the cue and declare a republic and leave the association altogether, for Irish secession ‘has already been de facto though not de jure’. It has often been argued that the wayward course of the Irish in these years provided the precedent for
India's later membership of the Commonwealth as a republic. By the same token, it has been regretted that the Irish failed to follow their own initiative, but withdrew from the Commonwealth on becoming a republic at the same time. The truth is that where the spirit is willing, it does not matter that the precedent is weak. As the veteran Amery wrote to the ageing Smuts in 1949:

> The fundamental difference anyhow between India and Ireland is that India wants to stay in and has asked to remain a full partner subject to her republican constitution, while Ireland has used the setting up of a republic in order to emphasize the final breaking of the last ties with the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth had been a useful cloak for the severance of political relations between Britain and Ireland, a severance which would have been more wounding if more open. But it would be a mistake to see the Irish as genuine contributors to the Commonwealth. They were hardly even genuine members.\(^2\)

Since in 1929 the Irish argued that New Zealand 'should not be a member-state of the Commonwealth of Nations at all' because it had no power to alter its own constitution, it may be worth trying to examine the changing imperial relationship from the other end of the globe. After all, as Harkness perceptively observes:

> In 1924 a pessimist looking at the Empire might have been excused for wondering if it could long survive the stresses to which it had lately been subject.

Yet it did survive, with all the Dominion governments bar the maverick Irish entering the war in 1939. Perhaps then it is worth examining the centripetal tendencies instead of concentrating on the centrifugal. In many ways, New Zealand and Ireland seemed similar: both were small countries, relying on the protection of British naval power. Both depended heavily on meat and dairy exports to the United Kingdom. Yet their reactions to the empire were very different. L. S. Amery, visiting New Zealand in 1928, found imperial sentiment 'a passion, almost a religion'. A British civil servant reported from Wellington in 1930 'there is absolutely no demand for the outward trappings of autonomy'. New Zealanders claimed that they were ready to follow Britain in all things, but they were ready to fight hard enough for their own interests, over matters such as the Singapore base. Conventional accounts of Commonwealth evolution tend to treat the New Zealanders as eccentric traditionalists. They insisted on the insertion of references to the 'British Empire' in the Balfour Report, and refused, until the Second World War, to cease using the governor-general as their channel of communication with London. They insisted on being exempted from
the operative provisions of 'the damned Statute of Westminster' unless specifically adopted by the New Zealand parliament, which did not happen until 1947. Not even the sincere belief of the Labour government in co-operation with the League of Nations after 1935 could prevent prime minister Savage from automatically following Britain into war in 1939. 'Where Britain goes, we go! Where she stands, we stand!'

Why did the New Zealanders hold such a radically different conception of the Empire-Commonwealth? It is easy to point to their economic dependence on Britain. Beaglehole argued that New Zealand 'psychologically has remained a colony because economically it has remained a colony'. But New Zealand was no less economically tied to Britain than was the Irish Free State. Was strategic dependence on Britain the explanation for imperial patriotism? No doubt there is an element of truth here, but it does not explain why New Zealand unhesitatingly joined a European war in 1939, when the Pacific situation was so uncertain. Again, strategic dependence did not bring an Irish declaration of war. The force of New Zealand's attachment to the empire can only be explained in terms of deep community feeling, a feeling which held together a sense of New Zealand identity by collective support for the empire, just as the Irish identity had become involved in its rejection. Was Massey really so reactionary when in 1921 he opposed Smuts's demands for definition by arguing, 'You cannot go beyond sentiment'?

New Zealand's position on Commonwealth change was more significant than is often allowed, simply because it represented views not confined to the Pacific Dominions. Durban and Toronto were just as fervent in their imperial loyalties as Christchurch and Wellington. Consequently it is inaccurate to portray Mackenzie King and even Hertzog as ruthless dismantlers of the imperial structure. Even if they had wished to leave the association altogether—which in King's case is unlikely—they had to bargain with the deep internal divisions which this would cause in their own countries. Hence they had to balance between extremes. Here again Ireland was an exception. Ireland certainly had its own New Zealand, but it was not part of the Free State and so exercised no check on its leaders. Kevin O'Higgins saw the connection in 1926: 'New Zealand must be rather like Northern Ireland—it produces the same type of Jingo reactionary.'

The stressing of continued 'empire' tendencies alongside the more publicised 'Commonwealth' initiatives throws the whole period back into confusion. What was happening to the imperial association between the two world wars? The simplest explanation is that the inter-war years were 'years of transition'. But that in itself is a peculiarly weak type of historical explanation, since any period in history is a time of transition between the years before and the years after. What makes it a justifiable explanation here is that so many of the participants were
themselves aware that it was a time of change. Their problem was to
decide exactly what had changed, and how to adjust to it. Everyone
agreed after the First World War that the world could never be quite
the same again. But, puzzlingly, the international pattern settled back
into at least recognisable lines. The withdrawal from world events of
the two giants, America and Russia, meant that Britain, France, even
Italy, continued to be the major Powers. Although the war had dented
many of the assumptions about the strength of the Royal Navy, and
the Washington naval agreements abandoned even the pretence of
world domination, for want of any alternative imperial defence con-
tinued to be based on the battleship, as the fitful history of the Singapore
base shows. In the circumstances, the groping around for reassuring
marks of status, or equally comforting signs of dependence, represented
psychological rather than real needs. It is interesting that the 1926
declaration should have been so satisfactory to South Africa, when it
did not possess an iota of legal force. Even in greeting the Balfour
Report, The Times could dismiss its key sentence, 'It may have its uses
for quotation to suspicious nationalists, but that is all'. Not until five
leisurely years later did the Statute of Westminster carry it into law.
But even force of law did not override force of circumstances. Michael
Collins in 1922 had seen that it was not so much definition of status
which mattered as 'our power to take it and to keep it'. Similarly the
Balfour committee in 1926 was unanimous in agreeing that its task
was not to draft an imperial constitution but to take stock of the exist-
ing constitutional position. And therein lay the problem. By act of par-
liament in 1931, Newfoundland was declared a Dominion which might
adopt full international powers. The tiny parliament which sat in the
Colonial Building at St John's thus became a potentially sovereign
legislature. But no act of parliament could prevent Newfoundland from
going bankrupt in 1933, and asking for the suspension of its Dominion
status. A similar cross-current in the years after 1931 was the successful
campaign by Montagu Norman of the Bank of England to create a
network of Dominion central banks 'almost by stealth'. Central banks
assisted Dominion governments to control the value of their own cur-
currencies, surely one of the marks of national sovereignty. But Norman
managed to ensure the deposit of fixed amounts of Dominion funds with
the Bank of England, an arrangement which tended to negative con-
stitutional separateness. But economic realities could conflict equally
with the centripetal forces of sentiment. The Ottawa Economic Con-
ference of 1932 is a good example of both how strong and how weak
was the Commonwealth association. When the economic storm came
in 1931, the first thought of Commonwealth members was to run for
the old imperial shelter. The association was strong enough to bring its
members to Ottawa, but when the delegations arrived they gave ample
evidence of its weakness too. No 'Ottawa agreement' emerged from the conference, only a series of 'Ottawa agreements' in which delegations haggled over meat and margarine quotas.22

The Commonwealth between the wars was not a straightforward organisation in which developments can be ascribed to a single Dominion or even a group of them. In most cases, Dominion governments had to deal with rival internal pressures – from those who wanted a greater measure of self-assertion, and those who hankered after the continued security – psychological and material, real and imagined – of a world-wide empire. In short, the imperial association was confusing, too confusing certainly for simple explanation. It was confusing enough for its contemporary participants that the association was able to include one member state which did not really belong.

NOTES


6. RD 16–17; F. Longford and T. P. O'Neill Eamon de Valera (1970) 139; The phrase 'immediate and terrible war' seems to have been de Valera's gloss on Lloyd George's alternative.

7. Harlow i 528; Round Table xi 505; RD 25–6.

8. RD 108; Mansergh Commonwealth experience 202; RD 233–7; Hancock Survey i 347.

9. RD 119, 122.


17. RD 132, 121, 119, 211–12; Neatby King 187; The Times 24 Nov 1926; Amery My political life ii 381, 388; SSP v 342–3; White 247–8; Mansergh Survey 10; Dawson Dominion status 352.


21. Ross JCP S x (1972) 28–42; cf. R. M. Burdon The new Dominion (1965) chs 13, 18; Contemporary New Zealand (1938) 3; Mansergh Commonwealth experience 108; White 222. Perhaps because New Zealand was settled after the famine migration of the 1840s, and partly under the auspices of Protestant churches, it did not contain a large Irish element. In 1921, 21 per cent of Australians were Roman Catholics, but only 13 per cent of New Zealanders.

Index

Where changes of title have occurred in people or countries, the most convenient form is indexed, usually without cross-references. Newspapers and periodicals, treaties of peace or commerce, and conferences within the empire/Commonwealth are indexed under the general headings 'Newspapers and Periodicals', 'Treaties', and 'Conferences, Colonial and Imperial'.

Abbott, Sir J., 103
Abraham, Heights of, 30, 112
Adderley, C. B., 98, 129
Aden, 160
Africa, 3, 7, 9, 13, 44–5, 47–8; east, 141, 153–4, 156–7, 161, 188–9; north, 140, 142–3, 147; partition of, 16, 139–66; southern (see also South Africa), 7, 10, 72, 105, 149, 159, 187–200; west, 21–2, 37–9, 48, 115–17, 144, 147, 150, 152–3, 158–60
Africans in South Africa, 3, 7, 12, 15, 168, 170–1, 182–3, 192, 195–6
Albany Congress (1754), 122
Albert, Prince, 107
Alexandria, 157
Allen, H. C., 106
Almon, J., 31
Alsace-Lorraine, 144
America, south, 44, 52, 61–2, 107, 142
American colonies before 1783, 2, 17, 22, 29–31, 39, 44–5, 70, 122–4, 136, 202
American independence (1776), 22, 35, 39–40, 46, 63, 101, 107, 122, 126, 213
American Indians, 31, 56, 143
Amery, J., 135
Amherst, J. (Field-Marshall, Baron), 32
Amritsar (1919), 5
 Analogies, use of in imperial planning, 10, 72, 82–3, 85, 104–5, 108, 201–4
Andaman Islands, 63
Anderson, Sir F., 152, 154
Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902), 2, 10, 85, 131–2, 163, 169, 175–6
'Anglo-Saxon' race, 3, 135, 155, 159
Annapolis (Nova Scotia), 36
Annexation of Canada to USA campaign of 1849, 91, 94, 103
Anstey, R., 2
'Anti-imperialism' myth, 2, 4, 88–111, 117
Armed Neutrality (1780), 63, 65
Aron, R., 161
Arthur, Sir G., 79, 102
Ashburnon, Lord, 97
Asquith, H. H., 169, 178, 209
Athlone, Lord, 191
Bagot, Sir C., 79, 84
Bahamas, 50, 52
Baker, Sir S., 157
Baldwin, R., 15, 84, 104
Baldwin, S., 218
Balfour, A. J., 14, 115, 178
Balfour Report (1926), 206, 210, 219–16, 219, 221
Baltic trade, 65, 95–6, 112
Banks, Sir J., 58–9, 64, 67, 70
Barbados, 122
Barbuda, 49
Baring, Sir E., 191, 198
Barotseland, 9
Barton, Sir E., 132
Chapman, H. S., 76
Chatham, Lord (William Pitt the Elder), 14, 22–33, 35–7, 39
Cheng, S. C-Y., 136
Chesterfield, Lord, 25
Childers, E., 203
China, 3, 44, 60–4, 66–7, 69, 72, 142, 148
Chinese labour in Rand mines, 12, 170–1, 176–8, 180, 183–4
Choiseul, duc de, 24–7, 33–5
Churchill, Hon. R. S., 176
Clark, C. M. H., 61
Clark, Margaret, 172
Clark, Sir W., 191–2
Clausewitz, 26
Clifford, B. E. H., 195
Cobden, R., 15, 90, 95–7, 113
Colani, T., 149
Collins, M., 204, 221
'Colonial reformers', 88
Commonwealth, 1, 13, 75, 134–5, 167–8, 170, 191, 197, 199, 201–23
Conferences, Colonial and Imperial: 1887, 130; 1897, 131; 1902, 132; 1907, 133; 1911, 133–4, 136; 1917, 134; 1921, 207, 213; 1923, 208, 210–13; 1926, 207, 210–16; 1929 (Operation of Dominion Legislation), 211, 216; 1930, 216; 1932 (Ottawa), 221–2
Congo, 12, 144–5, 147–52, 158–9, 198
Connecticut, 54, 58
Conradie, J. M., 192
Constantinople, 115, 157, 207
Continuity of imperial themes, 1–2, 12–14, 17, 88–9, 97, 117, 121, 124–9, 136, 175, 220–1
Convict colonies, 45–6, 50–2, 54–6, 58–60, 63, 71
Convict transportation, 16, 44–74, 203
Cook, J., 64, 69
'Coolie convention' (1861), 8
Corbett, J. S., 41
Cosgrave, W. T., 210–11, 217
Costello, J. A., 214
Cotton, 49, 151
Coupland, Sir R., 75, 83
Cox, H., 101
Craig, G. M., 83
Crewe, Lord, 188, 199
Crozer, Lord, 160
Curtis, L. G., 134, 191
Curzon, Lord, 160, 202, 211
Cyprus, 145–6, 164
Dafoe, J. W., 214
Dakar, 48
Dallas, K. M., 44–5, 61–2
Dalrymple, A., 52, 61–2, 67
Dalton, J. N., 130
Das Voltas Bay, 49, 52, 56, 64, 70–1
Davenport, T. R. H., 167–8, 182
Deakin, A., 132–3, 136
De Kiewiet, C. W., 196, 198–9
Delagoa Bay, 194
De la Rey, J. H., 181
Denoon, D., 167, 174–5, 179, 199
Derby, 14th earl of, 16, 80, 127
—— 15th earl of, 126–7
Desirade, 22
De Valera, E., 204, 209, 211, 217–18, 222
De Villiers, Sir H., 10
De Wet, C. R., 181
Dickens, C., 106
Diego Suarez, 48, 154
Disraeli, B., 2–4, 14–15, 48, 83, 93, 125, 129, 146, 157, 162
Dominica, 22, 37
Dominion status, 14, 201–23
Dominions Office see Colonial and Dominions Offices
Douglas, Sir H., 112
Dublin, 53, 57–8, 206, 209, 215
Dundas, H., 49–50
Du Plessis, P. J., 192
D'Urban, Sir B., 16
Durham Convention (1908), 10, 220
Durham, Lord, 15, 75–85, 106
Durham Report (1839), 2–3, 18, 75–87, 115
Dusky Bay, 69
Dutch East Indies, 44, 62–3, 72, 142
Du Toit, J. D., 186

East India Company, 37–8, 48, 59–61, 63, 67–8, 125
Economic and commercial factors, 1, 4, 11–12, 30–2, 35–6, 38, 45, 61–6,
Eden, Sir A., 17
Egremont, Lord, 24, 27, 34, 38
Egypt, 141–2, 144–9, 151–2, 154, 156–60, 162, 164–5
Elgin, 8th earl of, 15, 17, 85, 87, 94, 104, 107, 109, 114, 126, 208
— 9th earl of, 14–16, 133, 142, 160–1, 168–70, 172, 176, 178
Ellenborough, Lord, 97
Ellice, E., 77–8, 80
Enderby, S., 61
European Economic Community, 135–6
Exeter Hall, 13, 197

Fabian Colonial Bureau, 135
Faidherbe, L., 16
Falkland Islands, 52, 69
'Family' image, 92, 101–6
Fanon, F., 5
Farnie, D. A., 157
Fashoda incident, 156
Feinians, 115
Ferry, Jules, 144
Fiji, 156
First World War, 7, 14, 134–5, 206–7
FitzGerald, D., 204–5, 212, 216
Flax, 45, 48, 54–5, 58, 60, 63–70
Florida, 21, 28–9, 31–2, 36, 52
Flint, J. E., 152–3
Foreign Office, 152, 160–2
Foreign relations of colonies and Dominions, 76, 134, 136, 202, 209, 216
Forster, W. E., 150
Fox, H., 24–6
Franklin, B., 42, 46, 122–4, 129, 135
Franklin, W., 124
Frederick the Great, 24, 33
Freeman, E. A., 129
Freetown, 48
Free Trade, 88, 90–1, 97, 103–4, 112–14
Frere, Sir B., 157
Frost, A., 72
Froude, J. A., 129
Fry, H. T., 62
Fuller, R., 30
Fur trade, 31–2, 44, 60–1

Gallbräith, J. S., 88, 156
Gallagher, J., 20; see also Robinson, R. E. and Gallagher, J.
Galloway, J., 124
Galt, A. T., 128
Gambetta, L., 144, 147
Gambia, 36, 48, 93, 144
Garnier, F., 144
Garson, N. G., 163
Gell, L., 193
Geneva, 209–10, 216–17
George II, 29
George III, 25, 28, 33, 36
German colonies, 142, 149, 151, 153–5, 157–60, 180–1
German Confederation, 128
Gibraltar, 52, 114, 135
Gipson, L. H., 22
Gladstone, Viscount Herbert, 191
Glenelg, Lord, 16, 79
Glover, J., 16
Gokhale, G. K., 130
Goldie, Sir G. D. T., 16, 152
Goodfellow, C. F., 162
Gordon, General C. G., 156
Gorée, 22, 28, 37
Gosford Commission (1836–7), 83
Gourlay, R., 105, 125
Graham, Sir F., 170–1, 182
Graham, G. S., 54, 83, 87
Graham, Sir J., 94
Granville, Lord, 153
Gratton, H., 202
Gray, R., 157
Greg, W. R., 97, 113, 116–17, 127
Grenada, 22
Grenville, G., 24, 26–7
Grenville, W. W., 50, 57
Greville, C., 80, 94
Grey, Sir E., 158, 160, 178
Grey, 3rd earl, 16, 76, 78–9, 94, 96, 116–17, 129
Griffith, A., 204
Grimaldi, marquis de, 24, 35
Guadeloupe, 14, 21–2, 27–8, 30, 32, 42

Haliburton, T. G., 94, 103, 128, 136
Halifax, 2nd earl of, 27
Halifax, Nova Scotia, 114
Hamel, M.-P., 81
Hamilton, Alexander, 133
Hamilton, Ontario, 114
Hamilton, Lord G., 160–1
Hamilton, P. S., 128
Hammond, R. J., 156
Hancock, Sir W. K., 207
Harcourt, L. V., 180, 191
Hardwicke, Lord, 27, 29–31, 35
Hargreaves, J. D., 139, 147, 163, 166
Harkness, D. W., 201, 205, 209–12, 214, 217–19
Harlech, Lord (Sir W. Ormsby-Gore), 12–14, 191, 218
Harlow, V. T., 23, 30–1
Harndeny, P., 5
Havana, 21, 27–9, 33, 39
Havenga, N. C., 194
Hayward, A., 87
Head, Sir F. B., 38, 76, 85
Head, Sir E. W., 93
Heads of a Plan (1786), 64–6, 68
Healy, T., 203
Hertzog, J. B., 15, 181, 190, 193–7, 207, 213–4, 216, 218, 220
High Commission Territories, 12, 15–16, 187–99
Hill, D., 51
Hincks, F., 94–5
Hitler, Adolf, 17, 198
Hobart, Tasmania, 116
Hobart, R., 57
Hobson, J. A., 1, 3
Hofmeyr, J. H., 190
Home Office, 39
Home Rule, 180, 203–4
Honduras, bay of, 21, 28, 36, 46, 50–2, 57, 71
Hopkins, A. G., 16
Hopwood, Sir F., 188
Hottblack, K., 23, 35
Howe, J., 82, 127–8, 203
Howick, Lord, see Grey, 3rd earl
Hudson’s Bay Company, 36, 53
Hughes, J., 123
Hughes, W. M., 207
Hume, J., 98, 125
Hutchinson, T., 22, 123
Hyderabad, 9

Iberville, river, 36
‘Imperial federation’, 8–9, 13–14, 18, 76, 98–9, 109–10, 121–38, 203
Imperial Federation League, 130–3
Imperial ideas, 1–4; ignorance about empire, 15–17, 36–7; illusions about empire, 2, 5–6, 13, 15, 17, 85–6, 115
Imperial War Cabinet, 134–5, 206
India, routes to, 49, 52, 141, 145–6, 153–4, 160
‘Informal control’, 1, 6, 11, 158
Ireland, 65–6, 85, 116, 122, 124, 130, 141, 169, 201–3
Ireland, Northern, 7, 121, 201, 203, 217–8, 220
Irish Free State, 3, 17–18, 191, 201–23
Irish convict transportation, 46–7, 49–50, 53–4, 71–2
Islam in Africa, 139–40, 154
Italy, 145–7, 221

Jamaica, 49, 51
Jameson, L. S., 133
Java, 62, 149
Jeffrey, R., 6
Jenkinson, O. (1st Lord Liverpool), 37, 57
Johannesburg, 163, 178–9
Johnston, Sir H., 152, 154
Jones, Sir R., 197
Jowitt, Lord, 202
Just, Hartmann W., 178, 182

Kalahari, 192
Katanga, 150
Keith, A. B., 177
Keltie, J. S., 165
Kendle, J. E., 131, 138
Kenya, 188–9, 194
Kerr, P., 189
INDEX

Ketenou, 159
Kgama, Tshekedi, 196
King, W. L. M., 207–8, 211–14, 220
Kinglake, A., 5
Kipling, R., 3, 106
Kitchener, Lord, 156
Koeber, R., 4
Kruger, P., 163, 171, 182

Labrador, 98, 209
Lafayette, marquis, 48, 108
LaFontaine, L., 15, 84
Lagos, 144, 159
Lane, E. F. C., 189, 199
Lang, J. D., 89, 102, 108
La Perouse, J.-F. de, 69
Lapointe, E., 208
Latham, R. T. E., 201, 205
Laurier, W., 10, 129–30
Lawrence, Henry and John, 8
League of Nations, 135, 205–6, 209, 212, 216, 220
Lecky, W. H., 161
Legassick, M., 189
Legge, H., 29
Leigh, 146
Le May, G. H. L., 168
Lent, V., 1
Leopold II, 145, 147, 149–51, 157–8
Lewis, G. C., 95, 107
Leyds, W., 171
Liverpool merchants, 37
Liverpool, 1st Lord, see Jenkinson, C.
—— 2nd Lord, 202–3
Livingstone, D., 155
Lloyd George, D., 17, 168, 175, 203–4, 208, 218, 222
Lobengula, 8
London, City of, 24, 47, 54, 94, 216
Loreburn, Lord, 171, 178
Louis, W. R., 149, 162–3
Louisiana, 21, 29, 32
Low, D. A., 1, 8, 9
Lowell, Mass., USA, 113
Lower Canada, 80, 89–90, 125
Loyalists, Empire, 45, 56, 102–3
Lucas, C. P., 75–6, 83, 85
Ludlow, J. M., 128
Lugard, Lord, 1, 8, 16, 151, 154, 158
Lysaght, E., 203
Lyttelton, A., 14, 16, 132–3, 175
Lyttelton constitution (1905), 168, 171, 173–5
Macartney, Lord, embassy to Peking, 1792, 62
MacDonagh, O., 83, 117, 162
Macdonald, J. A., 6
MacDonald, Malcolm, 191
MacDonald, J. Ramsay, 151
Mackay, D. L., 13, 49, 64, 71
Madagascar, 48, 147, 149, 153–4
'Magnanimity', 33, 167–86
Maji-Maji uprising, 140, 160
Makoko, 150
Malacca, straits of, 63
Malan, D. F., 198
Malta, 114, 135, 146
'Manchester School', 97
Manila, in Seven Years War, 21–2
Mansergh, P. N. S., 205, 212–13, 215
Marie Galante island, 22
Maritime provinces, 9, 55, 78, 93
Marks, S., 189, 192, 199
Marryat, F., 95–6
Marsden, A., 145
Marshall, P. J., 13, 39
Martin, R. M., 91
Martinique, 21–2, 28, 33
Marxist interpretations of imperial history, 1, 151, 190
Maryland convicts, 46
Massey, W. F., 220
Mathews, J., 129
Matra, J., 45, 61–2, 66
Mauritius, 71, 153–4
Mawby, A. A., 180
Mbandzeni (Swazi king), 152
McCulloch, H., 32
McDowell, R. B., 203
McGilligan, P., 206, 216, 218
McIntyre, W. D., 4
Melbourne, Lord, 76, 78, 80–1, 93, 97–8
Mercury, 50
Merivale, H., 99–100, 107, 129
Merriman, J. X., 10, 85
Metcalfe, Sir C., 82
Mexico, 29, 62
Milbanke, Sir R., 57
Mill, J. S., 101, 128, 136
Millin, S. G., 168
Milner, Lord, 132–4, 163, 175–6, 179, 182–3, 191
Miquelon, 21, 28, 37
Miramichi, river, 55
INDEX

Mississippi, river, 21, 30, 32, 34, 36, 39
Michell, Sir L., 193
Mobile, 21, 29
Modyford, T., 122
Molesworth, Sir W., 89
Mombasa, 154
Monarchy, 7-8, 25, 107-8, 213, 217
Monck, Lord, 98
Monmouth, Duke of, 49
Montreal, 91, 94, 104
Moore, G., 50-1, 71
Morley, J., 91, 168, 172
Morocco, 145
Mosquito Coast, 50-1
Mozambique, 188, 193-4
Murphy, W. M., 203

Namier, L. B., 22-3
Nasser, A., 17
Natal, 130, 184
Nautilus, 49, 71
Naval power, 6, 21, 28-9, 33, 35-7, 113-14, 210, 215, 221
Naval timber, 45, 50, 54-5, 60, 63-5, 67-9, 95-6, 112, 114
Ndebele and Shona risings, 8, 140
Nehru, J., 11
Nepean, E., 47, 51, 53, 56
Netherlands, 44, 49, 62-3, 65, 72, 142, 149-50, 182
New Brunswick, 3, 53, 55-6
Newbury, C. W., 152
Newcastle, 1st Duke of, 23-5, 27-8, 31-2, 36
— Fifth Duke of, 98, 100
New England, 55, 64, 70, 120
Newfoundland, 21-2, 26, 39-40, 46, 53-60, 72, 83, 100, 135, 208-9, 221
Newgate, 13, 54, 77
New Guinea, 16, 143, 155
New Jersey, 58, 123
New London, Connecticut, 54
New Orleans, 21, 27
New South Wales, 44-5, 47, 53, 56, 58-9, 61, 64-5, 69-70, 72-3, 82, 106, 125

Newspapers and Periodicals: *Annual Register*, 30-2, 36; *Auditor*, 36; *Australien* (Sydney), 82; *Bloomfontein Post*, 183; *Colonial Gazette*, 79, 81, 93; *Commercial Advertiser* (Cape Town), 82-3; *Daily News*, 92, 104; *Daily Universal Register*, 55, 62, 65-8, 71; *Edinburgh Review*, 96-7, 111; *Evening Standard*, 176; *Le Fantasque* (Quebec), 81; *Freeman's Journal* (Dublin), 58; *Graham's Town Journal*, 82; *Irish Times*, 212; *Leeds Mercury*, 79, 105, 109-10; *Manchester Guardian*, 91-2, 94-6; *Morning Chronicle*, 79, 84, 90-1; *Morning Herald*, 76, 101-2; *Non-conformist*, 90; *North Briton*, 24-5, 36; *Quarterly Review*, 142, 151; *Round Table*, 191, 204; *Spectator*, 79, 90, 93, 97, 109, 128-9, 142, 147, 150, 154, 159; *Sydney Herald*, 82; *The Times*, 9, 47, 59, 84, 89-90, 93-7, 103-4, 106, 117, 127, 143, 146-8, 150, 152, 155-6, 159, 212, 214, 221; *Westminster Review*, 127-9

New Zealand, 7-8, 12, 64-6, 68-9, 116, 128, 131, 133, 138, 143, 201, 207-8, 213, 219-20, 223
Ngamiland, 191-2
Nicobar Islands, 63
Niger, river, 36, 144, 152
Nigeria, 8, 144, 153, 159-60
Nile, river, 139, 144, 149, 153, 156
Neotka Sound, 60
Norfolk Island, 45, 50, 55, 60, 63-4, 66-9
Norman, Montagu, 221
Normanby, Lord, 79-80
North, Lord, 76
Nova Scotia, 3, 9, 36, 53-8, 82, 93, 103, 127-8, 203, 219-20
Nyasaland, 154-5, 187, 194

O'Brien, B., 101
*Official mind*, 14, 139-40, 161-3
O'Higgins, K., 212-17, 220
Ohio Valley Indians, 56
Okavango, river, 192
Oldmixon, J., 122
Oliver, R., 133
Orange Free State (1902-10, Orange River Colony), 16, 142, 174, 177, 180-1
Orange river, 49
Ormsby-Gore, Sir W., see Harlech, Lord
Orr, C. W., 155
Otis, J., 122-4
Ottawa Agreements, 201, 209, 212, 221–2

Pakenham, F. (Lord Longford), 204, 218
Pakington, Sir J., 104
Palmerston, Lord, 15, 100, 151
Pares, R., 23, 26–7
Parkes, Sir Henry, 6, 132
Parliament, British, 9, 24, 44, 46–7, 51, 60–1, 69, 71, 76–8, 80–1, 84, 91, 97, 103, 109, 111, 116, 121–30, 133, 135–6
Parliament, Canadian, 207
Parliament, Irish, 47, 53, 57, 122, 130, 171, 178, 187–8, 202
Parliament, South African, 192
Parliamentary inquiries: on Canada (1828), 83; on transportation, 46–7, 51, 53, 56, 58, 70
Parties, political: Conservative (Britain), 78, 101, 126, 157, 174, 203–4, 212, 214, 218; Conservative (Canada), 206, 212; Hert Volk (Transvaal), 179–80, 183; Irish Nationalist, 203; Labour (Britain), 183, 218; Labour (Transvaal), 189–90; Liberal (Britain), 14, 97, 166–7, 170, 174–5, 177–9, 183; Liberal (Canada), 207; National (South Africa), 183, 190, 192, 194–5, 197–9; Progressive (Transvaal), 179–80; Radical, 76; Reform (Canada), 81–2, 104; Responsible Government Association (Transvaal), 179; Sinn Fein, 17, 203; South African Party, 207; Tory (Canada), 103–4; Ulster Unionist, 203, 218; United Party (South Africa), 198; Unionist (South Africa), 207; Whig, 78, 83
Pease, T. C., 27
Penang, 63
Pennsylvania, 46, 123
Perham, Dame Margery, 191
Persia, 142
Peru, 62
Phelan, E. J., 216
Philippines, 21–2, 62
Phillip, A., 60–1, 66–9, 71–2
Pirow, O., 190
Pitt, William, the Elder, see Chatham
Pitt, William the Younger, 62
Platt, D. C. M., 14
Plettenberg Bay, 49, 72
Polk, J., 84
Pollock committee, 132–3
Portal, Sir G., 154
Port Hunter, 83
Portland, Duke of, 202
Portugal, 71, 107, 116, 122, 126, 135, 149, 193–4, 198, 216
Pownall, J., 37
 Pretoria, 179, 181, 187–8, 198
Prince Edward Island, 21, 56, 100, 106
Prince of Wales, and Repulse, 6
Privy Council: appeals to, 110, 209, 211–12, 217; committee on trade, 65
Providence, will of, in Victorian thought, 91, 156
Prussia, 23–4, 35, 38, 149, 155
Punjab land settlement (1900), 5, 8
Pyle, E., 28
Pyrah, G. B., 184
Quebec, 77–8, 90
Queen Adelaide province, 16
Queensland, 16, 143, 155
Ragatz, L. G., 22, 39
Rand mining interests, 12, 170–1, 173, 175, 179–80
Rashed, Z., 23
Redmond, J., 218
Regency crisis (1788), 54, 202
Reid, S. J., 85
Responsible government, 6, 15–16, 75, 79, 82, 84, 90, 102, 104, 107, 109, 167–79, 203
Rhodes, C. J., 3, 6, 8, 141, 152, 155, 162–3
Rhodesia, 7, 187–8, 193–4, 198; Northern, 9, 187–8; Southern, 189, 192–5, 199–200
Riau, 63
Rich, E. E., 38
Richmond, Duke of, 125
Rigby, R., 27
Ripon, Lord, 14, 178
Robinson, J. B. (Canada), 125
Robinson, J. B. (South Africa), 179
Robinson, R. E., 1, 144, 155; and Gallagher, J., 4, 7, 11, 14, 16, 88, 139–42, 145, 147, 149, 151–2, 160–3
Rockingham, Lord, 204
Rodney, Admiral, 36–7
Roe, O. M., 45, 61
Roebuck, J. A., 76, 90–1, 105, 108
Rogers, Sir F., 9, 100
Roman Empire, 4, 115, 159
Rosebery, Lord, 130, 141–2
Round Table, 131, 133–4
Rousseau, J-J, 123
Royal Colonial Institute, 128
Ruanda-Urundi, 143
Russia, 65, 112, 115, 135, 209, 221
Ruville, A. von, 29
Ryerson, E., 82

St Domingue (San Domingo), 29, 106, 116
St Helena, 52
St John’s, Newfoundland, 54, 56–8, 221
St Lawrence river, 21, 53, 55–6, 113–14
St Lucia, 22, 27–9, 33–4, 36–7
St Pierre, 21, 37
St Vincent, 22
Salisbury, Lord, 132, 140, 143–6, 151–7, 159–62
Sanderson, G. N., 156
Sarawak, 8
Savage, M. J., 220
Say, L., 148
Scotland, 46, 121–2; anti-Scots prejudice, 25
Scullin, J. H., 214
Second World War, 8, 135, 190, 197–8, 219
Seddon, R., 131
Seeing, J. R., 3–5, 13
Selborne, Lord, 170–2
Senegal, 22, 36–7, 48, 144
Seven Years War, 21, 35–6, 122–3
Shaw, A. G. L., 61, 66, 73, 88–9
Shelburne, Lord, 3, 31
Sierra Leone, 48–9, 69, 158
Singapore, 63, 219, 221
Skelton, O. D., 214, 216
Slavery and slave trading, 2, 12, 27, 37, 47, 49
Smith, Adam, 124, 136
Smith, Goldwin, 91–2, 95, 97–8, 106–7, 109–13, 116–17, 128–9, 136
Smyllie, R. M., 212, 214
Sobhuza II, 8–9, 196
Solomon, Sir R., 176, 179, 181–2
Somaliland, 160
South African republican movement, 170, 180–1, 195, 197, 213
South Africans, English speaking, 179–80, 182–3, 195, 213; see also Uitlanders
South Carolina, 113
South-West Africa, 155, 159, 188, 192
Spain, 21, 23, 25, 29, 31–2, 34, 44, 51–2, 60, 62, 107, 209
Stanley, E. and G., see Derby
Stanley, H. M., 149
Stanley, Sir Herbert, 191, 193
Statute of Westminster (1931), 196, 201, 214–17, 219–21
Steele, J., 124
Stellenbosch, 182, 213
Stembridge, S., 4, 88
Stengers, J., 147, 150, 157
Stephen, J., 78, 98–100, 102
Steyn, M. T., 181–2
Stockton, R., 123
Strategic interests, 1, 11–12, 29–32, 35–6, 114–15, 140–1, 143, 152–6, 158–61, 192, 195–6, 215
Strijdem, J. S., 190
Sudan, 153, 156–7, 160
Suez, and Suez Canal, 17, 135, 146, 153–4, 157, 162
Sugar, 29, 50
Sun: ‘never sets on empire’, 92, 117, 120
Swaziland, 8–9, 12, 15–16, 152, 187, 190–9
‘Swing to the east’, 2, 72
Sydenham, Lord, 82
Sydney, Lord, 51, 54, 57, 64, 66, 68, 71–2
Sydney, New South Wales, 56, 62, 116, 126
Sydney, Cape Breton, 56
INDEX

Tanganyika, 140, 160, 188
Tasmania, 83, 102, 131
Taylor, H., 100
Tel el Kebir, 144, 156
Temperley, H. W. V., 23
Tench, W., 70
Thomas, J. H., 191, 196-7, 206
Thornton, A. P., 92
Thring, H., 110-11
Tinker, H., 2
Tobago, 22
Tomlinson Report (1954), 192
Transfer of power, and decolonisation,
1-2, 12, 16, 18, 36, 137, 168-80,
187-8, 198, 201-22; see responsible government
Transvaal, 6, 141-2, 157, 162-3, 167-
70, 172-83, 194-5
Travancore, 6
Treasury, 64, 66, 71, 153
Treaties, commercial: Halibut (1923),
209; Reciprocity (1854), 208; modus
vivendi with Russia (1930),
209; of peace: 1713 (Utrecht), 30;
1763 (Paris), 14, 16, 21-43, 51;
1783 (Versailles), 51, 63; 1814
(Ghent, with USA), 112; 1815
(Vienna), 29; 1871 (Franco-
Prussian), 149; 1902 (Vereeniging,
South African), 181; 1919 (Ver-
sailles), 33, 206, 209; 1921 (Anglo-
Irish), 201-2, 204-5, 209, 216-17;
1923 (Lausanne, with Turkey), 208
Treurfontein, 181
Tripoli, 142
Tristan da Cunha, 52
Trollope, A., 105
Tucker, Dean J., 38
Tunis, 142, 145-7, 149, 164
Tupper, C., 130-1
Turkey, 142, 146-7, 157, 207-8
Turton, T., 77

Uganda, 9, 154-5, 159
Uitlanders, 163, 182-3, 186
United Nations, 135
United States of America, 3-4, 7-8,
10, 40, 44, 46-7, 53-4, 56-7, 65,
72, 84, 90-1, 94-8, 100, 109, 106,
108, 111-15, 121, 126, 128; 135;
142, 149-50, 159, 205, 208-10, 221
Upper Canada, 53, 55-6, 80-3; 90;
100, 113, 125

Urabi Pasha, 17, 157
Van den Heever, C. M., 181
Van Diemen's Land, see Tasmania
Van Rensburg, N., 181
Vatican, Irish Free State minister at
the, 209
Victoria, colony of, 9, 106, 108, 131
Victoria, Queen, 8, 78, 97, 104, 107,
116, 157
Virginia, 46, 70
Viry, Count, 24, 27, 32

Waddington, W., 146
Wakefield, E. G., 14-15, 77, 79, 88,
101, 112, 115, 125
Walpole, Horace, 24-5, 27, 41
Ward, J. M., 75, 86
Ward, J. T., 94
Ward, Sir J., 133-4, 136
Washington, D.C., 126, 207, 209-10,
221
Washington, G., 108
Watkin, E. W., 93
Wellington, New Zealand, 219-20
Wentworth, Sir J., 55
Western Australia, 9
West Indies, 12, 16, 21-2, 29-31, 36-
7, 46-7, 49-50, 70, 100, 105, 115-
16, 123, 125
West Ridgeway committee of inquiry
(1906), 173-4, 176, 180
Whaley, D., 51
Whaling industry, 52, 59, 61-2, 65
White, T. de V., 212, 214
‘Whitall’, 2, 6, 13-14, 16, 162
Wigley, P., 211-12
Wilkes, J., 124
Williams, Eric, 30
Williams, Capt G., 37
Willink, H. U., 169
Wilson, J., 185
Wolfe, J., 30, 39
Wolseley, Field-Marshal Sir Garnet,
157
Worge, Lt.-Col., 37

Zambesi, 188
Zanzibar, 154
Zetland, Lord, 218
Zulu, 140, 207
"A book that is shut is but a block"

CENTRAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL LIBRARY
GOVT. OF INDIA
Department of Archaeology
NEW DELHI.

Please help us to keep the book clean and moving.