THE BRITISH IN ASIA

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by

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To F.

'At a time when the established political forms of the greatest civilized peoples are tottering or changing;

when, with the spread of education and communications, the realization and impatience of suffering is visibly and rapidly growing;

when social institutions are being shaken to their foundations by world movements, not to speak of all the accumulated crises which have not yet found their issues;

it would be a wonderful spectacle to follow with knowledge the spirit of man as it builds its new house, soaring above, yet closely bound up with all these things. Any man with an inkling of what that meant would completely forget fortune and misfortune, and would spend his life in the quest of that wisdom.'

Reflections on History

by JAKOB BURCKHARDT.

PREFACE

A main theme of this book is the change in the prospects of a large part of the world caused by the present British policy in Asia. The book was written in 1946 when little attention had been given to these changes. Since it was finished, the British pledge of complete withdrawal from India and the new policy of world intervention by the United States of America have increased the public interest in South Asia very greatly.

I am much indebted for aid of all kinds to Mr. G. E. Harvey, the author of the standard works on Burma, to Sir Frank Noyce, a representative of the minute band of administrators who for more than a century sustained the British Empire in Asia, to Dr. P. Spear, the chronicler of the early years of that Empire, to Lt.-Gen. Sir F. Tuker, and to Lt.-Col. W. Dobson. And especially I am indebted to Sardar K. M. Panikkar. His conversation was the climate in which the book grew, though he bears no blame for what in it is amiss.

Kirtlington
Oxon.

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INTRODUCTION

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British power has for more than a century spread peace over South Asia. This region, the territory lying south of the Himalayas and between the Persian Gulf and Singapore, contains between one-fifth and one-quarter of the total population of the world. These are not backward peoples, but for the most part heirs of the most ancient civilizations. Because they lay within the British Empire they were left undisturbed, at least until very recently, by violence from outside, and their troubles have not caused commotion in the world beyond their borders.

It was not merely by British power that this peace was preserved. It was also by the Indian power which the British organized. The British Empire in Asia, though a part of the world-wide British Commonwealth, has always been to some extent a separate entity from the rest of the Commonwealth. Indeed, it might have been called more accurately an Indo-British Empire. It was based on India; its extension over the countries clustered round the Indian Ocean was, by joint effort, British and Indian.

For the world's peace, the tragedy is that this partnership of Britain and India, a compelled one at the start as far as India was concerned, never, owing to faults on both sides, matured into genuine marriage. The union may now be dissolved, or at least its character and purpose will alter greatly. How profound a change this will make in the general conduct of world affairs has perhaps not yet been fully realized, so much has attention in the matter been concentrated upon the purely domestic problems of Indian politics. Half a continent is being emancipated and must provide for its own security. At a time when the world is quaking, in a region where all had been certain all now becomes problematical and dangerous;

and the least that may be said is that the area of tension in world affairs is thus very greatly enlarged.

The purpose of this book is two-fold. The first, since the time seems appropriate, is to try to set down what has happened in South Asia during the period of British domination, and not only what has happened to its politics and social organization, but also to what lies behind these, the temper of its mind. Every conquest and rule of one country by another has in it a stain of evil. To write or read about it rouses passion both on the side of those who ruled and those who were subjected. A fair history is perhaps impossible by either an Englishman or an Asiatic. But the British period in the East has been an important episode in world history; the changes which have occurred are matters of fact, requiring study.

The second purpose is to inquire whether the unity of the region cannot still be preserved, to its own advantage and the advantage of the rest of the world. This is not to suggest that British rule should continue. The East will once more rule itself. But may it not be possible to combine the satisfaction of the national aspirations of what have been British territories in the Indian Ocean region, with the maintenance of all this vast expanse of sea and land as a single unit for the purposes of defence and certain common interests?

PART ONE

BRITISH EMPIRE

CHAPTER ONE

THE INDO-BRITISH EMPIRE

[i]

The British Empire in Asia began its mature life in the eighteenth century, and in the nineteenth grew to be a system of territories, protectorates and alliances covering the southern part of the Asiatic continent. The circumstances in which the Empire came into being explain some of the peculiarities and indeed the paradoxes of its later history.

The home government in London never planned its Asiatic conquests. The parliamentary system would have prevented that; public opinion would not have tolerated the upkeep of a large army, expensive and a threat to the personal liberties of the subject in the home country. Thus the Empire was not built by a national effort of the British people.

The Empire was in fact the result of a more or less private enterprise of a relatively small number of British expatriates. After the British Navy opened the Eastern seas in the eighteenth century (without which no Empire could have been thought of), the British Government gave its more audacious subjects an authority, or licence, or encouragement, to win in the East whatever by intrigue and the most economical use of a small white force they could seize and, by their own devices, hold. Occasional help in emergency was forthcoming from the British Government, as in the crisis of the Indian Mutiny in 1857; but beyond this the home government was unwilling to commit any large force to the support of its subjects in the East.

This charter, limited as it was, satisfied the adventurers because at the time certain extraordinary circumstances in the East gave them all the other opportunity they needed. The adventurers were at hand because, as Jeremy Bentham remarked at the beginning of the nine-

teenth century, the expanding British middle class had produced families which could find employment only in an expanding Empire.

By the achievements of the new conquistadores Britain enjoyed much of its wealth and standing throughout the century and a half which followed. A relatively small European people whose effective life was concentrated in a capital city and a few industrial towns found itself paramount over civilizations which had already been a wonder seventeen centuries before in the time of the Roman Empire, of which Britain itself formed a barbaric fraction. It enjoyed for a time a power of transforming masses of mankind such as had fallen to no other country. Nevertheless, the home public continued indifferent to this romantic construction. By British shoulders the eastern skies were held suspended, but the British public was mostly unconscious of this, or at least would not have regarded the transfer of the burden as catastrophe.

Occasionally, it is true, its imagination was briefly fluttered by the news from the orient. Spices, palm trees, incredibly cheap victories against armies 'thick as standing corn and gorgeous as a field of flowers', subject princes, a military Empire with pomp and panache run in more or less safety and at a distance which lent enchantment—these were the diversions of nineteenth-century England after the solid achievements of the Reform Bill and the repeal of the Corn Laws and the reform of the corporations. Yet it perhaps never believed that its Asiatic Empire was quite real. It was too much like theatre. If at times the public indulged its complacency in surveying it, its good sense recalled it afterwards to more sober views. The East was too glittering to be sound. Australia, Canada, were credible, went with hard work, and were to be taken seriously, but not the lands of glittering and wicked princes. Of those who knew that the Asiatic Empire was real and understood how it was composed, some shrank from it as something meretricious or morally tainted by the method of its acquisition. And indeed, what chance would Clive or Warren Hastings have had before the Nuremberg Tribunal?

From these peculiarities there were two consequences. The first was that the British never colonized their Asiatic Empire or even visited it in large numbers. British conquest meant thus only the substitution of a very small English administrative cadre for the former indigenous governors.

It followed that the British Empire in Asia was always at least in part a genuinely Asiatic Empire rather than a foreign structure. Its architects, receiving only sporadic and slender aid from Great Britain, had to create in the East itself the instruments to sustain and

enlarge their rule. What impresses about them in the dangerous time when the structure was only half complete is how much at ease and at home they looked in that exotic world. They insinuated themselves in South Asia, raised Asiatic armies, financed them out of Asiatic revenues, and conquered as an Asiatic state. After an early attempt to exclude Indians from all political responsibility, they ran their Indian government, which was the centre of the whole system, by a bureaucracy the overwhelming majority of which was of indigenous origin.[1] Indeed, the few hundred Englishmen who controlled the Empire could be regarded as the European mercenaries of an Asiatic power. They had got their hands upon an eastern machinery of government, and, while themselves remaining English and being often insensitively indifferent to oriental culture, operated an oriental system. Thackeray, speaking of British officers in India as 'Indians', recognized, perhaps unconsciously, what was their position.

The second result of the way in which the Empire was built was that Britain never incorporated its eastern territories in its political system as Tsarist Russia, for example, incorporated its conquered provinces. British rule was a kind of net thrown over them, which could later be withdrawn; to detach its Eastern Empire from Britain would not have been to tear a vital part out of its body.

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The history of the Empire must be described in more detail.

It falls into two sections; the first is the conquest of India by the British: the second the spread of their power from India as a base over South Asia.

How the British, or rather the corporation of merchants called the East India Company, conquered India in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries has been often described. The subjection of such a huge area by so strange and commercial a conqueror was spectacular, but there is no mystery about how it happened. It was not, as is sometimes suggested, that Britain was industrialized and India was not—for the conquest took place when industrialization was only beginning. It was that a country whose people were not yet united by nationalism faced an agency which as a corporation could pursue longer aims than individual princes, and which knew how to exploit the absence of nationalism, and so to act that India itself worked for the Company's benefit.

[1] In the vast country the number of British administrative officers was usually no more than about three or four thousand, and in recent years much fewer.

On the fall of the Moghul Empire the Company found its trade adversely affected and its safety endangered by the disorder which swept the country, and raised a force for its protection. This was chiefly Indian in personnel, though the officers were European. To the surprise of its masters, the army passed from victory to victory over the generals, magnates and Hindu princes who inherited the Moghul authority, and the Company found itself master of the largest organized territory in the country and could overawe the remainder. In all these exertions the Company had acted in fact as if it had been an Indian prince. It used Indian troops, it played Indian politics, it was thought of by Indian governments as one of the 'country powers', it made its way partly through Indian allies.

It has therefore been said that India was not really, in fact, conquered at all in the sense that an outside power invaded it, but one part of India, seeing no shame in co-operating with aliens, allied itself with a group of foreigners and thereby imposed itself on the other part, thus unifying the country. The historian, Sir John Seeley, remarked that a number of Parsee merchants in Bombay, tired of the anarchy which destroyed their trade, might have organized themselves as the British had done and have achieved the same result.

The French, who were also in India as traders, had had the same opportunities as the British, and played the same game, but used a system which proved less successful.

India was held by the British by the same means by which they had established their power. When a part of the Indian army mutinied in 1857, the mutiny was suppressed partly by British troops but also partly by India itself, and *The Times* correspondent of the time reflected as follows:

'I looked with ever-growing wonder on the vast tributary of the tide of war which was running around and before me. All these men, women and children, with high delight were pouring towards Lucknow to aid the Feringhee to overcome their brethren.'[1]

The result of the persistent activity of the East India Company was that, though few of its officers had had such audacious ambitions, it ended by restoring a more or less unified Empire of India, and thus became the heir to the long line of Indian kings.

[1] That this peculiar system was based on mutual convenience and not on any special cordiality between the races is shown however in another despatch by the same writer. 'In no instance is a friendly glance directed to the white man's carriage. Oh, that language of the eye. It is by it that I have learned that our race is not even feared at times by many, and that by all it is disliked.'

The four or five Englishmen who formed the Executive Council of the Governor-General, and a few hundred senior English civil servants, in sentiment, habits and dress so different from the nobles of the courts of Akbar and Aurengzeb, sat, in fact, on the Moghul throne and thereafter wielded the Moghul power. Time was to change the character of their administration and make them less adventurous and more bureaucratic, less free and more controlled by the India Office in London, less a young man's government and more hierarchical. But in one respect their government preserved its character throughout. Their Empire was not something integral to the British political life but was an interest or almost a hobby of a clique of the English middle class, who as civil servants or army officers found in Bengal and the North-West Frontier a greater satisfaction for talent and for a curiosity stirred perhaps by Herodotus and a classical education than they could in Whitehall and Aldershot.[1]

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Having established their authority in India, having trained their armies, having organized a cadre of administrators, the new governors of India from the end of the eighteenth century turned their attention outwards. India is the core of South Asia. It stands out in the middle of the Indian Ocean, the great land mass in the southern part of the continent, and to the east, west and north lie minor countries in no sense its match whenever India is vigorous. Over them Indian power had at various times radiated in antiquity. Indian sailors, in voyages which at the time can scarcely have been less daring than those of Columbus, carried Indian arms almost as far as the Philippines; and the term 'India', as used by Marco Polo, meant not only Peninsular India but the region of the Indian Ocean from Java to the coasts of Africa.

When the new British authority came into being, it found these border lands in confusion. The administration in India was the strongest power over much of the continent and was able, by moving its strength very slightly, to build an Empire with borders far beyond those of India itself.

Its creation was a deliberate undertaking. The view sometimes put forward, especially for foreigners, that the British Asiatic Empire

[1] It has been pointed out that the details of the great decisions of British policy in India in 1946 and 1947 were decided by hardly more than a dozen men. The public as a whole was not interested—much less so than in the discussions before the Act of 1935.

was an accident, that it was the lumber of Asia which crumbled from its own rottenness and fell into the arms of the British which happened at that time to be welcomingly extended, is hardly true. The initial British seizures in India itself may have happened in this way but not the further extension of power. The bureaucracy in India may not have been very Machiavellian—an impatient general said that it looked on vigorous action in an emergency as indiscreet; the home public in England may have been quite ignorant of what was done in its name, and the home government, except when goaded by individual experts, was chronically cautious; but a small band of ambitious men, successively in control of India's power, added stone by stone to the growing imperial structure. Though in the Indian Government a 'Little India' school always existed, there was also an 'Indian Empire' school; first one prevailed, then another: and in moments of the ascendancy of the latter the Empire spread.

Its spread was the result of Indo-British partnership. This fact can hardly be enough emphasized. It was a joint creation of Britain and India, of the emigrants from the British middle class and of Indian manpower and resources which they had organized. India could not have established the Empire without Great Britain, nor could Great Britain without India. All the principal actors who conceived the expansionist policies were Englishmen; but the Empire which they built was based on Indian, not British needs. Except for the sake of Indian security, what interest would Great Britain have had in the Persian Gulf, Tibet, or Sinkiang, in all of whose affairs it began to intervene? Indian emigrants, not British, swarmed into the new provinces; and while British capital built the railways, mines, plantations, and new industries, Indian moneylenders acquired the land. The fact that in their activities in Asia the British were in part doing India's business, and acting as servants of the Emperor of India rather than of the King of England, explains much about the past and present of the Empire which is otherwise obscure.

The details of the spread of the Empire need not be described here. Ceylon, whose maritime provinces had already been for three hundred years under foreign rule, first of the Portuguese and then of the Dutch, was annexed in two instalments at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries. Though Ceylon was thereafter governed from London through the Colonial Office, and not from India, the motive for its conquest had come from India.

On the eastern side of India was the jungle peninsula of Malaya, divided between a dozen Sultans who were virtually pirate chiefs. At the end of the eighteenth century the East India Company ob-

tained footholds in its ports, and gradually spread its authority over the interior, though with almost unaccountable slowness. The states of the Sultans became its protectorates. Until 1867 Malaya was the sphere of the Government of India, not directly of London, and though afterwards it passed, like Ceylon, under the Colonial Office, India's interest in it was not abated. Indeed it increased since nearly a million Indian immigrants came eventually to Malaya's rubber plantations.

With its immediate neighbour, Burma, the Indian Government fought three wars, the first in 1824, the second in 1852, the last, which ended in annexation, in 1886. A Burmese intrigue with the French in Indo-China, which supposedly endangered India's security, led the Indian Government somewhat reluctantly to the final step of conquest.

In the west, Aden, important as a coaling station, had been occupied in 1839. In the Far East, as furthest outpost, Hong Kong was annexed in 1841.

Such were the actual conquests made by the British from India as base. But besides annexing territory the Indian Government, with the British Government behind it, built for their defence an outwork of alliances and of spheres of influence. The Himalayan mountains, a frontier barrier such as no other country possesses, are the central feature in any Indian defence plan, but they have often in history given India a false sense of security. They have been described therefore as a natural Maginot line, and the British defence plan looked far beyond them; indeed it was said by one of the foreign secretaries of the Government of India in Victorian times that the true frontiers of the Empire delineated not the lands it administered but the lands it protected. The Empire is to be thought of as consisting of a kernel which was the rich lands directly administered, and of a protective rind; this rind was made up partly of minor and more or less primitives states, such as Bhutan and Nepal, and partly of belts of mountain or desert territories inhabited by people tribally organized, like the belt on the Scotch border in the Roman Empire where, as Gibbon remarked, 'the native Caledonians preserved their wild independence, for which they were not less indebted to their poverty than to their valour'. Over both these groups the Indian Government exercised a control whose form varied—Nepal was treated with the normal usages of diplomacy—but whose common purpose was to prevent or restrict their relations with other countries, or at least to ensure that they could not be used by them for hostile purposes.

Still farther afield, and as a sort of open ground in front of the out-

works, the Indian Government formed a ring of neutral states. Persia, Arabia, Tibet, Afghanistan and even for a time a part of Sinkiang, fell thus into place in the system. On the one side the limit of India's interest was in general the Arabian desert between Baghdad and Damascus, which forms the true division between the countries which look towards Europe and those which look towards Asia, and which was once the boundary of the Roman Empire. But at one time the search for security extended even to Egypt, and if what was done there in the 'eighties was done by the home government, it was done at least partly because of the supposed needs of India.[1] On the other side the interest extended to Indonesia and Indo-China, though for various reasons it was usually less keen and alert than on the western side.

As a result of this buttressing of buffer states the Empire was placed in a position, very fortunate for avoiding friction in its foreign relations, that at no point did its actual political frontier march with that of any other great power. It was thus a system similar to that which Russia seems to be building at the present time.

By these seizures of territory, alliances, and the exercise of influence, the Indian Government turned South Asia into a political unit knit together for defence. There was a body of doctrine about how it should be held together. A corps of specialists in the Indian Army and the Foreign Office of the Indian Government, inconspicuously and at times with the sense of carrying on a conspiracy or an esoteric rite, secured the continuity of policy. Round it grew up a romance—the vision of the seas swept by the British Navy, the three thousand miles of the mountain frontiers of Northern India, the lands beyond, supposed in the imagination of the classically educated officials to be so much like the barbarian territory beyond the *limes* of the Roman Empire, the mysterious Central Asia in which forces might one day collect and coalesce for a descent on the tropic lands of the south, the small frontier forces whose wars with tribesmen (if heard of at all) seemed such amusing anachronisms to the outside world but which protected millions of peaceful peasants, the secret agents who, like the associates of Kipling's Kim, flitted through the mountain lands disguised as traders or lamas, loaded with silver rupees and measuring rods.

The system was described by Lord Curzon, one of those who most revelled in the tasks of its maintenance.

[1] Forty years before the traveller Kinglake had written: 'The Englishman, straining for ever to hold his loved India, will plant a firm foot on the banks of the Nile and sit in the seats of the Faithful.'

'India is like a fortress, with the vast moat of the sea on two of her faces, and with mountains for her walls on the remainder; but beyond these walls, which are sometimes of by no means insuperable height and admit of being easily penetrated, extends a glacis of varying breadth and dimension. We do not want to occupy it, but we also cannot afford to see it occupied by our foes. We are quite content to let it remain in the hands of our allies and friends, but if rivals and unfriendly influences creep up to it and lodge themselves right under our walls, we are compelled to intervene, because a danger would thereby grow up that one day might menace our security. That is the secret of the whole position in Arabia, Persia, Afghanistan, Tibet, and as far eastwards as Siam. He would be a short-sighted commander who merely manned his ramparts in India and did not look beyond.'

The system lasted from early in the last century until to-day, its basic conception fairly constant though its details changed often. Those who operated it had in view for most of the time only one main threat to India's security. This was from Russia, whose rival imperialism from the beginning of the nineteenth century caused a stir and rumble throughout Central Asia. Indian policy tended to be an elaborate counter-manœuvre, though periods of complacency alternated with periods of rueful panic. Thus there was a concentration on the land defences to the north, and a forgetfulness of possible danger from the east, an error for which the price was paid when Japan appeared as the enemy and in 1941 stormed defences which were ill-considered and inadequate.

[iv]

What had been built was a continental order, a political structure in which South Asia, in a century of unexampled change, dwelt in unexampled security. The handful of British officers who, in the absence of an effective governing class in India, had seized power and had acted as the governing class of South Asia generally, had contrived (with maximum economy) a system which imposed tranquillity over a fifth of the human race. They created an oasis in time, an age of unfamiliar bloodlessness, which may in future be looked back on by Asia as a disordered Europe looked back on the age of the Antonines.

What were the consequences for the peoples living within this 'system'? The Empire was like a high and brittle building which protected from the outside weather a host of people as varied as the races listed in the Biblical empires, whose ancient histories, modern usages,

and picturesque life made this the most fascinating human assemblage of modern times. The architects who had built the structure and maintained its fabric introduced into it all the most up-to-date material installations—the railways, new roads, telegraphs and factories invented by the Industrial Revolution. But beyond this they did not wish to meddle with the lives of those whom it overarched. To try to do so would have been to despair; there were too many of them, their customs were too firmly set. Moreover, since a central peculiarity of the Empire was that it was run on a minimum capital of force, its administrators could afford to raise no sleeping tigers, and were thus at most times conservative by principle. Discipline they insisted on; there was to be no fighting between inmates; some of what appeared to be their grosser indecencies were prohibited; occasionally in a busybody mood the authorities would issue exhortations in a brief and quickly exhausted ambition to modernize. But in general they were content with a reasonable quietness.

Yet in spite of their perhaps inevitable lethargy, changes in the life within the building took place rapidly. In this Empire there was no iron curtain. On the contrary, it was like a crystal palace (like which it appeared in some lights marvellous, in others shoddy), and through the glass walls the inhabitants could see what was going on in the outside world. In through the turnstiles passed a stream of visitors bringing the breath of change; and the inhabitants themselves were free to go outside. Glass walls also generated the hot-house atmosphere which so often goes before social revolution. And, however reluctant the administration might be to set afoot social change, it could not avoid a constant reformation and overhaul of the machinery of state to meet the changing day-to-day needs; and each time that it repaired or improvised it brought in a western or modernizing influence. The new material apparatus of society also set in motion change on every side.

Thereby all the life of South Asia was set on end. For the technical apparatus of society and its laws are finally the thing which determines most of the details of the daily life of even the humblest human being. It is not true that, as Dr. Johnson said, laws and kings cause the smallest part of what human hearts endure. The new laws and kings of South Asia, together with the new engines, changed the way men made their living, the nature of their houses, their ambitions, their attitudes and supposed obligations towards one another.

With this change, with the progressive classes taking over the ambitions and the outward manners of Englishmen, there grew up the demand for self-government. This Great Britain step by step during

the present century conceded, making in the process the experiment of building in oriental countries political institutions which were a replica of Westminster; and with the process completed in India, the centre of the Empire, the constructive role of Great Britain in Asia is ended, or transformed, and the responsibility for the maintenance or dissolution of the Empire passes to its heirs, the national parties.

[v]

One parallel to the British Asiatic Empire, both in its manner of conquest and in its effects, is so striking that it is strange that the British were never more conscious of it. Alexander the Great conquered Persia and the eastern world from a base which, compared with that, might have appeared as puny as island Britain compared with Asia. The instrument which he used was an army not merely of his countrymen, but drawn partly from the peoples whose governments he assailed. His Empire was not a Greek Empire, but an Asiatic one organized by a handful of Greeks and transformed by Greek ideas: so the British Asiatic Empire was an Asiatic one organized by a corps of British administrators and transformed by European ideas. In retrospect it seems that the role of the Alexandrian Empire was to be the means through which Greek ideas pervaded the Orient: politically it divided soon into succession states which fell one by one to other powers: its cultural role outlasted its political role: but even the effects of this were in the end exhausted. Point by point the British history in Asia either has followed or may follow the same course.

British officials in India enjoyed thinking of themselves as imitation Roman proconsuls. How much more entertaining a place British India might have been if, following perhaps the truer bent of the English mind, and seeing more rightly their true place in history, they had thought of themselves as descendants of the livelier, more humane and adroiter Greeks of the dynasties of Seleucus and Ptolemy.

British action in Asia extended to the Far East, to China and Japan. But with the exception of Hong Kong, Far Eastern territory was not included in the Empire. This book deals with that part of Asia which fell properly within the Empire. In this region, South Asia, British power was spread over a large variety of peoples. But three or four main communities were outstanding. Each had had a long history; each had clear characteristics; each moulded in the most intricate detail the lives of those who belonged to it. They were the Indian society (which

was itself divided into many subordinate communities), the Burmese society, the Malay society, and Cingalese society. The history of the individual subject of the Empire is the history of what happened to these societies under its sway.

What then was the state of these different societies before the coming of the British? What has happened to them during the British period and as a result of British influence?

CHAPTER TWO

TRADITIONAL INDIA: THE MIND

[i]

Many people who have lived in India for any length of time find they become its slave. If they leave it for ever, they return shortly. What seems inexplicable chance brings them back. Yet how are its qualities to be explained?

It is a poor land, harsh and for the most part ugly. Its arts, however splendid in the past, to-day are degenerate. Gawky palm trees, villages awry and crumbling, thin cows, children with swollen bellies, men and women with matchstick legs, sombreness, fatigue, dank heat, old matting and battered corrugated iron, the disappearance of the spring and freshness of life, the glint of tawdry ornaments amid squalor, everything insubstantial, disordered and crazy—these are the impressions of the traveller. The cities sprawl over huge areas, yet even so their inhabitants are congested; the wealthier houses are usually gimcrack, the poorer like cowsheds, the tanks full of slime.[1]

Thus India at first appears; but it has a latent power to shed its rags and by fits and starts to dazzle as the most impressive pageant of the world. (So in Indian cities at a festival the repellent slum of the daytime becomes at night transformed by thousands of lamps into a world of romance.) This quality of India has given it its hold on man's

[1] The first Moghul Emperor of India, who lived at the start of the sixteenth century, wrote as follows of the land which he had conquered. 'Hindustan is a country of few charms. Its people have no good looks; of social intercourse, paying and receiving visits, there is none; of manners, none; in handicraft and work there is no form or symmetry, method or quality; there are no good horses, no good dogs, no grapes, musk-melons or first-rate fruits, no ice or cold weather, no good bread or cooked food in the bazaars, no hot baths, no colleges, no candles, torches or candlesticks. . . . Pleasant things of Hindustan are that it is a large country and has much gold.'

imagination, and the study of what India has done and what it is to be should perhaps begin with what the imaginative writers say of the Indian panorama and the flavour of the land. Out of the thousand pictures which might be chosen, here are two selected at random, the interest of which is that they are by writers divided by two thousand years from one another, and that they both deal with the sensuous attraction of the country. The first is from one of the most ancient poems of South India whose date is uncertain but which probably comes from very early in the Christian era:

'Do you not feel here the south wind blowing from Madura? It is mingled with the divinely fragrant, thin, soft mixture, made up of the black akil paste, the odorous kunkumum flower, civet, the excellent sandal paste, and paste made from the musk of the deer. On its way it rests for a while in the newly opened flower-buds of the pollen-laden water-lily. It then mixes with the smoke rising from kitchens, the smoke of the broad bazaar where numbers of cooks fry cakes in pans, the fragrant fumes rising from the terraces where live men and women, the smoke of sacrificial offerings and various other sweet fumes. . . . Do you hear the thundering sound of the morning drum, beaten with great eclat in the temple of Siva and other gods, and in the palace of the far-famed kings; do you also hear the chanting according to the established rules by Brahmanas who know the four Vedas, and the speech of penance performers engaged in instruction?'

The second is by Constance Sitwell, an Englishwoman still living, and describes the landscape of an Indian state:

'We climbed the tower of yellowish clay and looked down from the roof over the country lying still in the faint rosiness of the sunset light. All along the roads were high hedges of loose pink roses. The dense blue-green of the crops ended abruptly where the water supply stopped. Long wavering lines of camels trooped towards the town, looking just the same colour as the sand they were treading on; a bevy of women swathed like bundles in their robes of weathered pink and red, rode in on slow-moving oxen. It was beautiful—I knew it was beautiful; but oh, the harshness of it! In my faint-hearted mood I saw everywhere signs of struggle and fight; no blades would grow here without water laboured for under the blazing sun; no sheep or goat could live here without the fear of wolf or jackal; no traveller was safe from robbers, no woman from men; no one could even ride at his ease because of the rents and chasms in the sun-baked ground. . . .

'From the Armoury we went along shaded passages where scribes

sat copying from ochre-coloured books. Their lined faces were bent downwards; they never looked up at us; their slender fingers went on with their fine writing. We came out into a court that was filled with the sound of music, and, looking up, we saw a little group of musicians sitting on a balcony singing in the sun. They made a bright jumble of blue turbans and coats pale green and rose; the sunshine glittered on their silver bracelets and toe-rings and ear-rings. They accompanied themselves on long lutes and little drums, and vaguely, continuously, their singing rose and fell. In the court there was perpetual movement. Men came from dark doors and gateways leading horses with high pointed saddles and bright bows tied round their legs.'

It may, however, be that, more even than its sensuous attraction, what gives India its power over the imagination is the fact that it is a kind of compendium of the world. Nearly all human experience, secular, religious and philosophical, may be found there. Thus it excites a veneration, as for a being who has known all the range of enjoyment and suffering, and who has preserved his memory and all his faculties:

> '*I, Tiresias, have foresuffered all*
> *I who have sat by Thebes below the wall*
> *And walked among the lowest of the dead.*'

[ii]

Religion has for centuries haunted the Indian mind to the detriment of more worldly pursuits.

By contemporary Indians this is sometimes denied, since in the secular atmosphere of the modern world they believe that to indulge an exaggerated religious interest is to be weak or old-fashioned; and certainly India has had a stormy complicated secular history. But in the eyes of the world the cultivation of religion and philosophy has been India's principal achievement. They have been the national art just as the development of political institutions has been that of England. A curious sidelight is that there are said to be more words for philosophical and religious thought in Sanskrit than in Greek, Latin and German combined.

True change in India—change which indeed is perhaps now taking place—would be the ending of this bias of the national outlook. If that happens India will enter a new period: whether this is for better

or worse people will decide for themselves according to their temperament. It is not that in the past the country had a static system of belief; the variety and change of religious ideas are indeed a main part of Indian history; the different religions have competed for supremacy, but there was continuity in that the national outlook was preoccupied with religion, whatever form this might take.

The Indian religious temperament developed three or four thousand years ago, or perhaps earlier, among a privileged and priestly caste. A tradition, established then, widened out and survived the many invasions and upheavals which the country afterwards experienced. Each of the sections into which the people of India are now divided, whether Hindus or Moslem, Sikh or Christian, Brahmin, merchant or warrior, whether speaking Urdu, Hindi or Tamil, reflects in some way a common Indian mind, and the more sophisticated the members of each community, the more they resemble each other. Many Indians would deny this, and indeed the differences between them are sharp and obvious; yet to the foreigner all have certain characteristics which stamp them as Indians.

The 'Indian mind' is different from and more comprehensive than Hinduism. But the Hindu mind was first in the field historically. It is the ancestral mind of all the later minds which India has evolved. To begin a study of the Indian temperament with an investigation of Hindu ideas is to recognize the relationship, and not to say that the related things are identical with one another.

The principal quality of Hindu religion at its highest level is mysticism. It teaches that the individual mind, or a special high part of the mind, is either identical with, or capable of being united with, a pervading spirit of the universe, and that this spirit is either God or ultimate reality. A favourite analogy is that as torches lit from a single fire are so many individual flames, yet each part of the original flame, so are all souls and indeed all being a part of a general being of the universe. Such a view is of course by no means peculiar to Hinduism. St. Paul describes men as being 'of the race of God', and Hindu mysticism is very similar in practice to that of Chinese and Christians. Where Hinduism differed from other religions was that mysticism was a chief interest.

The implications of mystical experience, the means by which the union of the soul and God could be achieved, or the identity of the soul and God could be recognized, these became the preoccupation of Hindu philosophy. The preoccupation was comparable with that of the western mind during the past three centuries with the nature of objective matter and motion. In earliest times the union was

usually sought through spells, rites and austerities; later there were evolved a number of mental or spiritual disciplines.[1]

Hindu mystics have been generally of two types. One believes that the soul, while desiring union with Nature and with God, exists distinct from these; the other believes that the distinction between mind and what lies outside is a hallucination, and that to become aware of this is to gain peace and enlightenment. The mystic of the first kind sees God objectively in each created thing; the mystic of the second kind is an introvert drawing a sense of power as his intellect unravels the twists of the deluding world. But the final experience of the perfected mystic of each type is probably the same: self seems to dissolve and he is 'swallowed by the Divine Darkness'.[2]

The state of mind of the enlightened who have attained the mystical union is described as follows in the principal Hindu scripture:

'The learned look with indifference alike upon a wise and courteous Brahmin, a cow, an elephant, a dog or an outcast man.... One indifferent to foe and to friend, indifferent in honour and in dishonour, in heat and in cold, in joy and in pain, free of attachment, who holds in equal account blame and praise, silent, content with whatsoever befall, homeless, firm of judgement, possessed of devotion; he who rejoices not, hates not, grieves not, desires not; he to whom pain and pleasure are alike, who renounces all undertakings, who abides in himself, to whom clods, stones or gold are alike; he whose mind is undismayed in pain, and who is freed from longings for pleasure.' Thus the soul is emancipated from the suffering and helplessness of mortal beings.

The Hindu gods themselves exist in this condition. It has been said that the whole genius of India lives in the picture of Siva, covered with ashes and with masses of neglected hair piled on the top of his head, indifferent to the world, bent only on thought.

[1] Lofty systems of thought often have their origin in incongruous material circumstances, and it may not be fantastic to see Hindu mysticism as resulting distantly from a crude practice of the most ancient Hindu priests. This was to induce an ecstasy by drinking a juice called soma; what it was made from nobody seems to know certainly; but under its influence the priests enjoyed the sensation of being possessed by a god. From this, as rational speculation grew, it would be a natural step to speculate on the possibility of union of the self with all being.

[2] Teachers of mystical discipline in India are to-day divided between two methods. One is to attain the mystical experience by a meditation whose essence is to make the mind a blank, absolutely passive, and therefore receptive. The other is to dissociate the god-like part of the mind, the spirit, from the mental and perishable part by systematically regarding every manifestation of this part as separate from the self.

These beliefs affected the entire arrangement of Hindu life. Philosophers differed among themselves about how the religious life was best cultivated. But the usual view was that a man might reach a state of mystical perfection by any of three roads, by intellectual meditation, by emotional worship of God, or by the discharge of worldly duties provided this was done because of obligation and without regard to the aggrandisement of the self. Some held that all three roads must be travelled. The ideal Hindu life is divided into four stages—the first, of education, the second, life in the world, the third, meditation, the fourth renunciation of all worldly life. A life planned on this scheme might seem as sensible as that proposed by any other civilization and to promise an experience as varied. Certainly the Hindu way of life can still produce to-day men who are singularly and almost uncannily impressive. Of course they are rare; but although through history few Hindus have actually lived in the way laid down the wonder is that at all periods some have made the attempt to do so.

How difficult it was to succeed in the mystical life, whatever the technique adopted, is shown by the experience of Buddha who lived in the sixth century B.C. Though apparently he tried all the approved methods of mystical discipline, none of them brought him the satisfaction which he sought, and in seeking for it he evolved his new religion which has been described as a kind of protestant and iconoclastic Hinduism.

Besides these mystical beliefs and practices, Hinduism, like all other major systems of religion, had a metaphysic. This combined subtlety with extraordinary imagination, and its development was aided by two facts. The first was that Sanskrit, the classical language, was both very flexible and yet precise, making an ideal vehicle for speculation. The second was that Hinduism, unlike Christianity or Islam, does not attach great importance to any single historic fact, as these do to the Crucifixion or the mission of the Prophet; its beliefs derive not from any single dogmatic revelation, but are generalizations from observable religious experience extending over many centuries and perhaps beginning in a period very much remoter than the earliest known period in history. Because of this speculative, almost scientific attitude to religion, differences of opinion on many points are not deplored; Hinduism had no obsession with proselytizing; and orthodoxy was more concerned with preserving a traditional social order than in securing uniformity of belief.

The Hindu system is difficult to describe because the basic concepts on which it rests are either unfamiliar to the West or, still more perplexing, are similar to the ordinary western ones but convey for the

Hindu a rather different meaning. It has, however, been interpreted to the West many times in the past century though the details are often controversial. In broad outline the picture is of a community of an infinite number of souls, each soul being incarnated countless times until it achieves union with God; each undergoing adventures in every life which may either advance or distract it in its search for fusion with deity; each enjoying or suffering in every life the consequences of action in previous existences; meeting perhaps again and again in successive lives other souls with which it became associated, whether in friendship, love or enmity;[1] being aided, if it is fortunate, by encounter with the more experienced souls, the Mahatmas, which defer for this purpose their own absorption in divinity. All the material world is the stage or properties for the spiritual drama, and the mishaps of history need not be taken too tragically since even by the miseries they cause they may further souls upon their way to redemption.[2]

One curious feature must be noticed. Partly because their system excluded a paternal deity, rewarding and punishing, the philosophers produced an account of the natural world which can be reconciled with surprising ease with modern science. It is true that Hinduism has thousands of gods, but the Hindu philosopher regarded them as no more real than did the scientists of ancient Greece their own nymphs and fauns; to him the chief gods of Hinduism were symbols of the laws which regulated the universe. Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Sustainer and Siva the Destroyer represented the processes of coming-into-being, existence, and passing-away of which nature consists. Shown dancing on humanity, Siva, the 'Time that devours all things', says, 'I am not of a compassionate heart, nor is forgiveness congenial to my nature'. Such indeed is time and change. The universe as a flux in which law operates: the law as never changed: impersonal forces instead of gods: these are the concepts alike of Hindu philosophers and modern scientists.

Western philosophers can make many objections to Hindu reasoning. But Hindu concepts have often seemed to possess a power of exciting men's minds so that they feel they are commercing with ideas more highly charged than in their ordinary speculation. Moreover

[1] There is some doubt whether earthly love is an aid or hindrance to true spiritual advance.

[2] There is nothing quietist about Hinduism in its traditional form. Mr. Gandhi's pacifism stands to traditional Hinduism as Quakerism to Christianity. It has been remarked that the principal Hindu scripture was supposed to be delivered in a war chariot on the actual battlefield on the eve of slaughter. No other great scripture has such a dramatic setting.

some of the new concepts of western science now supplanting the old—supplanting them because experimental inquiry has disproved the old—are not very much unlike some of those which the Hindus invented two or three thousand years ago.

There is another characteristic of Hinduism which is not exactly of doctrine but which has given the religion a special stamp and colour. This is the cult of simplicity. If all the sophisticated religions of the world have denounced riches and cares as harmful to the soul, in India the practice of simple life has been carried, at least among Hindus, to exceptional lengths. This is true in spite of the luxury and debauchery of some classes. To sit on mats, to eat from plantain leaves, to be cumbered with the minimum of furniture, to economize effort, is the true Hindu tradition, and, uncomfortable and at times absurd as it appears to the western visitor, is a kind of humanism, since it prevents man's environment from engulfing him. Perhaps in no other country has mere wealth been respected so little as in India, however avid some Hindus may have been to acquire it.

[iii]

This is certainly a very arbitrary and very much simplified statement of a complicated set of beliefs, and moreover it assumes a uniformity about them which perhaps does not exist. Hinduism has no set of dogmas whose orthodoxy is declared by a church—for it has no organized church—nor is there a canon of its scriptures. Hinduism is the system of ideas evolved in Hindu society and has been added to century by century. It includes several schools of thought, and the account given above is only of their common elements.

Certain interpretations of Hinduism which are popular in the West are questioned by Indians, or held to be exaggerations of Hindu doctrine; and one of the best ways of understanding Hinduism is to take some of these conventional western judgments and to notice the reply which would be made by contemporary Hindu scholars. A subtle visitor to India in this century, the late Mr. Lowes Dickinson, complained of Hinduism that it was non-humanistic. The Hindu, he said, is not, like the Westerner, concerned with the whole of man, his physical life, his moral life, emotional life, and his history and destiny, but with one particular part of man, his mind. 'Man', said Lowes Dickinson, 'in the Indian vision is a plaything and slave of natural forces; and only by claiming to be mind does he gain freedom and deliverance.' The westerner feels in Hinduism a kind of exalted inhumanity.

Another fairly common interpretation is that the Hindu thinker regards the world which exists in time as illusion—'Maya' is the term used—and believes that the only reality is a world beyond time, which can be apprehended only by a system of meditation. Plunged into this, the philosophical Hindu is supposed to lose interest in the world and to regard effort at its improvement as distraction from the more serious business of contemplation. This attitude, it is said, explains one of the peculiarities of Indian culture, the fact that there have been few Indian historians. 'How can you write the history of a nightmare?' said Lowes Dickinson, 'You won't do that. You try to wake up.'

A third view often expressed is that Hinduism leaves ethics out of account. If everything, even evil things, are part of God, evil as ordinarily understood can hardly exist. Indifference to ethics would follow naturally from a belief that all the external world is illusion, for in a world of shadows, moral obligation itself would be shadowy. One of the stoutest nationalists of the century, Tilak, the predecessor of Mr. Gandhi, seems to have asserted quite sincerely at the end of his life that he regarded politics as a kind of athletic sport and that they had nothing to do with morals as conceived by the West. Like some peculiar Christian sects and like many Russian mystics, some Hindu teachers argue that even the worst man can know God : some even that a kind of ritual sinning is a part of the way to perfection.

These are all current interpretations of parts of Hindu doctrine. While there is some truth in them, most Hindus would claim they were mistaken. The question of the reality or non-reality of the world is one on which Hindus themselves are much divided, but most would say that the world had at least a provisional reality. They might say too that even if the world is unreal, salvation is found by *acting* as if it was real, while *thinking* it to be illusion. They would deny that they favour inaction, and, as for ethics, they might say : 'Is not our principal holy book, the Bhagavad Gita concerned chiefly with morals and in a manner like that in the philosophical texts in the West, and is not its conclusion that by following the moral law a man comes ultimately to the vision of God?' And as for the alleged non-humanism, they could point to the tradition that a man must have lived a full life in the world before he can satisfactorily renounce the world.

[iv]

Such were the ideas handed down from generation to generation by Hindus, such the cast of mind which they encouraged. To be sure,

only a small minority in each generation lived at a high intellectual or religious level. But an atmosphere had been created. A Scotch lawyer who once startled the Church Assembly at Edinburgh by saying that he had sucked in the being and attributes of God with his mother's milk would in India have seemed to be expressing an everyday concept.[1] The main difference between the traditional Indian and the modern western outlook is that in the West mysticism is respected but regarded as an eccentricity since it is thought that man's chief effort should be concentrated on the improvement of the present life, while in India the mystical life was regarded as the highest of which man was capable.

Everybody knew, even if vaguely, what was the discipline of the rishi or the yogi. It was an accepted ideal for a man to end his days in meditation. The most trivial acts of life became ritual; and religious taboos constantly hedged round the ordinary spontaneous relation of man and man. At the back of most men's beliefs was the conviction that the world they saw about them was the reflection of an unseen reality, like Plato's shadows on the wall; and the religious man, if vigilant, was thought able to detect in the events of daily life the intrusion of something happening beyond. Everything in the world was said to be literally part of God or a manifestation of God. 'All things are threaded upon Me as gems upon a string', says the god Krishna in the most revered of the scriptures. Literature never, and art only partially, emancipated themselves from religion, and the appetite of even those engaged in the most worldly pursuits has seemed insatiable for stories of saints and gods. For centuries the air has been heavy with devotional songs and the clangour of temple bells. The religious mendicant, and the practiser of austerities for the love of God, enjoyed respect and the certainty of support. Brahmins, the descendants of the ancient priests, enjoyed a peculiar reverence, even though few of them performed any actual priestly function, and though their pretensions were often resented. In no other country were nature, and the processes of nature, so much venerated and so openly worshipped. Everybody had an ear for the strange story touching on the uncanny in any form. Everybody believed that there were latent

[1] There was a rather similar theological atmosphere at one stage in the history of Byzantium. St. Gregory Nazianzen has described how, if you went into a shop in Constantinople to buy a loaf, the baker, instead of telling you the price, would argue that the Father is greater than the Son. The moneylender would talk about the Begotten and the Unbegotten, instead of giving you your money, and if you wanted a bath, the bath-keeper assured you that the Son surely proceeded from nothing.
See CHRISTOPHER DAWSON, *The Making of Modern Europe.*

powers in men which if released by a more or less secret technique enabled them to levitate, to read other people's minds, to bewitch men and animals, to foretell the future, to change their temperatures, to increase or lessen their size, to cure diseases, to hear distant sounds, to enter into the bodies of others, to check or reverse currents of water, to control hunger, thirst and sleep, to separate lovers, to stop all actions of others, to cause enemies to flee the country: even in extreme cases to gratify every desire the moment it rises, and to have as their servants the great Hindu gods. A wizard could reduce a buffalo to the size of a pea, induce his enemy to swallow this and then cause the buffalo to resume its true size, the enemy disintegrating. The land was drenched in holiness, here a holy river, there a shrine which had for ages been a centre of pilgrimage. Whole species of animals such as the monkey or peacock were regarded as sacrosanct. The Babylonian tradition of astrology flourished more strongly than in any other country. Spells, charms, amulets, the evil eye, the sinister practices of black magic, were the tale of every day. There was the sense of fate and doom. There was the certainty of reincarnation. Misfortunes in this life were accepted as being due to wickedness in previous lives: thus there may have been less pity at individual miseries than in other countries.

In a country in which religious life was so luxuriant, religion could never be wholly dissociated from primitive and, to a western mind, rather shocking rites and usages. Indeed at many periods these have been made into a cult by the most sophisticated classes.

This was the civilization which over many centuries was built by the diverse peoples who were yet united in regarding themselves as Hindu. It clung to the country. Thus when invaders came who were not, like their predecessors, absorbed by the Hindus but retained their own alien culture, these also fell slowly under its power. The Moslems, for example, whose theology and principles in their original form are the opposite pole to those of the Hindus, especially in their central belief in a single and personal God, in their regard for human equality and in their strenuous extraversion, evolved nevertheless at one time in India a civilization which was a blend of Hinduism and Islam. It is true that a section of the Moslem community has always kept with complete purity the original Arab traditions of Islam; but others exposed themselves to the influences of the country, and without becoming Hindu, became Indian. They evolved, or at least developed, the Moslem mystical system called Sufism, which almost certainly borrowed many of its methods from Hindu Yoga; they accepted, too, the old Hindu idea that asceticism gives power,

and some, like the Hindus, regarded God as immanent in the world, not transcendent. A Moslem saint expressed the central truth of the Indian tradition :

'There is nothing but water at the holy bathing places, and I know they are useless, for I have bathed there.

'The images of all are lifeless ; they cannot speak : I know for I have cried aloud to them.

'The Puranas and the Koran are mere words ; lift up the curtain, I have seen.'

[v]

A country which has for so long kept its mind on other-worldly things may well fascinate the western visitor. But India has paid a price for the rather one-sided development of its national life. Its mundane history, with its early achievement in politics, art and letters never quite equalled by what came afterwards, stands in odd contrast to its spiritual excellencies. This is not to say that Indian civilization remained static. Indeed it has changed constantly with a vigour of production with which any but the greatest country might be satisfied. But the earlier promise was not fulfilled. Indian civilization, after a brilliant start, seems to have had a long, slow running-down. Even in religion, there have been few original ideas in the last thousand years ; energy has been spent in worship rather than in thought. This is not merely the unfriendly judgment of an alien. Jawarharlal Nehru, in whom the country to-day sees the national fire burn brightest, speaks in his recent book of the progressive deterioration through the centuries, and compares Indian life to a sluggish stream moving slowly through the accumulations of dead centuries. India, he says, was seized by a kind of coma.

For this slow banking of the national fires, may not the unworldly orientation of the Indian mind be at least partly responsible? The mind has been too rigidly directed in a certain way, and both its fixed interest in certain matters and its obstinate lack of interest in others stood in the way of new creation. May there not be a truth, however impressionist and one-sided, in the following curious observations of Hegel?

'India has always been the land of imaginative aspiration, and appears to us still as a Fairy region, an enchanted World. India is the region of phantasy and sensibility. . . . There is a beauty of a peculiar kind in women, in which their countenance presents a transparency of skin, a light and lovely roseate hue, which is unlike the

complexion of mere health and vital vigour—a more refined bloom, breathed, as it were, by the soul within—and in which the features, the light of the eye, the position of the mouth, appear soft, yielding and relaxed. This almost unearthly beauty is perceived in women in those days which immediately succeed childbirth. . . . Such a beauty we find also in its loveliest form in the Indian world; a beauty of enervation in which all that is rough, rigid and contradictory is dissolved, and we have only the soul in a state of emotion—a soul, however, in which the death of a free, self-reliant spirit is perceptible.'

For the decline of the creative vigour of a people, for a national sickness, it is, however, hardly enough to say merely that its national mind lost its force. The spirit of a country, and the mundane political institutions in which it is contained, these act constantly upon one another. What were the political institutions of India during this long decline?

CHAPTER THREE

TRADITIONAL INDIA: THE STATE

[i]

As the pattern of Indian thought was fixed early, and remained more or less stable, so did the political life follow a fixed pattern. In its long history, India passed through periods of catastrophe, at least one of which was as devastating as the Dark Ages in Europe, but in certain broad features the political life changed little.

Though Indian society was elaborately organized, the organization was for purposes which were not primarily political. Caste, a semi-religious institution, was the chief fact of Hindu social life. The effect of caste has been to divide society into a multitude of groups each living its separate life. If the castes formed a hierarchy, it was not the kind of hierarchy which resulted in political cohesion. On the contrary, from remote times caste split rather than united society. Hence to the cultural unity of India there corresponded no unity political or social. In the terminology fashionable to-day, India was a plural society. It was several distinct communities, not one.

Caste has been much misunderstood. Basically a caste is a group of families whose members can marry with each other and can eat in each other's company without believing themselves polluted. To eat with or marry a person of a lower caste is to be polluted. While a caste, especially an upper caste, is sometimes spread over a wide area, more often it belongs to a particular locality; sometimes, but by no means always, members of a caste tend to follow some particular occupation. The standard division of all Hindus into four main castes—priests or Brahmins, warriors, merchants, and cultivators—results from the attempt by past Hindu thinkers to make a rational scheme of Hindu society, and does not correspond to reality; each of

these so-called main castes is really a category of castes in which hundreds of castes find their place.

What was the origin of this system, so complex, so unnecessary, has still not been fully and satisfactorily explained. Rudiments of caste exist in other countries but nowhere is it so set as in India, nowhere else is there such fear of defilement by contact with lower castes.

Though caste is a Hindu institution, it infected the life of all the non-Hindu parts of India, so that, as other religions grew up besides Hinduism, the people of these, breathing the air of caste, organized their own communities as exclusive societies. This happened the more easily because religion in the East is not only a set of beliefs held intellectually, but generally the entire body of customs which a people observes.[1]

In recent centuries, Islam has been the most powerful of these rival religions. Islam was never strong enough to convert Indians *en masse*, except in certain parts of the country; on the other hand it has not been weak enough to be strangled or absorbed by Hinduism. Thus Hindus and Moslems formed something like separate nations, suspicious, antagonistic, even though, as stated in the last chapter, all of them had in common certain peculiarly Indian habits of thought, and though there was always much exchange of custom, and at many periods fraternization and borrowing of one another's saints. The Moslem did not feel himself his Hindu brother's keeper. Emphatically, Indians were not all members one of another. They had no common purpose.

And not only caste and religion divided Indian society. Geography, its sway over a people more persistent than that of any custom or religion, divided the huge country into several distinct regions, each of which had little to do with the others. Language, since Babel the principal author of discords, also divided: India has twelve main languages, and over two hundred dialects. Another cause of division was the invasions which India had suffered, especially in the North. Each resulted in a stratum of one-time conquerors who felt themselves separate from the rest of the country, even though sometimes the reason for their isolation had vanished from their minds.

In a country so organized, or rather so fragmented, the lack of

[1] I have met a Moslem in Bombay who declined to eat melons because he could not discover a scriptural guidance whether they should be scooped out or cut in two; and I was told in Persia of converts to Christianity who were bewildered because they could not discover whether Christ permitted or frowned on the custom of whistling.

political institutions proper—institutions binding the people together in a common political unity—is hardly surprising. As Dr. Johnson would have said, Indians were not 'clubable men'. They have not organized themselves as citizens. The moral obligation of which a man was conscious was to advance the interests of his family: his duties were to that: they were not to the state. Politically, India has been the most individualist of all countries.

Where there was a multitude of groups, conscious of their separateness from one another, there could scarcely be the conception of a majestic law of the land holding all citizens together in a common obedience. Where men were so divided from each other that they did not easily meet together and sympathize, the ordinary man could hardly be expected to feel a passion for social justice, a sense of human equality, a moral responsibility for all other men in the country. Beyond the limits of the village, there was no such code of public morals as is found in close-knit societies; and there could in general be no political public opinion. There was none of the criss-cross of groups such as in western countries have existed to promote various objects for the community considered as a whole. The towns, though often magnificent, never produced a bourgeoisie with a will for power over the entire community. There was no feudal system providing a social bond.[1] There were no guilds with ambitions beyond the protection of their own interests. So strong was the antipathy to political organization that the Hindu religion itself was never embodied in a hierarchical church, for a church is, or at least resembles, a political institution. Buddhism, the offshoot of Hinduism, had its ecclesiastical councils, but these in time withered.

One exception needs perhaps to be made in recording this politically unorganized state of Indian society. This is of the village councils or panchayats. In nearly all old agricultural societies, villages have developed a system of self-government by the village elders. In India over much of the country this was perhaps more thorough and more systematic than elsewhere. When the British administration was set up it was found that in parts of North India the rural society consisted virtually of a federation of village republics ruled by the panchayats, served by hereditary village officers and hereditary police, and lightly presided over by the monarchical government, and so, apparently, it had been for centuries. Inscriptions show that panchayats existed in the south also. Yet the extent to which the panchayat system pre-

[1] Some writers have detected a feudal system in the part of India called Rajputana. But for the curious nature of this society, and its merely pseudo-feudalism, see the writings of Sardar K. M. Panikkar.

vailed can be exaggerated. Over very considerable areas no trace at all can be found that it ever existed. Certainly the panchayats demonstrated that the Indian people did not in propitious circumstances lack the capacity to organize themselves locally for public affairs such as justice, police, and the building of tanks, roads, bridges and forts; but on this foundation rose no superstructure of national government. Nor was this surprising because large agrarian Empires have never been fertile ground for representative institutions.

These were the underlying facts of the social organization which for more than two thousand years remained surprisingly constant throughout the stormy rise and fall of states and dynasties.

[ii]

These facts of India's social organization governed most of its political history.

They stood in the way of unification. It is true that there have been great empires, covering much but never the whole of the country. But the organization of such structures was of a loose and feudal kind. Empires rose, endured for a period of two or three centuries, then crashed, and were dispersed. For most of recorded history, India has been divided between competing small states.

Because of the loose organization of society, monarchy was for these states the only practicable form of government. There could be no conception of a government organized by, and resting on the consent of, the general body of citizens.[1] And the sole important task of the monarch was to repress violence.

Sometimes he succeeded; Indian history is full of kings venerated for their stern justice; but often the king himself was the worst offender in lawlessness, and his subjects groaned. 'The ploughers ploughed upon their backs, and made long furrows.' Only the inefficiency of government prevented its heaviness from being greater than it was. Moreover, since it was unstable, it could give no guarantee of lasting peace—and when it fell, there was nothing to take its place.[2]

Beyond repressing disorder and doing justice, government attempted little. Legislation as conceived to-day, the constant changing of social relations according to a policy, was not a concern of the

[1] Certain popular theories of government may have been evolved by the early Buddhists. But they had small influence on India's history.

[2] It may be argued that the heavy hand of government was itself the cause of the failure of society to organize its own self-governing institutions. But society was fatally hampered by the caste system.

Indian kings. Their function was to maintain the traditional customs of society. They were strong against the individual subject, but weak to build anything out of society; with the British who succeeded them the case was to be the reverse. Nobody expected that by means of political action life could be made better. The belief was that history moved in cycles, not in a progress towards a better world; a curious result was that in Indian literature there are no Utopias.

Government was expensive, raising the maximum revenue. The relatively poor peasant society supported a multitude of courts whose dazzling display was that for which, next to religion, India became celebrated in the rest of the world.

One of the legacies of the old system has been fear. Because the monarchical government was often weak, or broke down, violence was always round the corner; and the strong preyed on the weak. At least in recent centuries, men have lived on tenterhooks; until the opposite was proved, they suspected that a stranger was an enemy. They lived entrenched. They took no chances. Fear, which thus is in the marrow of the Indian bones, is the origin of the quality which has struck so many observers of the country, the difficulty people find in co-operating, and their mistrust of each other.

In these shortcomings of the political and social institutions at least as much as in the peculiar Indian mind lay the reason for the drying up through the centuries of the Indian national energy.[1]

[iii]

A more concrete account of the traditional Indian government may perhaps be interesting.

The small states into which the famous Moghul Empire broke up in the eighteenth century, and which the East India Company annexed or rendered tributary one by one, are typical of those which had succeeded one another in endless process for hundreds of years. The eighteenth century, though a time of trouble, is wrongly regarded as a time of exceptional decadence in India. That there was a political and moral decline is true : but India had known many such periods and artistically it was an age of considerable achievement. As has

[1] The attempt is sometimes made to explain the unsatisfactory political life of India as the result of its unworldly outlook. It is argued that if a man exists in a sort of theological trance, then the events of this life seem unimportant. He does not stand up for his rights. But, though there may be something in this theory, it is hardly the key to Indian history. Other countries also have suffered despotism without the accompaniment of Hindu metaphysics.

been pointed out by one of the best critics of to-day, Italy in the late Renaissance, France in the reign of Louis XVI—ages of high civilization but with a background of impending revolution—are the true parallels. Palaces which, if no longer as magnificent as in the previous century, were still grandiose romantic fantasies; the cult of an ideal world of dream and ecstasy; a lyrical school of painting; music, dance, a world of fountains, night, trees, and singing birds; the development of Urdu literature; an ascetic mysticism which was the final result of a satiated cult of beauty and sensation—these the courts of eighteenth-century India fostered, even if their statesmen and soldiers, often over refined, were becoming less competent to hold in check the natural turbulence of the country, finding indeed the work of government distasteful and fit only for barbarian soldiers and clerks, and relying ever more on intrigue to prevent disaster rather than on force or reform.[1]

Some of the states were described in detail by the English diplomatic representatives of the time; and their accounts show what was Indian society in the last days before the engine of western influence was turned upon it. It happened that one which received special attention, the powerful State of Indore, enjoyed and suffered within two generations one of the best and one of the worst types of Indian sovereign. Thus it exhibits conveniently the good and bad in the Indian political tradition.

Indore was under a Maratha dynasty. The Marathas were a Hindu agricultural people of central India who, by the leadership of captains of genius, built an empire on the ruins of the Moghul State; from them, indeed, rather than from the Moghuls, the British conquered the paramount position in India. The Maratha Empire was at first united, but, as all tends to fall apart in India, it soon became a confederacy of a number of separate states, and of these Indore was one of the chief.

For thirty years, at the end of the eighteenth century, the State was governed by a woman, Alahi Bhye, the first of the two rulers referred to above. She had taken over authority when her son, the reigning prince, died while still young and without an heir. The death of this young man was itself curious. A humorous prince who had amused himself by placing scorpions in the clothes and slippers given to Brahmins, and venomous snakes in the pots of rupees given to them, he killed an embroiderer whom he believed the lover of

[1] Dr. Goetz, the critic mentioned, cites as examples of eighteenth-century architecture the palaces at Jaipur, Lucknow, and Dig, and certain buildings at Jodhpur.

one of his concubines. Soon afterwards he went mad, and it was accepted that he was possessed by the spirit of the embroiderer; and though his mother offered to build a temple for the ghost, all efforts to pacify it were in vain. A voice coming from the prince's mouth was heard to say, 'He slew me and I will have his life.' The threat was soon fulfilled.

Alahi Bhye thereupon took over the government, crushing opposition by the aid of a general named Tukoji. Her relation with this soldier, from then on commander-in-chief of her armies, showed how even in the lawless India of her day force was not the only instrument of government. While he remained the source of her power, and carried on the external relations of the State, she was the undisputed chief internally. In the world of jungle politics which followed the fall of the Moghul Empire, she demonstrated, like a last brilliance of the sun at its setting, all the traditional virtues of the Hindu sovereign. Ascetic, pious, capable, she gave her people the contentment and peace which, had it been universal throughout India, would have rendered the British conquest impossible, or at least have stamped it as infamous. She conducted herself rather like a female St. Louis. Her piety was her strength. Rising every day an hour before dawn she spent the morning at her prayers, in performing ceremonies, distributing alms, and feeding Brahmins. Her surplus revenues were spent on building temples at the remotest holy places in India. Within the State men were stationed on the highways to offer water to travellers or even to ploughing oxen; and other officers were sent to feed the birds which farmers had driven from their fields.

Surrounded by the aura of her piety, her State became a sort of holy ground, safe from attack. The British Resident, Sir John Malcolm, who described her reign, quotes a Brahmin who said of her: 'Whether Alahi Bhye, by spending double the money on an army that she did in charity and good works, could have possessed her country for above thirty years in a state of profound peace, while she rendered her subjects happy and herself adored, may well be questioned. No person doubts the sincerity of her piety; but if she had merely possessed worldly wisdom, she could have devised no means so admirably calculated to effect the object. I was in one of the principal offices at Poona during the last years of her administration, and know well what feelings were excited by the mere mention of her name. Among the princes of her own nation, it would have been looked upon as sacrilege to become her enemy.'

In her administration of the State she was conservative, humane, frugal, and left the regulation of local affairs chiefly to the panchayats

and the hereditary local officers. Old rights were respected, the State took no more than its recognized due. Subordinate officials, if they had proved their worth, were continued in their positions for long periods, an exception to the practice of other Indian governments at the time when office, being saleable, changed hands so quickly that no proper administration was possible. She declared herself answerable to God for every excessive use of power by her officers, and though in most things orthodoxy itself, abandoned purdah and held each day open durbar to receive petitions, one of the oldest and best traditions of Indian kingship. She reduced capital punishment to a minimum.

She was a plain, almost ugly, woman, and this was a comfort to her rivals. Malcolm wrote :

'A rival Maratha queen sent a servant to see her, who reported : "Alahi Bhye has not beautiful features, but a heavenly light is on her countenance." "But she is not handsome, you say," was the reply of her mistress, who was thus consoled.'

Such was Hindu kingship at its best.

[iv]

'We now proceed', wrote Malcolm, after describing her death, 'to notice those destroyers who came to ruin the fair prospects which her government had opened to the inhabitants of her dominions.' The prodigy among these was Jaswant Rao, the illegitimate son of Alahi Bhye's loyal general, Tukoji.

If Alahi Bhye resembled St. Louis, Jaswant Rao was like Richard III or the Italian princes of the Renaissance. Power was his aim, he had great obstacles to overcome in gaining it but his energies were huge, his ruthlessness and personal magnetism no less peculiar. This combination of circumstances could not but produce convulsions. On the deaths of Alahi Bhye and Tukoji he and three brothers competed for the succession : neighbouring Maratha princes intervened from outside : two of the brothers perished, one became a puppet Maharajah in the hands of the Maharajah of Gwalior, and Jaswant Rao was outlawed. Hunted through the jungle, he escaped capture. For a time he had even to beg clothes. At length, followers began to join him. He paid a visit to his old tutor who gave him a chestnut mare which became almost a legendary figure and later, by his order, an object of worship as the origin of his good fortune. By drawing to him a horde of the masterless soldiers who abounded in India at this time, but above all by the fire and force of his personality, he was

able, if not to recover, and take over ordered government in his principality, at least for six or seven years to plunder it. About this time he lost an eye : one-eyed men in India are notoriously evil. 'I was before bad enough', he said, 'but I shall now be the high priest of rogues.' Shortly afterwards he poisoned his nephew; and all expression of disapproval was repressed from dread.

His last years were spent in war with the British, with whom the Maratha states had come into conflict. He believed that the chance of Maratha victory lay in reviving the earlier custom of the Marathas of living as a guerrilla horde.

'He commenced casting cannon', wrote Malcolm, 'and attempting changes and improvements in his army, with an ardour and violence which decidedly indicated insanity, the crisis of which it no doubt accelerated. It was at first observed that his memory failed, and that he became every day more impatient and outrageous in his temper.' Like Peter the Great he laboured at his foundries and furnaces, and cast two hundred pieces of brass ordnance in four months; like Peter also he was a great drinker, and the liquor shops of Bombay were drained by his demand for cherry and raspberry brandy. He superintended every detail of the reorganization of his army, was out at daylight drilling troops, measured recruits with his own hands, and anticipated the recent war by using live ammunition in training.

His inner fire in the end burned him out. He realized his failing powers. 'What I say one moment, I forget the next,' he said. 'Give me physic.' He ordered the death penalty so often that his ministers began to ignore his commands. One night all his harem fled, and he was found raving mad and trying to hide in a bundle of clothes. Twenty or thirty men were needed to bind him. His madness was generally put down to his having plundered a famous Hindu temple. For one year he continued violent; then fell into a childish condition during which he became perfectly docile, was fed with milk, and looked after by one female attendant. After two years he died.

This prince was well educated, understood Persian, wrote Marathi with great correctness, and was a quick and able accountant. His qualities as a leader were courtesy, wit, power of flattery, inflexible courage, generosity, and above all high spirits. To those who served him he was loyal, but he preferred as favourites the worst men. In pursuing his object of power he was quite merciless. Both in character and in the circumstances in which he found himself he was like Cæsar Borgia; as Cæsar Borgia was supposed to have the ambition of uniting Italy, so Jaswant Rao the ambition of restoring the unity of the Marathas.

While he survived, no ordinary administration was possible either in his own State or in the bordering ones which he attacked. Government was dissolved into guerrilla armies: the people became their prey. His officers assessed their victims by the feel of their skin : the softer it was, the more they were condemned to pay. In the long history of India Jaswant Rao is, it is true, an insignificant figure, but he is a type which has recurred constantly, vigorous, gifted, deadly to his people. The epitaph on the tomb of a greater conqueror might in his lesser sphere have suited Jaswant Rao. 'If I was alive again, the world would be sorry.'[1]

[1] On the tomb of Timur.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE BRITISH IN INDIA

[i]

The British, on becoming supreme in India, found a country unlike Europe of their time but resembling in many respects the Europe of the Middle Ages, though only a few understood this. The absence of a sense of nationalism, which had made the British conquest possible; the disposition of the Indian to think of himself as belonging to a caste or a religious community rather than to a country or nation; the numerous petty states, some in their organization like the feudal kingdoms of medieval Europe, others like the petty tyrannies of Italy at the Renaissance; the profusion of chieftains, each with his following bound to him chiefly by the personal tie; religion pressing into every corner of life, as did the Catholic Church; the veneration of holy men and of enthusiastic religious practices—the parallels with medieval Europe are as striking as they are extensive.

The question with which the British administrators were therefore faced was whether they should set themselves the arduous and discouraging task of modernizing and reforming this medieval land, imposing on it a modern government, or should, as was in some ways easier, leave its ancient institutions intact and govern through them, acting as the sustainers and revivers of the traditional Empire of India. Ideally the British rule of India should have resulted in a marriage of what was of such great value in Indian civilization, its philosophical and mystical tradition, to a more up-to-date and humane political system by which the philosophical life might have been stimulated afresh. How far was this in fact achieved?

[ii]

British action varied at different times. There were always conflicting trends of policy and conflicting views among civil servants.

But it is possible to divide British rule into three periods, in each of which a certain attitude prevailed.

For the first fifty years of the British Raj—after the early excesses of the period of conquest had been ended and British rule became respectable—British officers remembered how solid and awe-inspiring had seemed the Moghul Empire which they succeeded, and to what extent their own coming to supremacy had been due to juggling, chicanery and to luck. Therefore they regarded their position as precarious and their Empire as probably a very temporary one. Some of the chief architects of the administration of the Raj were among the chief to take these rather pessimistic views; Sir Thomas Munro, an eminent soldier and Governor of Madras, is an example. They were disposed to raise no unnecessary enemies by going against the ancient ways of the country. Also, since in this period the British Raj produced more notable scholar administrators than any other Empire in history, many of the new officials, properly free from any sense of racial superiority, dealt with India with a certain tender respect as with one of the centres of world civilization. Having discovered a new world different from Europe, a still living world with a life like that of the ancient Empires described by Herodotus, they desired often to preserve it as in a museum. If at times they were shocked by the customs they found, as by suttee, they were ready to chronicle these with a scientific interest rather than with contempt.

This mood changed as the nineteenth century advanced and the first age of British rule turned slowly into a second. One cause was that the British had become flushed by the recent material and mechanical advances in England. Another cause was the fashionable Utilitarian philosophy. Utilitarianism demanded from governments that they were to wipe away superstition, and turn all nations into societies of thrifty freemen, with a scientific spirit, each man hunting his own advancement and happiness in the assurance that the happiness of all was thereby best achieved. The utilitarian ideas were trained on India first by James Mill, an official of the London establishment of the East India Company, and Macaulay, Law Member of the Governor-General's Executive Council in the 'eighteen-thirties. Their altruistic zeal for reform quenched natural sympathy. James Mill, for example, wrote a history of India which, almost forgotten to-day, moulded and darkened the Victorian ideas on the country. It is full of contempt for almost every feature of Indian civilization, both Hindu and Moslem. It assumed that if India were to be improved all that was good must come from outside, nothing or very little being salvaged from the Indian foundation. Its sentiments were expressed

with a vigour which, when it is read to-day, makes it hard to believe that the book was taken seriously, 'No people', wrote Mill, 'how rude or ignorant so ever, who have been so far advanced as to leave us memorials of their thoughts in writing, have ever drawn a more gross and disgusting picture of the universe than what is presented in the writings of the Hindus.' Yet this book became a kind of manual for the British in India, and indeed especially for those who considered themselves as the most humane and advanced. Wishing to serve India, they gave the impression that they were willing to touch it in its present state only with a pair of tongs.

Even more unsympathetic to India than the secular philanthropists was another of the groups which at that time had great influence on opinion and policy, the Christian missionaries. If the British had conquered India in the early seventeenth century when English religious interest was at its height they would almost certainly have tried to convert their subjects to Christianity as the Portuguese did in Goa and the Spaniards in America; and almost certainly their empire would have come early to grief. By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the Christian zeal was more mixed with worldly prudence. Indeed at the end of the eighteenth century the East India Company had succeeded in excluding Christian missionaries from its territories, since at that time, when conservative views prevailed, the Company feared more the danger from Indians if invited to renounce their gods than the wrath from heaven if the Company was lukewarm in proselytizing. But as the godly spirit grew in nineteenth-century England it caused the home government to reverse the decision of the Company, and partly but never wholly subdued the caution of the administration in India. The Protestant evangelists, who thereupon began to appear in considerable but not embarrassing numbers, were apt to think that the Hindu gods were real devils, and that the Indians had become a subject people as a penalty for their wickedness.

> '*Thou hast rebuked the heathen, thou has destroyed the wicked,*
> *Thou hast put out their name for ever and ever.*'

The proposal by Lord Shaftesbury at this time that an Indian should be appointed an official astronomer in order that by contemplating the stars his mind should be turned towards the true God might surely be regarded as the supreme example in history of teaching one's grandmother to suck eggs. Dr. Spear in his book, *The Nabobs in India*, has given examples of other extravagances.

The belief in the inferiority of India, which thus became accepted by the administration in this second period, resulted in an enthusiasm

for the country's total reform, a task which might have appalled any generation less optimistic than the mid-Victorians and with more understanding of anthropology. Its spirit was best expressed by the Governor-General, Lord Dalhousie who, though a man of action and not a philosopher, proved the sword arm of the theoreticians. But this second period was ended by the great Indian Mutiny of 1857, blamed on the over-impetuosity of the reformers which had stirred Indian feeling to an angry retort.

The third period, which lasted until quite recent times, was again conservative. Zeal for innovation was checked, and Indian institutions, while still not regarded with any respect by the great majority of the British officers, were recognized as having teeth and a power of self-defence which in the previous time had not been suspected. To assail them too openly was to cause too much danger. From this followed a mixture of toleration and contempt. The British had lost any clear conception of what they wanted to change India into, and as time went on confined themselves in general to maintaining day-to-day administration. This was the least profitable period of British rule and, because many archaic institutions were buttressed, the most injurious to the Indian national spirit. To this period belong few of the great Viceroys, and very few of the notable administrators or the scholarly officers who had given so much credit to the earlier periods of British rule.

[iii]

In spite of this conservatism which dominated both the first and third periods of British rule, great changes in fact took place in India, often unforeseen and unintended by the Government, but due to its actions.

'It is by its indirect and for the most part unintended influence', wrote Sir Henry Maine, the author of *Ancient Law*, 'that the British power metamorphoses and dissolves the ideas and social forms underneath it, nor is there any expedient by which it can escape the duty of rebuilding upon its own principles that which it unwillingly destroys.... We do not destroy in mere arrogance. We rather change because we cannot help it. Whatever be the nature and value of that bundle of influences which we call Progress, nothing can be more certain than that, when a society is once touched by it, it spreads like a contagion.'[1]

[1] Maine was one of the successors of Macaulay as Law Member of the Government of India. His time in India was the seventh decade of the century.

The action of the British was chiefly upon the two-thirds of the country which they administered directly. But even in the remaining third, where Princes were left as the government but under British influence through the Residents, the changes which took place in British India repeated themselves, though more slowly and less radically. Princely India has been always a kind of muffled echo of British India. The larger states became copies of British Indian provinces, though often, it is true, they were camouflaged to appear such rather than were in fact reformed; and the minor states, in which every antique vice of power survived, though in number a multitude, made up only a small part of the whole of princely territory.

British action divides into two compartments, destruction and creation. In one of its guises, British influence, though this was never for long intended, was one of the principal disintegrating forces which have ever been turned upon an old society. It hammered and pulverized, transforming the ancient body of custom and public opinion which in the last analysis is what causes men to act as they do as members of society. It broke many of the old links between man and man, and left men as so many separate atoms, and the problem ever since has been to bind them up again into society by new principles.

[iv]

The destruction of the old is glimpsed in the reminiscences and travel books of the nineteenth century. In the part of the country which the British governed directly, the princely dynasties were removed. Some of the former rulers survived as country landlords, and some lived on in the cities as more or less indigent pensioners, a spectacle which the philosophical visitor to India was usually anxious to see. Here is *The Times*' correspondent in 1858 on the greatest of this class, the Moghul Emperor, descendant of Timur and Jenghiz Khan, but at this time after the Mutiny a prisoner in Delhi Fort. He was a poet whose merit did not depend on flattery for its detection. Because of this and of his misfortune he has been compared to Henry V's captive, the Duke of Orleans.

'In a dingy passage there sat crouched on his haunches a diminutive attenuated old man, dressed in an ordinary and rather dirty muslin tunic, his feet bare, his head covered by a thin cambric skull cap. The moment of our visit was not propitious, certainly it was not calculated to invest the descendant of Timur with any factitious in-

terest, or to throw a halo of romance round the infirm creature who was the symbol of extinguished empire. In fact, the ex-King was sick; with bent body he seemed nearly prostrate over a brass basin into which he was retching violently. . . . The qualms of the King at last abated. He broke silence. Alas! It was to inform us that he had been very sick and that he had retched so violently that he had filled twelve basins. This statement could not, I think, have been strictly true, and probably was in the matter of numeration tinctured by the spirit of oriental exaggeration, aided by the politic imagination of His Majesty. . . . I tried in vain to let my imagination find out Timur in him. But as he sat before us, I was only reminded of the poorest form of the Israelitish type as exhibited in decay and penurious greed in its poorest haunts among us. His hands and feet were delicate and fine, his garments scanty and foul—— His youngest begum said of him: "Why, the old fool goes on as if he was a king; he's no king now. I want to go away from him. He is a troublesome, nasty, cross old fellow, and I'm quite tired of him." But the ex-Emperor merely asked one of his attendants for a piece of coffee-cake or chocolate, put a small piece in his mouth, mumbled it, smiled, and, pointing with his thumbs over his shoulder in the direction from which the shrill accents of queenly wrath were coming, said, "Allah, listen to her." '

With the princes disappeared the classes which had grown round and were dependent on the courts, the bearers of much of Indian culture and tradition. Indeed, in parts of the country the sweeping away of the upper strata was so complete that it could almost be compared with that in Russia after the Bolshevik Revolution; though there are still to-day great landlords, most of the present landowning class are new men, the larger part of the former landed class having for one reason or another been during the course of the century dispossessed. Sons of potentates became clerks or even beggars. The troops of military adventurers, singers, artists, craftsmen, pimps, vanished; and therewith the tradition, flavour, sights, colours and decorum of Indian civilization changed. The arts collapsed and Indians either forgot or despised their heritage. In dress the old gaudy appearance of British India turned to a uniform dull white and grey, which still contrasts soberly with the brightness of the Indian States.[1]

[1] India in the first period under British rule might well be described by the following passage by Burke, which in fact describes France after the revolution. 'Every person in the country, in a situation to be actuated by a principle of honour, is disgraced and degraded, and can entertain no sensation of life, except in a modified and humiliated indignation. But this generation will pass away. The next generation of the nobility will resemble the money-jobbers and usurers who will be always their fellows,

Steep as was the fall of the privileged classes, it was not perhaps more calamitous than had taken place in the past when successive invaders had overrun different parts of the country. In the Moslem States a hereditary aristocracy had hardly existed, and each new generation was new men. But the Moslems, accepting the tradition of the country, had always recreated the court life, and an age died only to be born again : under the British, dead India was to stay dead.

Even in the villages there was upheaval. Former invasions had left the peasant life more or less unchanged from what it was in most ancient times, but the British regime affected the very roots of national life. The new government, its vigorous hands reaching everywhere, touched and destroyed, though inadvertently and with the best intentions, the age-old institution which had been the centre of rural government. This was the panchayat, the informal village council at which everybody knew everybody else, truth was open, and public opinion decided the common action and disciplined the local undesirables. The panchayats had existed, it is true, only in certain parts of India : successive invasions and wars seem to have killed them elsewhere. Where they had survived, the British government is seen at the beginning of the nineteenth century making up its mind whether to govern the rural areas as its predecessors had done, through the hierarchy of petty officers—village headmen, accountants, constables, and so on, officers of the village rather than of government, defending its customs, and carrying out the will of the panchayat—or to substitute for them a new corps of petty bureaucrats, appointees of its own. It decided on the latter course; and in a little while the old hierarchy melted away; the panchayats, their work transferred to government officers and judges, ceased to meet. Thus the worst feature of Indian social life, the lack of natural cohesion and of social action by the people themselves, was aggravated.

The first results were an increase in crime and disastrous delays and miscarriages of justice. Relations between government and people became a kind of blind man's bluff, government striking out as if blindfold and causing the most surprising consequences. An English judge, looking back on what had been done, remarked that to an Indian there might have seemed no particular reason in importing

sometimes their master. Those who attempt to level never equalize. They load the edifice of society by setting up in the air what the solidity of the structure requires to be on the ground.' This says in other words what is a common allegation about British rule in India, namely, that it transferred power from the kshattriya or warrior to the bania or moneylender.

foreigners at vast expense to confer on the country the benefits of anarchy.[1]

Thus, whatever part of nineteenth-century India is looked at, the view is of a dying world. Not only government action but the rather violent play of new and almost uncontrolled economic forces blew and scattered the old world apart. The new markets, technique, communications, and rapidly changing prices, turned traditional India upside down.

Of course, not all the old institutions perished, and even to-day more of what was archaic in Indian society has survived than has vanished. These survivals are indeed the bar to India functioning as a normal modern State. They are the clue to its eccentricities which perplex the observer; the nuisance which they cause will remind the observer that the destructive power of the British was on the whole beneficent. Chief among these ancient remnants is the caste system, with its baleful effect in dividing society into fragments. Sometimes it is said that because of the influence of modern life, the caste system is breaking down, and certainly some of the old taboos are weakening, but, as one of the wisest observers of contemporary India has said, caste has become entangled in politics and for this reason Hindus are apt to be more conscious of their caste than ever before. Other survivals from the past are the discord between Hindus and Moslems, the linguistic divisions, the joint family, and the various religious beliefs which stand in the way of human equality and energetic action. Their elimination, which may not be possible without grave commotions, will perhaps be the main theme of Indian history later in the century. Less invidious ancient customs also continued, such as the cult of asceticism, the belief in the value of even a glimpse

[1] The decision to supersede the panchayat administration by a more bureaucratic rural administration was not taken without controversy. For example, Sir Thomas Munro, a Governor of Madras, denounced its effect in a document which is still the best analysis of early British rule in rural India. But he protested in vain. The government, believing the country to be in a desperate way after years of civil war, felt it necessary to meet what seemed to be the most pressing needs—that is, to raise revenue and repress violence. It knew at this time little about the custom of the country, and made regulations for the Indian peasant as if he were an English farmer. The headmen were henceforward its local agents even if, as often happened, they were drawn from the families in whom the office had been hereditary. Mrs. Besant is said to have remarked shrewdly that 'the words *paid by Government* mark the gulf between the English and Indian village systems'. The villages still remember their panchayats. Recently, in a village near Delhi, the elders, on being asked what used to be discussed in the panchayats, replied: 'Skirmishes with the Moghuls.'

of a holy man, pilgrimage, and ritual bathing. Yet even in the social and religious life there was either change or the anxious conservatism which showed that change was in the air.[1]

[v]

British rule had also a creative side. This affected the country no less deeply than did the destruction which had taken place. Because they destroyed so much, the British had to rebuild. Even where the British officers intended to be conservative and tried to reassemble the old scattered machinery of the State and to make it function again, it fell to pieces as they tinkered. The very repair was often new construction, and the value of what was built is not to be underrated.

Until recently, it would have been said generally that the most obvious gift by the British to India had been a political unity much securer than in the past. The bane of Indian society, noticed in the last chapter, had been its tendency to fall apart, and divisions have had on the whole a deplorable consequence on its civilization. India too, like China, has found difficulty in holding itself together because of its very size; no Empire before the British, not even the Moghul, had unified the entire country even formally, let alone administered it effectively. But a long period of actual British rule through the length and breadth of the land had seemed at one time to have established in the Indian public mind the axiom that India was henceforth to remain united; unhappily, more recent events have shown that this axiom is no longer universally accepted.

A more enduring achievement may have been the construction of a modern machinery of government. The old link between man and man had been fear or personal loyalty; the new link was by means of institutions. In general the builders of the new administration, because they were nineteenth-century Englishmen with nineteenth-century ideas, produced by instinct remedies and institutions which, broadly speaking, were liberal, and only modified them as far as

[1] Behind the feverish modern front, the ancient India is even to-day very much alive. In the countryside the tempo of life is slow: men are interested in each others' souls: they go on pilgrimages: they discuss religion under the shade of the ubiquitous clumps of trees which are the distinguishing mark of the Indian countryside: they respect Sadhus more than politicians. The Himalayas still fascinate the national imagination, and frail old men undertake the most fantastic religious journeys, without money and clad only in a blanket. Temples and mosques are still being built: contrast this with China where nobody builds new temples, though Christian converts build churches.

seemed necessary for security in an oriental State. Hence what has appeared the paradox of imperialist rulers busily setting up institutions which were different from those which an authoritarian government might have been expected to foster, and which indeed could only end by subverting such a government.

Chronologically the state building activity of the British falls into two parts. The first, which dates from the earlier period of British government, was the establishment of the rule of law. Government by law has been the peculiar mark of English political practice and influence. As Dicey remarked, the singularity of England has been not so much the goodness or the leniency as the legality of its system of government. The rule of law, which signifies several different things, is taken here to mean that government binds itself to act according to rule; that it does not take arbitrary action against its citizens; that no man is punishable except for a distinct breach of law; and that law, not persons, is supreme, the task of the functionary being merely to administer the codes.

It would be folly to pretend that British government never used the methods of self-preservation traditional in the Orient; some of the provisions of law gave the government a power of high-handed action which would never have been tolerated in England except in time of war; at the lower levels of justice, judiciary and executive were not strictly separated. Nevertheless, because of the legal system, the subject in India was in fact guaranteed, to a far greater extent than was known before in Asia, against arbitrary proceedings by the executive. He enjoyed within wide limits freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and freedom from fear of arbitrary arrest. To this extent British rule promoted individual liberty, even if it did not at first accord the liberty of self-government.

The rule of law operated by means of the law codes and the courts. Here also the British made great innovations. Law in the East had meant as a rule a traditional custom, not easily altered, but under the British it became a rational system which was understood to be changeable to meet changing needs. Though in the law of marriage and succession the British conserved the old system—even perhaps interpreting it more rigidly than in the past—in the civil and criminal law they wrote new codes copied from western systems and with little regard to Indian traditions. These proved very strong engines for change. Law, which is the frame of a civilization, discourages certain institutions, encourages others. Thus the new law gave a new turn to Indian life, as for example by the type of economic life which it fostered. Maine remarked indeed that there was bitter complaint that

life in India had become intolerable since the new criminal law had begun to treat women and children as if they were men.

A modern judiciary was organized. The law courts set up by the British have been much criticized, their chicanery, the opportunity which they have given to defeat substantial justice by technical adroitness, their impotence to check perjury, their remoteness from the people, their cost and their delays, their exaltation of a not very desirable legal caste, their absurd consequence that it has become a mark of social distinction to institute law suits. 'Woe unto you, ye lawyers. For ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers.' Certainly, the peasantry, the largest class in India, seems to have been better served by the panchayats (where these existed) of pre-British times.[1] Yet in condemning the excesses of a rigid system and in compassion for a people over whom law has become a tyranny, let not the picture be forgotten of an earlier India where the royal officer or the grandee used without remonstrance whatever power he could muster against the unfortunate private citizen. As early as the seventeenth century the French traveller in India, Bernier, commenting on the absence of lawyers and law-suits in the India of Aurengzeb and on the supposed paradise which a European might suppose this to show, urged the critic to look at the other side of the picture—justice sold by the kazis to the rich, the poor man the victim without redress of whoever was powerful. In England itself there have always been complaints against lawyers such as are heard in India to-day—the Elizabethan playwrights, Webster and Tourneur, were especially angry—but history on balance has approved their contribution.

Besides the reforms of the law, the other achievement by the British, their second major set of creations in India, was the import, admittedly at a rather late stage of their rule, of the representative assembly, an institution hitherto unknown there, and indeed unknown elsewhere in Asia. Treating India in the same way that they had treated the Anglo-Saxon parts of the Empire, though with misgivings and more tardily, the British from the late nineteenth century onwards set up representative assemblies for every unit of government; there were boards for the districts (whose population was usually between half a million and one million) municipalities for the cities, legislatures for the provinces, and a central legislature for the whole country. If at first the assemblies were consultative, it was

[1] Burke once wrote: 'People crushed by law have no hopes but from power. If laws are their enemies, they will be enemies to law.'

recognized that in time there would be the demand that government should become responsible to them.

To serve these parliaments there came into existence the political parties. These, copied from the West, were a thing quite new in India, and indeed in Oriental life. But from early in the twentieth century, party was to dominate Indian politics, and was in the end to eclipse, as the centre of political power, the bureaucracy under whose aegis the parliaments had come into being. With party was born also the popular politician, who made his way by speech and debate, a being unknown in the time of Akbar or Asoka, or of Alahi Bhye and Jaswant Rao. The most active minds of the country discovered for the first time in India's history the fascination of politics as an occupation, and there began the obsession with them which the visitor to the country has ever since found so tedious.

Such were the changes in the apparatus of the State. Two innovations in the cultural life were no less important. One was the widespread use of the English language; the other the setting up of anglicized schools and universities. Of these the second had perhaps deeper consequences than the first.

The decision to make the English language the medium of higher education, taken under the influence of Macaulay, had, it is true, momentous results. But it was not for the reason usually supposed. The general view is that English, by uniting into a common class the educated classes from different parts of India whose vernaculars were unintelligible to each other, and by opening to them the modern ideas of the West, stimulated the rise of nationalism. That it made its growth easier, and accelerated it, cannot be denied. Yet nationalism would have developed in any event as the result of contact with the outside world. If English had not been the lingua franca, Urdu or a new form of Hindustani would have served, at least in the north, as they had done in the past. In time the Indian languages could have been modernized, as is happening to-day, to be a vehicle for the most up-to-date scientific teaching. The main importance, indeed, of the use of English by the educated class was different and was to detach them curiously from the psychic life of their own country. Since their thinking in matters of public affairs, modern commerce, and science was done in English, while their thinking on domestic matters was in the vernacular, the effect on the mind could not but be friction and instability. But as long as India remains a polyglot country, and a lingua franca is therefore essential, some part of the people will always be doomed to these disadvantages of bilingual life.

The change in the content of thinking came about not from the

language but from the schools. Soon the sons of orthodox Hindu pandits, and a little later the sons of Moslem mullahs and Nawabs, were following the same curriculum as boys of the same generation in England. The sister of an early Victorian Governor-General has a rather surrealist picture of a visit to one of the new schools.

'They asked the boys to give an account of the first Syracusan war, of the Greek schools and their founders, when the Septennial Bill was passed, what Pope thought of Dryden, what school of philosophy Trajan belonged to—in short dodged them about in this way—and they gave the most detailed and correct answers.'

Unhappily the universities became philistine and their prime function was to cram prospective clerks and civil servants with factual information. Nevertheless their larger and more liberal performance should not be underrated. Through them were planted in the minds of young Indians, at least in that part of their minds which engaged in public affairs, all the prejudices, axioms, and ideas of Victorian radicalism, and they became honorary Europeans. To-day most Indians are unaware how many of their fundamental ideas such as those of individualism, humanitarianism, and nationalism are borrowed and are not part of their own tradition. And indeed the British official responsibility for them was often slight, the British part being to hold open the Indian mouth, the progressive ideas from England and the rest of the world then flowing in; such a complacency by an authoritarian government to liberal influences was no less remarkable than was the insensitiveness which allowed India's own history and tradition to be neglected in the schools.

The education in the universities was spread widely. It was literary, not mechanical. The traditional prejudice against practical manual work was not overcome. Hence two consequences which were later to be weighty. On the one hand India, when it desired to modernize itself, was without an upper class with a mechanical turn of mind, skilled hands, and an instinct for undertaking great engineering works; on the other hand it possessed a class of literati much in excess of what it could suitably employ, and these were a potential army for any opposition to the government.

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With the framework of life transformed by these institutions and these ideas, Indian society began the changes which are still continuing and which have created so many problems of the present time. The new technical apparatus of life altered the material environment;

railways increased the volume and velocity of circulation of the public; printing increased the volume of what it read; fashion changed, and western commodities and ways of life were imitated. The reflecting public absorbed western science, the artists tried to synthesize western painting and sculpture with their own tradition. Great cities formed the real centres of the new civilization and were the magnets of the enterprising spirits from the villages; in them the ancient customs weighed a little less heavily; they were full of strange new buildings, the local version of European architecture.

Peace fostered trade, and the new law and European example caused a private enterprise such as would have been unthinkable under the regimes of the past and the growth of commercial and banking institutions of the same pattern as in the West. Though at one time the policy of the government had scarcely favoured industrialization, factories began to appear first here, then there, until in the third decade of the twentieth century, India became one of the leading industrial powers of the world. Trade unions struggled feebly to life.

New classes arose. The appearance of a middle class was especially momentous. This was recruited chiefly from sections of the community which formally had played a rather subordinate part in Indian life—in trade or in minor administration—but which, with the setting aside by the British of the military castes and the traditional leaders, came to the front. It established itself in the new-style commerce and professions. Some of the members of this class were almost grotesquely anglicized. One of the earliest glimpses of them is of a Prime Minister of a State at the end of the eighteenth century. 'Though a very learned shastri,' wrote a British envoy, 'he affects to be quite an Englishman, walks fast, talks fast, interrupts and contradicts, and calls the Peshwa and his ministers "old fools" or "damn rascals!" ' The middle class acted as the main channel for the westernization of India. It was bound together and taught to act as a unit by the Press, whose establishment early in the nineteenth century was the real foundation of modern Indian politics. Among this class there developed a moral sense of civic duty, though this went side by side with the traditional instinct that a man's first duty was to his family, and in a conflict between the two duties the traditional obligation would prevail over the new and sophisticated one.

A social welfare movement developed on the same lines as in the West, and through private endeavour India became covered with widows' homes, girls' schools, asylums for the blind (to be in which was often perhaps a worse fate for the inmates than to be left to

fend for themselves). There was agitation for improving the position of widows, abolishing purdah, raising the marriage age, forbidding polygamy, abolishing caste.

Yet this, it must not be forgotten, happened against a rural background in which pain, darkness, short life, labour and the pathos of puny effort against nature, were still the prime characteristics. Change affected chiefly the classes near the surface of Indian society; at the deep-sea levels the opaque colours of the past were little altered.

Such was the hotch-potch of actions, inhibitions and influences which determined the fate of India under the British. It was the play of a mildly liberal tendency of government and of the liberal forces of the time upon an oriental despotism. The receipt was to take the Moghul structure of administration—to use those parts which were convenient or made for security—to make them function according to the hitherto unknown principle of the rule of law—to build on this, as a way of modernizing the country, what were regarded as the essential institutions of modern civilization, law courts, representative assemblies, a civil service, universities. The result was a palimpsest: the lower text was authoritarian, the upper was liberal. Or as Burke said at the trial of Warren Hastings, government was, or should be, upon British principles but not by British forms.

Thereby the British might well have hoped to blend what was best in the western and Indian traditions. The peculiar achievement of India had been to evolve a society in which the contemplative life was the most revered; the peculiar strength of the British lies where India itself is weakest, in the flair for building political institutions. But, alas, the ancient mind of India, instead of deriving, as was once expected, new vitality from the new political institutions, began to wilt and disintegrate.

CHAPTER FIVE

MALAISE

[i]

In spite of the domestic and foreign peace, so unfamiliar in India that it almost tingled in the ears, the people of the country, and especially the upper classes who alone at this stage influenced the course of politics, were in the judgment of nearly all visitors anything but happy. Material wants did not cause their misery but a disease of the spirit, and though it was intensified by, it was different from, the national pessimism which for two thousand years has sat like a cloud on the Indian mind.

It was not a unique disease; in other countries the same symptoms have shown themselves; but it is ironical that the closest parallel to the malady in India, in which a comparatively liberal though foreign system of government functioned, occurred in a country which is regarded now as a symbol of obscurantism, Russia of the Tsars. If this appears strange in British eyes, it is partly because in the legends which have grown up round the Russian revolution, the better qualities of the Tsarist monarchy have been forgotten. Certainly in some respects the circumstances of Russia in that period and India under the British are surprisingly close.

The cause of the malady in both countries was, broadly speaking, that an ancient social order was changed, and changed to a great extent by the action of government, but the reforming impulse of government petered out half-way, leaving the new classes sponsored by its activities disappointed and leaderless, and feeling the new world unsatisfactory.

In Russia the Tsardom had at first been the agent of a virtual revolution, or at least radical westernization, no less than were the British utilitarians and missionaries of the reforming period in India. Peter the Great imported western artisans. He started factories. He forced western manners and dress upon his capital. (This is a typical idiosyncrasy of oriental reformers; the Emperor Jehangir had

planned to do the same in Moghul India, as did in our own day Mustapha Kamal in Turkey, and, to their cost, a Shah of Persia and a King of Afghanistan.) Later in the eighteenth century, when it seemed that the superiority of Europe to Russia lay not only in its technical apparatus but also in its culture, the zeal of government changed to the spread of French language and French books.

Up to this stage the government outstripped all but its most eccentric subjects in its rage for modernization; but after the French Revolution the Russian aristocracy outstripped the monarchy. Westernization meant thereafter liberalism and the limitation of the power of the Tsar. The monarchy could scarcely be a champion of these ideals. Nevertheless, even after this change, the Tsardom did not become the dead weight on Russian progress which is sometimes popularly supposed. The freeing of the serfs in the middle of the nineteenth century by the Tsar Alexander II against the opposition of much of his own nobility; the reform under the same monarch of the judiciary in such a way that it became one of the least corrupt and also the humanest in Europe, the death penalty being very rare in the fifty years before the Bolshevik revolution; the government's economic policy, which was at least sufficiently well-conceived not to prevent Russian industry from developing rapidly, showed that the Tsardom had lost neither all its will nor all its beneficence. Finally, in politics, if the Tsars fought and tricked the Russian national parliament, the Duma, the government accepted in local affairs the representative assembly as the proper institution of administration. It set up the zemstvos, a sort of county council with fairly extensive franchise and with very wide powers in local administration; and the fact that these existed throughout almost all settled Russia meant that the concept of a land where popular activity could only be conspiratorial is a myth.

But while the Tsarist government continued thus to put out now and then a reforming measure, the most significant fact had ceased to be that the government was changing Russia, and was instead that the population itself, at least the upper sections of it, were becoming profoundly unhappy. What these classes had gone through—sprung for the most part from the general peasant mass of the population and compelled to live unfamiliarly and too hastily as nineteenth-century Europeans—is shown in the rather feverish nineteenth-century literature of Russia. Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*, published in the middle of the century and analysing for the first time the new, disillusioned and frustrated type of young man, the nihilist, is in some ways the most illuminating document of nineteenth-century Russian

history. The Russian educated classes were the most celebrated neurotics in Europe. Unforeseen and uncontrollable, a *malaise* had come upon society, poisoning all its actions.

The *malaise* caused a schism between the Russian government and people. How a regime keeps a contact with the people, how it loses it —this is one of the mysteries of politics. A government reasonably competent and humane may forfeit almost totally the allegiance of the energetic people in the community, especially if it loses a clear purposive activity and ceases to enlist for itself the hopes of the ardent and aspiring. In its last twenty years the Tsardom became a symbol of constraint and repression. A mediocre Tsar, a series of bad appointments to ministerial office, an unsuccessful war, a creeping sense among those who by nature and interest should have been the supporters of government that all was rotten and ended—these finally destroyed what had seemed the most impressive autocracy of modern history. Its decline from an eminence which awed Europe to complete squalid collapse was as rapid as the fall of Eastern monarchies of antiquity. The classes which overthrew it were those which its own modernizing policies had engendered; so Jupiter, escaping the voracious appetite of Saturn, had set aside his creator.[1]

The intelligentsia were not only against the government, but a

[1] One cause of the *malaise* was that the Tsarist government was a bureaucratic government in its extreme form, always galling to the human spirit. Here is a picture of the Tsarist bureaucracy by the liberal critic, Alexander Herzen, who lived in the middle of the nineteenth century: 'One of the saddest consequences of the revolution effected by Peter the Great is the development of the official class in Russia. These officials are an artificial, ill-educated, and hungry class, incapable of anything except office work, and ignorant of everything except official papers. They form a kind of lay clergy, officiating in the law courts and police offices, and sucking the blood of the nation with thousands of dirty, greedy mouths. . . .In those grimy offices which we walk through as fast as we can, men in shabby coats sit and write; first they write a rough draft and then copy it out on stamped paper—and individuals, families, whole villages are injured, terrified, ruined. The father is banished to a distance, the mother is sent to prison, the son to the Army; it all comes upon them as suddenly as a thunderclap, and in most cases it is undeserved. The object of it all is money. Pay up! . . . Then there are the police and law officers—they must live somehow, and one has a wife to maintain and another a family to educate, and they are all model fathers and husbands.' The Tsarist bureaucracy depended far less on terror than the Soviet Government which succeeded it. Tsarist Russia indeed seethed with discussion and debate. And it is curious that a mild absolutism seems to produce a *malaise* much stronger than a thorough-paced one, perhaps because under a real tyranny which does not shrink from violence the fear which it causes eclipses resentment.

vigorous section, the Slavophiles, whose groans were heard throughout the Continent, denounced all the western civilization which two centuries of Tsardom had thrust on them. They were at once reactionaries and revolutionaries, prophets of doom.

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The visitor to India feels at times that among the upper classes he was surrounded by people who talk and act very much like those of the novels of Tchekov and Dostoievsky. Their history has, in fact, been similar. They, too, were the progeny of a reforming government, for, cautious and vacillating as it was, the early administration in India had been a modernizing force, as we saw in the previous chapter. They, too, had to ape an unfamiliar life, that of nineteenth and twentieth-century Europeans. They, too, found the government, their creator, growing remote from them and suspicious of them; one of the shortcomings of the British administrator in India has been his embarrassed aloofness from the Indian educated classes.

The severity of the strain which had been put on the Indian mind, indeed on the mind of all Asia which had come under western influence, must be appreciated if modern Asiatic history is to be understood. For countless generations Indians, whether Hindu or Moslem, had had before them an interpretation of human life and of nature, incorrect perhaps but intelligible and forming a whole. Life was full of certainties, most of them connected with religion; almost everything in man's existence fell into place. But what had European civilization to offer to the East? A restless curiosity, a method of scientific inquiry, a vast mass of certain new facts about the material universe, new aims of political life—all, indeed of value, but, as it has often been pointed out, the defect of the modern western outlook is that all its many values are separate from one another. There is no longer a comprehensive pattern or picture of the nature of the world and of the nature of man such as is found in other civilizations or existed earlier in Europe. Thus, in receiving the riches of the West, the Indian surrendered what had been the chief fortifying asset of his life, his former clear-cut picture of why the universe existed and what was his role in it. The peculiar Hindu philosophy had not, it is true, been upset by western science, for most of its beliefs were not incompatible with modern scientific teaching; but science, without disproving the Hindu religion, drove it into the background. Life lost its old pattern and the new one was confused and constantly changing.

What galled India also under the new system was a sense of aimless drift. It is the nature of a more or less liberal administration such as had been set up by the British to avoid the paternal control of the minds of its subjects, and thus the new classes were left with their feet unsupported and their hands unheld to find their way in a changing world. In general, people are happiest when they believe that they are performing work under superior direction and approval. But one of the worst features of life in British India was that nobody seemed to be under moral compulsion to follow any particular line, and, except so far as the old Hindu caste ideas persisted, there was no longer any religious or moral sanction behind men's lives. Nothing mattered very much. The incentive to action was self-interest. After a time, this palled.

Moreover, the western habits of mind came to India too often in their baser forms—in vulgarity, in the acceptance of ready-made notions and sentiments, and in violence of opinion. The atmosphere was philistine; and the typical figure of the times was the half-hearted go-getter—go-getter because there was nothing about which to be idealistic; half-hearted because there is something incompatible in the Indian temperament and ruthless enterprise.

Full of qualms, anxious to shine at the new game he was called on to play but mistrusting his skill, the educated Indian was apt, like the pre-revolutionary Russian, to round in peevish despair on the society which had produced him. Modern Indian man had been made by a mighty machine, but its creatures, disliking what they were, slashed at it with whatever hammers they could find. Their self-respect was fatally wounded. Some sought to restore it by reverting to the ancient ideas and institutions, which were painted with a false glory, but in their hearts most knew the folly of doing this, and their deepest feeling was a kind of death-wish.[1]

[1] There is a certain truth in the rather frivolous picture of the traditional type of Hindu given by Mr. Norman Douglas. 'Hindus are not afflicted with the fidgets. . . . They do not imagine, like Europeans, that they are driving a machine because they happen to be tangled up in its works. It does one good to watch them sitting on the grass in merry groups under their apricots and walnuts, laughing and chatting and playing games and nibbling from time to time at a fresh lettuce leaf—local substitute for a glass of beer.' But a heavy change has now come over them, or at least over those caught in the machinery of the modern world. It might be argued that the worst disservice of the British to India was that under their rule the Indian educated class began to suffer the same atrophy or frustration of the emotional life as is alleged for some generations to have afflicted the British.

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This Indian nihilism was aggravated, as in Russia, by the sense of political frustration. It is a healthy instinct among a class which has attained any position in society to desire a political career. If this instinct is frustrated, the class turns sour, and if it is large enough infects with its rampaging sense of injustice all the rest of society. The British gave, under the rule of law, liberty from arbitrary acts of government, but were much slower to give the rather different liberty of controlling the acts of government. Until near the end of the British Raj the government was a bureaucracy, causing the cynicism which such a system always seems to occasion; it used to be described as a despotism of despatch-boxes tempered by the loss of keys. The great majority of Indians never saw the British officials, and for them the government consisted of petty Indian clerks, procrastinating and often corrupt. The visitor to India, meeting the English civil servants, often did not observe what a morass there lay beneath them of chicanery, petty oppression, obstruction and incompetence.

While the British eventually created the parliaments as a stage for the energies and passions of the political parties, they acted too late to prevent the growth of an aggrieved spirit, suspicious, insatiable, inappeasable.

Whether they could, in fact, have conceded power more rapidly without causing a breakdown of government is one of the questions which will be discussed as long as interest in these times continues. But under an authoritarian system, the British, though humane, were forced like traditional Indian governments to use from time to time repressive measures. What other course was open? To capitulate to immature parties whose ability to sustain the weight of government was at least very uncertain. Thus politics developed under the gloomy and poisoning, though intermittent, shadow of the police, censorship and the prison. Jawarharlal Nehru has described in moving words how the main emotion in the land was fear, and if to the impartial onlooker the fear seemed often unfounded and also to be less widespread than under previous Indian governments, the fact of fear was none the less unpleasant. Whatever may have been the reality, Indians believed themselves to be in chains. Whether or not there was in fact an active political police, they believed themselves spied upon.[1] And like the Tsarist government, the British government

[1] In 1943, an Indian police officer, on being told that there were Socialist members of the British Cabinet, replied, 'Ah, but they are watched!'

thwarted liberty just enough to kindle resentment, not enough to kill that resentment by fear.

The Indian discontent was even sharper than the Russian because of the aggravation of being a conquered country. British government, it is true, was by no means oppressive. It has been the thesis of this book that as the home government in Great Britain was unwilling to maintain the British position in India over the long run by force, it was necessary for the British to secure their position by gaining the consent of the governed, and in this they succeeded, on the whole, for a long time. Nevertheless they were aliens; and alien government always harms the spirit of a country. India, which supplies so many examples of political behaviour, supplied an almost perfect instance of the tension of a people feeling themselves under subjection. They could not hold up their heads among the free peoples of the world. They had not their own flags or national symbols which abroad they saw increasingly worshipped. The educated people were like a hedgehog with its bristles permanently extended. From the essays of Macaulay, who was held up to them as a model philosopher and statesman, they learned that the British Empire in India was made by fraud and violence. No foreign government could supply them with a cause for which to sacrifice themselves. They believed, genuinely, that owing to their impotence irreparable harm was being done to their society by the foreign hand, its growth being either distorted or arrested. Not unnaturally they resented the contempt which many British officers showed for Indian institutions and ways of life, especially in the middle and late periods of British rule, even though they may privately through their own westernization, have come to share this contempt. Also they had much to endure in more straightforward insult. Temperamentally, Indians are sensitive and sympathetic and respond to these qualities in other people, and nearly every Indian at some time or other met with some snub or rudeness from an Englishman and, without the opportunity to retaliate, suffered, because of the political situation, a wound which festered. As a consequence, Indians developed an almost unbelievable capacity for detecting insult and intrigue in quarters where none was intended. They did not realize that Englishmen were often quite as rude to one another as to Indians; a century ago the Duke of Wellington remarked that there was not a single good-tempered Englishman in all India.

There was another curious psychological effect. The discouraged young Indian blamed on the British the shortcomings of the national life. Reflecting on how much better he would be if the British were

away he was able to excuse himself all effort for the present. This may seem a travesty, but some Christian missionaries have declared that in this effect of British rule lay the most important argument for its termination. By attracting all criticism to themselves the British robbed India of the power of self-criticism.

It is hard to exaggerate the extent to which most of what has happened in Indian politics in the past two or three decades has been the result of these neuroses. There was the bitter sense that society, constituted as it was, obstructed and frustrated right living. When a feeling of this kind emerges, and anger accumulates behind it, an existing government is doomed, however tough its carapace, however humane its intentions, however brilliant its trappings. It may perhaps therefore be permissible to supplement this account of the nature of the neurosis by a study of how it manifested itself class by class.

[iv]

There is a pathos in the very size of the Indian population now over four hundred million, and in the sense of the stunted lives, limited aims and unworthy hates of so many human beings, victims not only of the present but of a long past. Out of the mass the individual as in all countries tried to elevate himself and live with freedom and dignity; but in India the effort is harder than in most societies, the pressure of adverse circumstances stronger, and the individual is more the victim of convention and compulsion. Consider what in concrete terms has been the life during the past generation or two of some of the principal classes of the community.

The mass of the people, the peasantry, still follows, it is true, a life not very different from that of any time in the past two thousand years; gaining a little in safety, they have lost a little because of the disintegration of village life through the decay of the panchayats, but they have felt probably no greater unhappiness than in the past. Only in the most recent years has the general restlessness begun to stir them, carried by the itinerant agitator, the newspaper, the motor bus which has brought them into the orbit of the towns, and the economic upheaval of the recent war. But to find a peasant who has never heard of great contemporary events or even of Mr. Gandhi is still a favourite sport of the journalist who visits the countryside.

The town proletariat, a new creation, lives in ways which would horrify the western world. The great industrial cities, such as Ahmadabad and Cawnpore, are a nightmare of hovels of corrugated iron

and sacking, of streets which end suddenly in backyards, stinking puddles, wandering and famished cows, garbage, and the scream of factory sirens—sights such as are described by Disraeli in *Sibyl* of the industrial north in England and are to-day regarded as impossible exaggerations. But as the proletariat is partly recruited from the untouchables who for centuries have been forced to skulk on the outskirts of their villages, urban life may seem preferable especially if its horrors are diversified by excitements which break monotony, and also because it is a window on a happier future.

The upper classes have all, however, endured a distress of some kind. The landowning class, partly the descendants of magnates of pre-British days, partly a new creation, had the stimulus neither of danger nor responsibility; they neglected their estates and went to live in the towns, where they engendered a peculiar version of the Victorian civilization of the antimacassar, the sporting picture, the stag antlers, the billiard-room and the coloured glass candelabra, of the family photograph album and the prints of royal personages, Asia having a strange flair for mimicking the most grotesque side of the West. There was a lack of uniformity and an exuberant growth of eccentric individual personality, as there always is among classes rich, leisured, denied participation in government, and bored. They were spoilt for India by European prejudices and for Europe by Indian habits. They were often men of considerable mental development and culture; but they had nothing to do, and rushed after pleasure, exalted the love of eating, and lowered love for women into a kind of gluttonous epicureanism.

The merchants, lawyers and industrialists were busy and successful, but as only a part of the faculties of their minds were habitually employed, they were not a type of which India could be especially proud.[1]

The educated clerical class had the most unenviable place; and with the setting aside by the British of the former leaders of the people, it was this class which was to step into their place and lead the new political movements.[2] Consider its history. As has been often noticed, the intelligentsia came into being not because it was attracted to European

[1] How anglicized were these classes is shown rather vividly in the following remark by Matthew Arnold on England of the nineteenth century which would be true of India to-day. 'The graver self of the Barbarian (the aristocracy) likes honours and consideration; his more relaxed self, field sports and pleasure. The graver self of the Philistine (middle class) likes fanaticism, business and money-making; his more relaxed self, comfort and tea-meetings.'

[2] From this class came all the leaders of the masses. In India the masses

civilization by pure intellectual curiosity, but by the lust for employment. It was highly overproduced. In government reports, there have been repeatedly accounts of the alarming number of applications from university graduates for every government post falling vacant, however low the salary. The majority of the class made its living by drudgery, and its temper was frayed by want and confusion and by the nagging and goading of the excess of relations who inhabit every Indian house. The young man of this class believed vaguely that science or the turn of history had disproved many of the traditional ideas.[1] He sought therefore to build himself a new personality suited to the new world which he had to handle. The new personality was usually aggressive—because the young man felt insecure. It worshipped force—because by a kind of sympathetic magic this made the young man feel himself forceful. It cut adrift from the old established institutions—and he felt guilt in consequence. It criticized and backbit—because he had no clear conception of any desirable goal. The young man was unhappy, arid, and a gossip. Partly because English was the language he naturally used, he felt himself cut off from the past. He was a new type in the East, the pathological egoist who had lost his roots in society. He wished for change, and was willing to flee ten thousand miles from that which the tourist goes ten thousand miles to see, the pageantry of sadhus, burning ghats, holy rivers, kirtan parties, durbars, and all the concomitant sounds and scents which render India unique. At least he was an improvement on the past in that, instead of withdrawing from the world, he sought, though often with an incapacitating petulance, to grapple with it. He was a successful imitation European, but lacked the invisible foundation of experience and habit on which the European stands.

have as yet produced few leaders of their own class. Such organizations as they have—trade unions, peasant unions—have been made for them by the educated class.

[1] The extent to which young India has become materialist can, of course, be exaggerated. There still lingers an interest in the culture of the soul which in the West might be regarded as unusual. In the recent disturbances, Congressmen imprisoned for violence spent much of the time studying the Vedanta.

CHAPTER SIX

NATIONALISM

[i]

As the *malaise* of the Russian upper classes overthrew the Tsarist regime, once very formidable, so in India the unhappiness of the educated classes had sapped the political structure built by the British. The means by which this has happened was the nationalist movement, which satisfied in India the same psychological needs as liberalism and socialism had done in Russia. Nationalism restored the self-respect of the new classes and offered them a purpose—it was like a band marching down a street behind which those who had been idling could fall in. How intoxicating was the idea of the 'nation' to young men when it was a quite new discovery and they were chafing at parochial life, we, living in the shadow of war caused by the hypertrophy of nationalism, can hardly now realize. The desire to feel society functioning as in some way a unity, and the desire to feel oneself a part of this organism, is the basis of nationalism and is not to be condemned. Nationalism touched the whole life of the country and there was a revival of interest in Indian art and philosophy but, essentially, nationalism meant politics.

Nationalism rose partly from resentment at foreign rule, and partly reflected the world-wide political life of the times. In its service there grew, as in other countries, a new, romantic, and not very correct picture of the country's past.

It had been the absence of nationalism which had made possible the British conquest of India; in its initial conquest in Bengal the East India Company had been egged on by the rich Indian merchants with whom it was in a kind of partnership. To an empire formed as was the British one, the rise of nationalism was a doom which it could not in the long run withstand. The British Raj could be main-

tained only as long as the nationalist movement could be held in check by an administration using primarily Indian force to restrain it, and that without such repression as would stir the liberal conscience of England to effective protest. All the early administrators of the Raj knew this. They regarded the Raj as more or less accidental, doomed to pass as soon as Indian society had gone through its revolution of modernizing itself and classes rose which could claim back its government. Many had the belief that it was Britain's mission to train India for self-government as rapidly as might be.[1] Only during the latter half of the nineteenth century did this clear and modest understanding pass and it began to seem for a time that the subjection of India would be lasting. And even then such sagacious writers as Seeley pointed out that India could never be held except by consent, and that if either the Indian army or Indian bureaucracy ceased to serve the British Raj willingly the British would have no alternative but to quit.

[ii]

The end came more or less as it had been forecast. It is true that nationalism developed slowly; the most intelligent observers forty years ago testified to the continuing weakness and superficiality of the movement. Indeed at its start it had actually been patronized for a short time by the government; and a nationalist poet wrote a poem describing how Bharatavarshini, goddess of the Indian earth, had fled because of the evil-doings and discord of her children, and how the English by providential decree had been sent to regenerate the land, and eventually to restore the goddess to her throne. It is true, too, that some Indians have ever since those days of relative good will continued to support the government through thick and thin, even against their own national leaders such as Mr. Gandhi, and even down to the most recent times, so strong has been the prestige which government enjoys in India by the mere fact that it is government.

Partly the nationalist movement operated through political parties and agitation in a manner copied exactly from the West. Partly, like

[1] At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Elphinstone, one of the great architects of the Empire, wrote: 'The most desirable course for events to take in India is that European opinions and knowledge should spread until the nation becomes capable of founding a government of its own on principles of which Europe has long had the exclusive possession. A history of little other merit which shall preserve the otherwise perishable record of that progress will be read with the deepest interest in India and with attention elsewhere.'

nationalism generally, it looked back to the past. At the start it was chiefly a Hindu movement. Not only the election meeting, the ballot box, the resolution, the reasoned pamphlet, made the atmosphere of the movement, but also a religious emotion roused rather by the ancient Hindu mysteries than by John Stuart Mill on Liberty. At a later stage Mr. Gandhi owed part of his strength to the fact that he was revered by some as an avatar or incarnation of the great Hindu gods.

People were afire with the urge to do something, though what it should be they did not always know. The skill of the succession of leaders of the nationalist parties—Tilak, Gokhale, Gandhi, Jinnah, Nehru—was to crystallize what all, or large sections, had vaguely felt—to speak their subconscious mind—so that these, seeing what had perplexed them now simplified and made clear, joined together for action and by their support heaved the leaders to power.

As in the growth of liberty in England, lawyers played a major role. This was natural since, with the rule of law, Indian life has been dominated by legal institutions and concepts. Because of the cult of the law, agitators to a surprising extent avoided violent acts and sought reform by legal means, though there were certainly also times when the terrorist was in the ascendant, and Hindu nationalism has sometimes been associated with the worship of Kali, the goddess of destruction.

Nationalism united the most diverse interests, reactionary, progressive and plain anarchist, millionaire and pauper, Hindu and Moslem. Between them there was no agreement on what was to replace the existing order: the only bond of union was *malaise* and the will to end the British regime.

The movement gathered force. It became formidable first in the early years of the present century. The classes which were politically active slowly withdrew their support from the British regime; and a government in its top levels the least corrupt, most competent and humanest in Asia, and one in which the overwhelming mass of government servants were native Indians and not aliens, sank gradually in the eyes of its educated subjects until it seemed an ogre, a foreign monster, something under which they could hardly breathe. It had exhausted its mandate; the symbolism of state with which it was associated lost its force; and the symbols which stirred the imagination of the country became instead those of the new political parties which the nationalist movement had brought to life.

If, as it has been suggested, the caduceus of Mercury is the emblem of a sound government—a rod surmounted by wings and enwreathed

by serpents—it must be said that the British government of India had lost its wings; its serpents were not particularly subtle; only the rod remained, and that could be used only sparingly.

Every few years there was a conflict between the nationalist parties, with all to win from aggression, and the British, anxious above all to escape the criticism that they were governing by force, which it became increasingly difficult to do. It is true that the great majority of the people continued uninterested in politics as in all previous regimes in India, and the government could justifiably say that the protest against its rule came from what was numerically a small minority. In general, the mass wanted only a quiet life. Yet enough of the people were willing to follow leaders of revolt to make it impossible to carry on government without occasional abrogation of civil liberties and stern repressions. Each conflict ended with a technical victory for the British, and an increasing certainty in India and Britain alike that the British day in India was ending. Such was the history of the nationalist upheavals of 1919, 1931 and 1942. From the time when rich Hindu nationalists gained such ascendancy that the government shrank from policies of social or economic reform likely to offend them, the British Raj really ended. As one by one the classes which had supported the government transferred their attachment to the political parties, the British found themselves like generals whose armies had vanished away like Sennacherib's and who had no alternative but to come to terms with their adversaries. Indeed, true to their plan of staying only with Indian consent, they had made no real attempt to fight back, never, for example (or hardly ever) conducting an anti-nationalist propaganda. The Empire which had come in like a lion which was rather surprised at its power went out like a lamb. Civil servants became aware that they were, as one of their present generation termed them, 'Strangers in India', and to recognize this was more than half-way to abdicating. The British had made parliamentary self-government the goal of their policy, and their only difference with the nationalists was over the speed of progress. The outward expression of their policy was the reforms of 1919 and 1935, the abortive proposals of the war years, the proposals of the Cabinet Mission of 1946, and the declaration in 1947 of the resolve to quit.

The success of the nationalists would have come earlier if the nationalist movement had remained united. But as it surged, it divided into Hindu nationalism and Moslem nationalism. The Hindus stood for a strong executive; the Moslems at first for a federal government guaranteeing their local autonomy, and later for the inde-

pendent state of Pakistan. Here was the old bane of Indian society, its divisiveness, showing itself once again. The two nationalisms struggled with each other for the power which the British were laying down, and thus delayed the triumph of either. Constitutional advance was also delayed by the need to fit the Princes into the new structure. Nothing will convince the Indian nationalist that these divisions were not fomented and manipulated by British officials in their struggle to maintain their authority.

The last years of the British Raj, once the most solid and beneficial political structure in Asia, have been inglorious. A group of perplexed English civil servants have carried on an administration amid the jeers of the country, under a hatred of which, mercifully, they were only partly aware, and in the humiliating shadow of the revival throughout the land of famine, to eliminate which had been one of the claims of British rule, while they sought again and again, and in vain, for the ways in which they could transfer power to the rival communal parties without those parties at once engaging in hostilities among themselves and bringing down to ruin the work of a century. In the demoralizing atmosphere, corruption in the services, from which the British regime at its higher levels had been almost uncannily free, began to be accepted once again as the normal state. A new feature was the influx of correspondents of the Press, especially the American Press, who have doubted the intention of the administration so persistently that the civil servants may perhaps be forgiven for a certain dislike on their side for those who

> *Hawk for news*
> *Whatever their loose phantasy invent*
> *And murmur it with bated breath as though*
> *The abounding gutter had been Helicon*
> *Or calumny a song.*

There was, too, an inevitable incomprehension by the civil servant of the motives which necessarily guide the party politician and which so often make his actions distasteful to those who in the security of permanent office can afford a tender conscience. It is to be hoped that there has been in Delhi during these years a gifted diarist able to record for posterity the talk and emotions of the Indians who amid the tinkle of tea-cups and swish of sarees, amid diffused distrust and indiscriminate suspicion, amid the new-found pleasures of scattering wealth in a riot of clubs and parties, have furthered the great handing-over of responsibility.

[iii]

How the Indian upper classes resembled the Russian has been already described—and the parallel of the last days of the British Raj, described above, and of the Tsarist Empire has also been so close that it may be interesting to notice some of the details. The Indian central parliament and the Russian Duma; the Indian provincial governments and the Russian zemstvos; the Indian liberals and the Russian liberals; the Congress and the Cadets; the autocracy of the Viceroy and the autocracy of the Tsar; the inordinate influence which unqualified persons could often obtain over the highest decisions; the use of a police force which, however well controlled, was nevertheless felt by the country to be a social outlaw—all along the line there are similarities. The Russian autocracy was spasmodically liberal; so was the Indian. Tsarism disliked the educated classes and placed its confidence, blindly as it proved, in the loyalty of the peasants; so did many British officers. St. Petersburg was obsessed with terrorism; so was Delhi. In the last years before the war of 1914 the efforts of the enlightened friends of the Tsardom were to buttress it with a 'ministry of confidence'; and similar efforts were made by the government of India during the recent war. In 1905 the Tsarist government, in the middle of war with Japan, was faced with domestic insurrection, the result of military reverses, the agitation of revolutionary parties and economic distress; but the government, though threatened for a few days, did not fall because the army and the police remained loyal, which they failed to do when the revolution took place in 1917. Those who were in Delhi in 1942 may have felt that the political events then were uncomfortably like those which took place in Russia in 1905; and they knew, too, that liberal circles abroad, especially in America, looked forward to the dissolution of the Indian Empire as a hope for human advance, just as liberals in England had wished for the destruction of the Russian Tsardom.

[iv]

It is easy to deplore what has been thrown away in India, to admire the profound peace which is now being jeopardized, to correct some of the undervaluing of the achievements of the British government, to recollect that the end of the Roman Empire was followed by a Dark Ages, to insist that it was the possession of certain territories imperialistically gained which enabled Great Britain to check Germany in the first stages of the late war, and thereby, as it may fairly

be claimed, to save liberal civilization. But the conclusion is not that because of these considerations, the British control of India should have been maintained indefinitely even against the will of the awakened section of the Indian people. For the pride of the British has been to insist on government by consent. Whoever has seen in action government by force—a sullen people, the fear of police, the periodical brutal tumult in the streets, with arson and looting put down by whips and guns—will applaud the British tradition that a magistrate who uses force by that very fact loses face, since it is assumed that, other things being equal, civil means should, except in rare moments of emergency, be sufficient to circumvent violence. The British public would not sanction the persistent use of force against a resolute opposition. It could do so only by changing its nature.[1]

British rule had rested on prestige rather than force. Congress, noting this, had concentrated on undermining the prestige by agitation. That is the truth of saying that Congress talked the British out of India.

The pathological emotionalism which was India's disease during this century, whose poison was sensed in the air by every visitor to the country, and which frustrated all reasonable life, could be allayed by nothing except a yielding to the nationalist demand. The British had to go, even if going meant disaster to India.

The tragedy was that while the British maintained peace, and thus engendered one good of incalculable value, they had never, unlike the Romans in their empire, managed to complete their work by capturing the imagination of Indians and thus winning them to the support of that empire and that peace. Through the writers with which they made India familiar, the British proclaimed as ideals freedom, liberalism and nationalism. As these ideals were unaccompanied by any larger conceptions which made their realization seem bound up with the maintenance of a British connection the eventual decline of the Empire in face of nationalism became a certainty. Admittedly there was the hope that India, once liberated, would hold together with England, not as the result of force but of its own free will. Perhaps it is too early to write off this hope as unjustified. But if all connection is ended, the good things which have been established will be jeopardized at the same time as the bad things are ended.

[1] The Irish understood this. An Indian writer told me that, wishing to write the life of W. B. Yeats, he visited the poet, who said to him: 'Why waste time in such frivolities? You should be making bombs,' and gave him a letter of introduction to an Irish Republican.

[v]

Both nationalist government in India and Bolshevik government in Russia were brought in through the *malaise* of the educated classes of the countries. The Russians banished this *malaise* by partly exterminating the classes which had been the worst sufferers, and by giving the survivors tasks which satisfied their imagination. Will the new Indian governments, whose ideas are at present not at all like those of the Bolsheviks, succeed in rebuilding society in such a way that they soothe and melt the discontent of the upper and middle classes which has been such a force of destruction and change? Revolution is hardly likely to be at an end until the Indian mind, perhaps after many vicissitudes, loses its present patchwork quality and achieves again unity and peace.

CHAPTER SEVEN

TRADITIONAL BURMA

[i]

Besides demolishing and rebuilding the central fabric of South Asia, the Indian civilization, the British did not spare the lesser structures. These, though for world history so much less important than India, were also ancient works of time, often intricate and attractive. Of these lesser civilizations the principal was the Burmese.

The Burmans, in total number always a small people, indeed a minute fraction of the Indian population, are a mixed race whose origin is a matter of controversy, but was distinct from that of the Indian peoples. While their civilization made large borrowings from India their spirit remained their own. Strong Burmese kingdoms existed between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, in the sixteenth century, and again from the early eighteenth century to the conquest by the British. For short periods they terrorized the neighbouring lands of Siam and Bengal; once they even fought the Chinese with success. In the times when a central Burmese government was in abeyance the country was divided between the Burmans and the neighbouring Shan peoples, and also the Mons or Talaings whom the Burmans eventually absorbed.

The following very brief account of what was the Burmese civilization before the British transformed it cannot do justice to the charm which most sensitive visitors have recorded of this rather singular country.

[ii]

Burmese civilization, even more perhaps than the Indian, is the product of its religion. This is Buddhism. For many centuries there have been two principal schools of Buddhism. Both began in India (though Buddhism afterwards died out there while it spread east-

wards) and were offshoots of Hinduism. The type of Buddhism found in Burma differs from Hinduism in that it concentrates less on metaphysics than on a psychological fact—that all men are miserable—while Hinduism has its eyes turned less on the unhappiness of individual man than on the majority of the universe as a whole.

Buddhism springs out of a pessimistic analysis of human experience. This pessimism has been common to all Asia, and indeed to Europe itself except in the last two centuries. And to-day in Europe as the result of two wars there has arisen the fashionable modern philosophy of Existentialism, which bases its system on human anguish as the principal observable fact of experience, and is thus no less gloomy in outlook than was the ancient world in which Buddha lived. Buddhism teaches that all conscious life can be analysed into three parts, desire, the satisfaction of desire, and disillusion when desire is satisfied. Life is a progress from want to want, not from enjoyment to enjoyment. Nor is death the end of disillusionment, for Buddhism took over from Hinduism the doctrine of reincarnation and eternal rebirth.[1]

The essence of Buddhism is to teach a way of release from misery which can be practised by the ordinary man and is not dependent on divine grace. This is the simple remedy of suspending desire. The man who succeeds in this becomes immune from all unhappiness: himself a Buddha, he has achieved positive happiness. In his final state of perfection he enters into Nirvana and is exempt from rebirth.

Nirvana is described in negative terms, and there is some disagreement about its meaning. Some think of it as total loss of personality and absorption in the divine, others as a blissful unchanging state of personal existence. The belief that Nirvana means total extinction seems to be a misunderstanding.[2]

Salvation of the soul may take a very long time and involve countless reincarnations both in animal and human form. A Buddhist monk in Siam calculated as follows: 'In order to estimate the ages needful for all the transmigrations which are preliminary to the creation of a Buddha, you are to fancy a granite block of enormous extent which is to be visited once every hundred thousand years by a celestial spirit clad in light muslin robes, which should just touch the

[1] In its strictest form, Hinayana Buddhism denies the existence of the soul, resolving it into a stream of sense data. But this denial is hard to reconcile with the belief in reincarnation. Some Hinayana Buddhists have even regarded the existence of God as an open question.

[2] It might be interesting to compare the concept of the 'Null' of the Existentialist philosophers with the Nirvana of the Buddhists.

rock in flitting by; and that until by the touch of the garment, which must remove an infinitesimal and invisible fragment of the stone, the whole stone should be reduced in successive visitations to the size of a grain of sand, the period of transmigrations of a Buddha would not be completed. Again, there is no spot on earth or ocean which you can touch where a Buddha has not been buried in some form or other during the incalculable period of his transitions from one to another mode of existence.'

All teaching is summed up in four simple propositions which are the centre of the Buddhist mind and use, called the four noble truths; these form a coherent and easily intelligible view of the world and the proper course of man in it. They are as follows. All life is suffering; life is the result of desire; cessation of desire ends life and suffering; the cessation of desire is attained by the eight-fold path. The eight-fold path has been described as the ladder of the mystical life, and is to believe rightly, aspire rightly, speak rightly, act rightly (that is, according to the accepted moral law) follow an honest livelihood, sustain a constant mental exertion, to be alert, and to be serene. Stealing, deceiving, adultery, killing, and the drinking of intoxicants are the principal crimes.

Buddhism has usually impressed visitors from the West more favourably than Hinduism. Marco Polo, who visited Burma, remarked that if only it had come from God it would be the best religion in the world.

[iii]

Buddhism has pervaded Burma so thoroughly because it has for centuries been served by an order of devotees. These are called pongyis—the name means Great Glory. It is not easy to decide what is the status of the pongyi in western terms. Sometimes it has been said that pongyis are not priests, since they do not administer any sacraments like the Christian clergy. But they satisfy most of the other traditional requirements of a priesthood; they are celibate; they preach; they pray at weddings and funerals; they stand on a pedestal in comparison with the laity. The pongyis renounced the world, but they did not, like some of the Indian mystics, live in isolated retirement, for Buddhism was a revolutionary religion in that it had a missionary spirit. The duty of the pongyis was to preach its gospel and redeem their fellow men.

At times the standards of the pongyis sank low. For example, in the eleventh century a sect called the Ari in Upper Burma was noted for haughtiness and high living; it was complained that they bred

racehorses, boxed, and wore long hair. Such aberrations were, however, rare. During most of Burmese history the clergy were, if not very learned, at least surprisingly unworldly. Dressed in yellow robes, gliding with begging bowl amiably round the village, the pet of its women (as were the holy men in Holy Russia) vaguely saintly or frankly cheerful and fat—a kind of Buddhist Friar Tuck—the monk is among the things which for centuries have given the Burmese countryside its character. The monks were at once the village gossips, the source (though often themselves only vaguely informed) of the knowledge of Buddha's teaching, the moral censors, and, if holy, the pride of the community. In each village of any consequence there is a monastery, built on the outskirts and among trees, housing perhaps only three or four monks, but the centre of the village life.

Traditional casuistry enabled the monks to observe the Buddhist rule without living in intolerable austerity. The rules are comprehensive. In a Siamese version which was the same as the Burmese they included:

Kill no human being.

Steal not.

When you eat, make no noise like dogs, chibi, chibi, chiabi, chiabi.

To cough or sneeze, in order to win the notice of a group of girls, seated, is a sin.

Boast not of your own sanctity.

Destroy no tree.

Give no flowers to women.

Wink not in speaking.

To sit on the same mat with a woman is a sin.

To wear shoes which hide the toes is a sin.

It is a sin not to love every one alike.

It is a sin in laughing to raise the voice.

To clean the teeth while speaking to others is a sin.

A monk who whistles for his amusement sins.

A monk sins who in eating slobbers his mouth like a little child.

A monk may not wash himself in the twilight or in the dusk, lest he should inadvertently kill some insect or other living thing.

The hold of the monks on the country came partly from their being schoolmasters. They provided Burma with an educational service which in Asia was equalled only by, if it did not surpass, that of ancient China. Moreover the profession of the monk was so much respected that every man of the entire population at some period of

his life served a novitiate in a monastery, the period of which might sometimes be only a symbolical day or two but was often much longer. And this was not regarded as a burdensome obligation but as an honour which a boy was unwilling to forgo. The day on which he was initiated was often the most memorable of his life. Dressed as a prince (because Buddha had been a prince) he rode in state to the monastery, there (like Buddha) to lay aside his crown, take the tonsure, and don the robe. It was a sign that he had come to manhood. As a result, nobody in Burma was without knowledge of the interior of the monastery, few were indifferent to the peace which reigned there, and nearly all had accompanied the monks on their daily begging tour.

The army of monks thus acted as a kind of occupying and garrisoning force keeping Burma secure for Buddhism; but, as in all countries where a higher religion has vanquished older forest or jungle religion, there existed older gods which, though much dwindled, received from Buddhism an amiable tolerance. These were the spirits of nature, or Nats, like the fairies or trolls of Europe. 'Millions of spiritual creatures walk the earth.' Trees had Nats, rivers had Nats, Nats played all kinds of tricks on humanity if not appeased. A spirit much feared was one which was twenty-five feet high, whistling, and always hungry because its mouth was only as large as the eye of a needle. Midway between these beliefs and pure Buddhism was the tendency to treat Buddha himself not as a venerable teacher but as a divinity who must be placated and sacrificed to.

[iv]

A people with a religion whose fundamental tenet was that no satisfaction was to be found in the world might have been expected to be sombre and listless. Burmans on the contrary were among the most light-hearted people in the world, and as their national temperament has affected their history, these psychological facts are of importance. All the Indonesian peoples share indeed in some measure the engaging traits of gaiety and unusual kindness. A pleasant Burmese custom was to purchase the catch of a fisherman and restore it to life and liberty in the river; one of the deepest Buddhist hells was kept for hunters; Burmans say, quite truly, that famine such as has made India too often a nightmare could not happen in Burma since each man would share even his remnant with his neighbour. It is true that there are wicked Burmans, and that even the best are some-

times surprisingly cruel, but this comes from a high-strung temperament rather than settled malevolence.

One of the early British administrators gave the following sympathetic picture of the life of the Burmese peasant. 'In the morning, after his bath, he lazes about, talking to the neighbours till breakfast time, or perhaps strolls out to the corner of his paddy field, and indulges in a contemplative smoke. After breakfast he probably dozes through the heat of the day, and when the shadows begin to get long, saunters about again. . . . The evenings are spent ordinarily in amicable converse over a cheroot at a friend's house in the rains. Variety comes occasionally in the shape of a jolting, hilarious journey to a distant pagoda feast, or a trip down the river in the big rice boat to one of the mill-towns. And so an uneventful life passes away: the greatest desire to live peaceably with all men and observe the ten precepts; the greatest excitement the suspicion of a witch in that lonely house by the nat's pool in the creek.'

The Burmans celebrated, and still celebrate to-day, some of the most graceful festivities of Asia. They have a passion for boat races, cock fights, and village theatricals, and they love light, flowers, and any sport or ceremony which involves splashing water. If sometimes in their history they have dressed dingily, this was because to be conspicuous attracted the tax gatherer, and whenever they have had security they dress in everyday life as for a pageant. They work as little as possible and are pleasingly boastful. Purdah and child marriage are unknown. Often the women work and the men look after the house. Divorce is easy but unusual; there is a charming love poetry. Of their architecture, which expresses very well their temperament, one of the most perceptive of modern travellers has written:

'The precincts of the Shwe Dagon pagoda contain the world's finest specimens of what I may call the merry-go-round style of architecture and decoration. . . . It seems a sacred Fun Fair, a Luna Park dedicated to the greater glory of Gautama, but more fantastic, more wildly amusing than any Bank Holiday invention. Our memories, after the first visit, were of something so curiously improbable, so deliriously and comically dream-like, that we felt constrained to return the following day to make quite sure that we had really seen it.'

What a people thinks about its past throws light on its tastes and temperament. Burmese history is a record of marvels. The national chronicle, a document called the *Glass Palace Chronicle* because it was compiled, fittingly, in a crystal palace, deals with signs and omens, monarchs out of whose mouth came wheels, men able to lift elephants

because of acquiring strength through eating dead fakirs, ogres which sit astride the gates of the royal palace and will not go away, beautiful ladies born from water, the miraculous reproduction of Buddha's teeth, wizards who can make the royal palace turn back to front, poisonings, murders, reincarnations, and showers of gems.

[v]

The Burmese social and political organization contrasted with the Indian because of its cohesiveness.

The centre was the monarchy. Without this, political life seemed inconceivable; a Burmese king of the sixteenth century once choked with laughter on hearing that Venice was a free city without a king.

Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the centre was the royal palace. The palace was the symbol of the royal power. Ritual circumambulation of the walls was one of the king's duties. The aim of many conspiracies was to seize the palace in a temporary absence of the monarch; if the rebels succeeded in this, they had gone far towards obtaining a sanction for his deposition and murder. The palace, elegant but insubstantial, made not of stone but of wood—'a mere matchbox', as a journalist said—was an epitome of Burmese civilization, remote from ordinary life but made out of its components. Within its walls several thousand people, elegantly dressed, spent their life in glitter, ceremony, pageants, idleness and intrigue. At the construction of a new palace, it was usual to bury live men at its entrances, their spirits being thus enlisted as a supernatural guard.

It happens that the neighbouring court of Siam, which was in these respects identical with the Burmese, was described in the middle of last century by an English governess named Mrs. Leonowens who taught the numberless royal children. She records the atmosphere of a large ill-run nursery, boredom, the fear of spies, fear of the king, fear of tortures, imprisonment and death. Those who saw the Burmese court from the inside, and not merely one of its periodic durbar ceremonies, give a similar account.

Some of the titles of the kings of Burma were 'Ruler of land and sea, lord of the rising sun, sovereign of great empires and countries and king of all umbrella-bearing chiefs, lord of the mines of gold, silver, rubies, amber, chief of the celestial elephant and master of many elephants, the supporter of religion, the sun-descended monarch, sovereign of the power of life and death, great chief of righteousness, king of kings and possessor of boundless dominions and supreme

wisdom, the arbiter of existence'. At his installation the king proclaimed himself with the formula : 'I am foremost in the world. I am the most excellent in all the world. I am peerless in all the world.'

The King's person was holy. He could not be directly named and was addressed in a special dialect, a kind of royal language. Subjects addressing him used of themselves such descriptions as 'dust grains of your sacred feet'. He could not be touched.[1] Even some of the astutest kings seem to have believed that they were invulnerable. His body linen was so sacred that it was used for the printing of scriptures when cast off. The oath of allegiance was taken by drinking water in which the royal weapons had been placed. Fertility of the soil depended on the king performing a ritual sowing. It was supposed that to become a king a man must have been of exceptional virtue in previous lives and that, however monstrously he behaved in his office, he was still entitled to veneration because he had not used up the extraordinary reserves of merit which he had accumulated.[2]

Politics consisted of conspiring; on the accession of a new king his relations likely to be competitors were often exterminated. As the blood of the royal family could not be shed, the princes who were killed were sewn into red velvet sacks and beaten to death with sandalwood staves.

Though the king was absolute and all revolved round him, not all his commands were obeyed. In the reign of the last king, Thibaw, his favourites were put to death without his knowledge; in the war which dethroned him he believed from his ministers that his armies were victorious until the British were actually in Mandalay.

The typical monarch built pagodas—the Buddhist shrines with which Burma is covered—carried on slave raids and made war on the chiefs of the border area, seeking their daughters for his harem. His most lively passion was often to collect white elephants, these being

[1] In the neighbouring kingdom of Siam the same taboos existed. When the King of Siam went on the river he was protected with a life-jacket of coco-nuts because, should he fall into the water, none of his subjects could overcome the tabu on touch and attempt his rescue. A King of Ceylon once executed two men who had saved him from drowning. (Gulliver, it may be remembered, incurred great unpopularity in Lilliput from his emergency methods of putting out a fire in the royal palace and saving the King and Queen.)

[2] Similarly the Buddhist theory was that a man sentenced to death died not primarily because of his crimes in this life but because his end was foredoomed by crimes in a previous life. His judges were thereby held guiltless of his blood, and their own reincarnation prospects were not affected adversely.

holy because Buddha had once incarnated himself in this form. The white elephant was in fact an albino elephant, grey or pink, not white; to be genuine it needed to possess a considerable number of unusual points, and their verification was a nice art. When an approved specimen was found it was sent to the capital with a retinue, garlanded, with a canopy borne over it, feeding off porcelain and gold. Arriving at the palace it was given titles, a landed estate, a diadem, a red parasol, secretaries, and a band. Nursing mothers were appointed to give it milk, nobody might pass it without respectful salutation. It was prayed for, and on its death there was general mourning, the more sincere because its end was thought to bode ill luck.

[vi]

The King's authority in the country was exercised at the centre by a council, the Hlutdaw, and in the provinces by governors, whose name 'Province Eaters' shows in what way they were regarded by the people. To be an officer of state was a post of peril. The royal correction was freely used. The entire Hlutdaw was sometimes imprisoned for a day or two. Governors of provinces, called from their palaces to the capital, would be pegged out for three days in the sun, then return to their duties pardoned; and the low esteem in which Burmese kings held their own governors explains their indignation at receiving Embassies from the Governor-General of India and not from the King of England.

Impressive as was the show of the royal capital, the operations of the royal government were limited, and the more so the farther the region was from the court. Indeed its principal anxiety was usually to maintain its circus-like splendour. The amount of silver in the royal treasury was seldom large but it sufficed as the general population subsisted on a barter economy, and the treasury was little more than a security reserve against rebellion.

The administration as it touched the ordinary villager was carried on chiefly by a hierarchy distinct from the royal government. Over each group of fifty or so villages there was found a hereditary officer who was in effect the key figure in the political life of the district. It is perhaps unfortunate that he was usually called a 'headman', for the word headman, because of its Indian associations, usually suggests a village 'kulak', while the personages in Burma were the aristocrats of the country. How easy it is in Asiatic countries for the visitor to overlook the very considerable influence of the minor local aristocracy is shown in the southern states of India to-day; because the local

dignitaries wear in that hot climate no more clothes than other people and live with little ostentation, they are lost in the background. The Burmese headmen, like western squires or lords of the manor, drew their authority not from royal appointment but from ancient right, and they were the intermediaries between the people and the royal officers. In practice the kings could do little without securing their consent. Respected, usually of ancient family, animated by a long tradition, these officers carried the country on their shoulders. It has been said of Burma that almost all which came from the royal government was bad, almost all from the local government good.

The unworldly society of the church had a government of its own. Its head was a prelate called the Thathanabaing, who was the royal agent and censor; his supervisory powers were supported by the government. Most monks were genuinely averse from secular life. Their pastoral duties gave them, however, a spiritual power which the government could not ignore. On the one hand it deferred to them as long as they performed their proper spiritual role. On the other hand it repressed them without scruple if they became seditious. In a civil war a king executed three thousand of them in a single town.

[vii]

Such was Burma traditionally, a small country insulated by jungles and mountains from both India and China, its capital city remote from the sea and the highways of the world. It developed its own society, in which there was plenty of bloodshed and oppression, but which, because of the humanity of Buddhism and the excellence of the local government, was among the happiest in Asia.

Its people were also among the most ignorant. Few foreigners came to Burma; fewer Burmans went abroad, even though the holy places of their religion were in neighbouring India, and though the Burmese temperament is often adventurous. Thus, when they came into contact with the British power at the end of the eighteenth century, they despised it and failed to understand their perils. The treatment of British envoys by the Burmese court from then until its final fall in 1886 is one of the comedies of modern Asiatic history.[1] The Burmese

[1] A historian summarizes their treatment as follows: 'The court wished envoys to run barefoot and bareheaded in the sun along the roads, grovelling at every corner of the walls and at every spire. . . . One day they would tell the envoy that they were going to present him with two elephants, the next that he must buy his own boats for departure. . . . The king would go into raptures over the presents such as an English coach, or beg for the

court spoke of granting the British an alliance and of sending a Burmese Army to capture Paris; and in the first war with the British in 1824, the courtiers pre-empted the expected white slaves, and the Burmese army set off to march to Calcutta carrying with it golden chains in which to fetter the Governor-General.

In this first Anglo-Burman war the Burmese fought surprisingly well. In the third war half a century later which ended the independence of the kingdom, the army surrendered quickly; but a guerrilla war followed such as the British had not had to fight anywhere in India and which was a sign of the much greater unity of the people. There was in fact already in existence a Burmese spirit of nationalism, which only the overwhelming power of the British and Indian armies and police forces enabled them to overcome.

envoy's own hat and put it on saying delightedly "See. This is a high proof of the envoy's regard for me. He could not do more for his own king. . . ." The envoy would be invited, as a great delicacy, to see an exhibition of fireworks in which scores of deserters were to be burned in the wheels. Sometimes he would be ignored for weeks; then suddenly half a dozen great personages would call on him with the utmost affability asking him to get the Viceroy to obtain a Buddha tooth from Ceylon. One day they would tell him that he must pay enormous bribes to get an audience, the next that the king was longing to see him, the third that they wondered he was still there, why had he not left ages ago? One day it would be announced than an army was about to march against England; another the whole population of Rangoon, headed by the governor, would stampede into the wood because a pilot schooner with despatches for the envoy had appeared in the mouth of the river, carrying two tiny cannon without ammunition.'

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE BRITISH IN BURMA

[i]

The British conquered Burma in three stages, the long coastal strips in 1824, the Irrawaddy delta in 1852, and Upper Burma, after much hesitation and against the advice of some concerned in the affair, in 1886. As long as the British had held only Lower Burma, they did little more than occupy key points with a military force and develop the port of Rangoon; when Upper Burma, the heart of the country, was also annexed the influences of British rule played fully upon the land.

For fifty-one years Burma lost its individual identity, being merged with India; in 1937, as the result of the constitutional changes in India, it was restored again to life as a separate country.

The British government in Burma was alien to the country to a greater extent than was British government in India. While, as it has been suggested above, the British Raj in India was really in great part an Indian government, organized locally and operating largely through Indians, Burma on the contrary was a land conquered by the Indo-British power. Until quite recently many of the subordinate officers were Indians; the British officers, even those who had not received their early training in India, looked to India for standards of orthodoxy; in the days of the earliest annexations, with an incongruity which to-day seems almost beyond belief, the language of the courts was Persian, this being at the time the language of judicial record in India. British officers responded to the charm of the country readily enough, but were unfamiliar with Burmese tradition, and had in any case no power to modify the standard British Indian law which was applied to Burma as a matter of course.

What happened to Burmese society under British rule has been studied in a series of works by two retired Burma civil servants, Messrs. Furnivall and Harvey, which are not only very informative about

Burma, but are a model for detailed investigation of social change and its causes.

[ii]

In Burma there was no controversy such as had taken place in India between those who desired to westernize and those who wished to maintain the old institutions. For Burma was conquered at a time when the British were most self-confident. Believing in the absolute superiority of western institutions over the traditional ones, the administrators set themselves to rebuild the society in what was at that time considered the most modern form. By that paradox which has marked the whole British record in Asia, they applied to the reconstruction of a conquered country, not the principles of authoritarian rule, but, at least in social and economic matters, the principles of extreme liberalism, then at the height of their influence. As far as their measures had a common purpose, they sought to make Burma a country fit for Economic and Liberal man.

With this as its programme, a British government was inevitably a force of destruction. Demolition had to precede change. The old society toppled down. To describe the effects of British rule is thus from one aspect like making an inventory of one of the ancient cities of Germany after the Allied air raids, and the disposition may therefore be to condemn it as bringing the unhappiness which goes with such destruction. But Oriental society could not have continued into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries unchanged, and moreover what the British have set in place of the old society, even if destined itself to change rapidly, has much that is of value, and is unprecedented in the East. To attempt a moral assessment is not very practicable, and all that can be done is description—noting alike what has been overthrown and what substituted.

It is unnecessary to list all that has been done away with. Roughly it included most of the peculiar institutions described in the last chapter. The suppression of the monarchy; the pensioning off of the royal family—queens received Rs 30 a month, princesses Rs 10; the setting aside of the rural headmen, that beneficent rural squirearchy described above, and their replacement by government nominees, non-hereditary and enjoying little respect from the people; the virtual disestablishment of the Buddhist church; the elimination of much of what was picturesque, even if childish, such as the cult of the white elephant and the pageantry of the palace, shook Burmese society to pieces and robbed the Burmese state of its essence.

In the vacuum which resulted the government set up new institu-

tions. In total, the effect of British rule was, as in India, the establishment, in a country where it was formerly unknown, of the modern liberal State. In detail, the result of Burma being annexed to India was that the government set up the administrative machine, the law, and the judiciary which had been created in modern India.

Also, as in India, and of great importance for Burma's ultimate recovery of freedom, the government set up the institution of the representative assembly. This appeared first in the form of urban councils, but from 1923 there were rural councils and also a provincial legislature, to which, as in India, government became partly responsible. Later, when Burma was again separated from India, the franchise was made much wider than in India, and the part of the government which was responsible to the assembly was expanded.

Among the acts of construction under the British regime must also be included the rounding off of the Burmese state territorially and the change of its ethnical composition. At the time of the British conquest, Burma had included only Burmans proper and Talaings, but British and Indian arms now almost doubled its area, incorporating in it a large border area inhabited by Shans and tribes-people who had formerly owed the loosest allegiance or none at all to the Burmese kings.

[iii]

What were the effects of these changes on the life of the ordinary citizen?

The main consequence was to destroy the discipline which Burmese society had evolved in itself for the control of the individual. In the East, individual men had at all times been hedged round by custom, often sanctified by centuries. The Burman of pre-British times had been compelled by public sentiment to follow a certain pattern of life, and in doing this he had achieved a reasonable contentment. But British rule introduced liberal ideas. These glorified the unconstrained individual, and freed him to strike out as he chose. The old discipline was destroyed. The paradox of the British system was that the traditional roles of government and subject were reversed; government became bound by law; the individual on the other hand was unshackled from custom. The ruling principle was that the general good required that the minimum check should be placed on the free movement of capital and labour. Institutions which had enforced custom were repressed, and the individual became free to act as he pleased, subject only to his not infringing or, what was easier, not being caught by the criminal law.

In Burma, more perfectly perhaps than in any other Oriental country, can be seen what happens when a tightly knit society in which every man has his appointed place is dissolved into a collection of free, uncontrolled, and more or less unorganized individuals. The effects can be studied in every stratum of social life and in every class.

In the village the natural leader, the hereditary headman was deposed, and as a result the village lost its ancient ability to manage its domestic affairs. The successor to the hereditary chief, the headman appointed by government, enjoyed no real primacy or authority, and being unable to act by traditional means and bound by rules which nobody understood, could not restrain, or was forbidden to restrain, the village petty nuisances.

The peasant became free under the new law to dispose of his land without control by the headmen or elders. In consequence he alienated it to strangers. Land changed hands rapidly: aliens came to the village, old inhabitants went away.

The moneylender, free under the new law to lend as much as he pleased and at whatever rate he pleased, engrossed the land in his hands. The village could do nothing to stop him; and, though expropriation on the scale which took place was an evident catastrophe, the Government, because of its attachment to economic liberalism, could not apply any restrictions. Only when a responsible Burmese ministry was set up in 1937 was a law passed to protect the agriculturist, and then its operation was spoiled by bad administration on the part of the ministers themselves.

The individual trader, operating uncontrolled, brought in cheap goods from abroad, and ruined the village handicrafts. The craftsmen —boat-builders, embroiderers, iron-workers, shoe-makers, toy-makers—were swept together into a new labouring class.

Because the village had ceased to be an organic unit, crime increased sensationally. In former times a Burmese coming before a village tribunal would swear an oath such as the following: "If I have not seen yet shall say that I have seen—then may I be thus punished. Should innumerable descents of the Deity happen for the regeneration and salvation of mankind, may my erring and migrating soul be found beyond the pale of their memory. . . . May blood flow out of every pore in my body that my crime may be made manifest to the world. If I walk abroad, may I be torn to pieces by four preternaturally endowed lions." Believing that these penalties might in fact follow perjury, he usually told the truth. But he had few scruples in cheating British courts, whose findings were regarded as so erratic that it was said they resembled the spin of the roulette wheel, and a

sally in the courts had sometimes the same motive as a visit to the casino.

The new middle class, the product of the schools and universities, took to the new professions. If in the civil service there was self-discipline, because of traditions taken over from the civil service in England and India, in other occupations, in law, politics and journalism, standards of behaviour were low. The new institutions were an avenue for self-advancement, or rather an arena in which men wrestled for a place regardless of rules, any means being permitted. Politics, it has been said, became a racket of a clique of new literates who wielded the instruments of liberal government but despised their fellow-men.

The students, a new class recruited from all sections, less interested in learning than in opportunity, found that by agitation and strikes they could become a political power.

The monks were freed from the control of their Thathanabaing, and some (a minority) fell to the temptation to use their position for worldly profit and power. Men of consequence in the village, they became the sought-after ally of the politicians. Some became absolute pests; the description by Robert Burton of the Jesuits of his day would have fitted them: 'Monks by profession, such as give over the world and the vanities of it, and yet a Machiavellian rout interested in all matters of state: holy men, peacemakers, and yet composed of envy, lust, ambition, hatred and malice, fire-brands, assassinates.'

The former cheerfulness of the people turned into a fretful pessimism; the same *malaise* that had afflicted India appeared also in Burma, though in a cruder form. At the beginning of the century, when the effects of British rule were becoming clear, sympathetic British officers commented on the waning self-confidence of the Burmans; life had lost its brightness. Mr. Furnivall describes the nationalist movement as an instinctive attempt to throw off by fever the poison working in the social system.[1]

[1] Fielding Hall, a civil servant early in the century, wrote: 'There is nothing more noticeable among the better-class Burmese to-day than their pessimism. They have become depressed. They have little knowledge and that little has disagreed with them. They have got no standards. They are lost. They publish papers in the vernacular which sometimes read like nursery lamentations over imaginary ills. And though they would be leaders of the people, they know not whither to lead them, and the people will not follow.' He contrasts the old and the new administration. 'For a Burmese official of the old days, dressed in his rich Mandalay silk, with his gold umbrella borne by men behind him, you have a native official of to-day riding in a cheap copy of an English dog-cart. He wears cotton socks and patent leather shoes.'

Since the movement of labour was uncontrolled, Indian immigrants overran the country. They came to work as labourers on the land, in the docks, and in the enterprises which economic freedom had fostered. Recruited by contractors who intercepted a part of their earnings, they came generally for a season, using Burma as a workshop which they visited for labour. In the years before the war the Indian population was at any one time over one million; in Rangoon, the capital city, Indians were a majority of the population. Indian moneylenders—the famous Chettiars, a caste from Madras—poured in capital; and by 1931 more than a quarter of the rice land of Lower Burma was owned by them.[1]

Permitting this invasion was one of the worst disservices of the British government in Burma. It is true that the Indian labour made possible a much more rapid development of the country than would have been possible had Burmese labour alone been available. But, with the flooding in of an alien population, there grew up all the worst features of plural society—a state in which communities live side by side with no organic connection and with no link except the economic one. Such a society is always more or less diseased. It does not produce men with a civic sense. The hatred of one community for another poisons life.

[iv]

Such were the effects of free society in Burma. Mr. Harvey in a recent book gives a picture of the government and country just before the invasion of the Japanese which should be reflected on by all those who feel that the introduction of western forms of life is the remedy for Oriental troubles.

'Members of the legislature were not going to vote for ministers who did not make it worth their while. Not that they were all mercenary, but they themselves were being subject to pressure. The electorate regarded government as a cornucopia, an inexhaustible source of money and favours. If you wanted a minor appointment for a friend, your member seemed the natural person to ask; or if a local officer refused your requests, however inadmissible, you asked your member to have him transferred. And members were often in a position to get you your wish, because no ministry had a stable

[1] The Chettiars, who came from a single district in Madras, built up an astonishing structure of banking and moneylending over all South-East Asia. They were like the Lombards of medieval Europe. Each Chettiar is accustomed to mix in with his operating capital a loan from the principal Chettiar temple.

majority or knew from one month to another how long it would last. . . .

'Bribes had been paid under the old bureaucracy, but on a smaller scale because they were paid only to subordinates who claimed to have their master's ear, and the English officer himself never heard of it, or if he did, he was incredulous. But now that bribery was no longer checked at the district level, now that it went straight up through the entourage even to the minister himself, the price naturally rose. Officers in the Class II services—what in English we call the executive grade just below the administrative—found they had to pay a whole years' salary to get or avoid a transfer. There is no secret about these things : they were publicly debated on the floor of the House.

'It was the ministers themselves to whom the corruption was due. . . . The newer generation of Burmese officers, the graduates, were often as good lads as you could wish. . . . It was ministerial pressure which led them into evil ways. Police officers found themselves suddenly transferred when they were on the track of a local gangster who had the ear of the minister's supporter. Some ministers even sent messages to a judge on the bench telling him what sentence to pass, as the accused was a friend of theirs.

'Outside in the country at large there was growing unrest; it was now fostered by secret societies of youths, some of them harmless, others not so harmless; but it had begun long before the 1937 constitution; indeed despite its half-baked slogans, its aping of the west, it was the expression of an immemorial nationalism. But the constitution had been heralded as the harbinger of a new heaven and a new earth. And it was the ministers themselves who raised these hopes. Now that they were in office they were called upon to fulfil them. . . .

'(There were pogroms of Indians), there were strikes, both industrial strikes which were openly political, and school strikes in sympathy with them. Students and schoolchildren would picket the secretariate —the equivalent of our Whitehall—to prevent ministers entering their offices. Or again schoolchildren and students, 2,000 of them, including little girls aged ten and eleven, would go on hunger strike, causing a cabinet crisis until it was discovered that a band of devoted mothers was surreptitiously feeding them. Then scores of women would lie across the tram-lines, stopping the traffic. And monks would roam the streets caning or even tearing the clothes off Burmese ladies who dared to buy from shops which were under some political ban or to wear clothes of which they disapproved. And the everlasting processions continued, sometimes carrying the hammer and sickle, or even the swastika. There was little bloodshed but there was wide-

spread intimidation. The authorities seldom used force; when they did, the wrong people—as usually happens in a crowd—were sometimes knocked on the head, and this would provoke fresh processions.... The students were the organizers of every agitation, and sometimes even the ministers, grown men, had to seek their permission before accepting office.'

These were the results of a sincere and respectable endeavour to set up a liberal system in Burma. At this account of a twentieth-century civilization run wild, the reader may feel that it echoes something he has read before; he will find it in the account of the democratic city from the eighth book of Plato's *Republic*:

'"Has not a man licence therein to do what he will?"

'"Yes, so we are told."

'"And clearly, where such licence is permitted every citizen will arrange his own manner of life as suits his pleasure."

'''Clearly he will."

'"A democratical city insults those who are obedient to the rulers with the titles of willing slaves and worthless fellows: whilst the rulers who carry themselves like subjects and the subjects who carry themselves like rulers, it does, both privately and publicly, honour and commend. . . . Does not the prevailing anarchy steal into private houses and spread on every side? The schoolmaster fears and flatters his scholars and the scholars despise their masters and also their tutors. The young copy their elders and enter the lists with them both in talking and acting, and the old men condescend so far as to abound in wit and pleasantry, in imitation of the young, in order to avoid the imputation of being morose or domineering.... Truly even horses and asses adopt a gait expressive of remarkable freedom and dignity, and run at anybody who meets them in the streets, if he does not get out of their way.

'''Now, putting all these things together, do you perceive that they amount to this, that the soul of the citizens is rendered so sensitive as to be indignant and impatient at the smallest symptom of slavery? For surely you are aware that they end by making light of the laws themselves, whether statute or customary, in order that, as they say, they may not have the shadow of a master."'

Plato describes how from a society of this kind there emerges ultimately a tyranny.

[v]

In 1942 the Japanese invaded Burma. The welcome they received from a part of the country and their subsequent collision with Bur-

mese nationalism might have been foreseen. By their three-year occupation, by the puppet government they installed, by the further turmoil of the campaign which ejected them, and by the economic ravage, Burmese society, already invalid, was further wounded and buffeted.

On returning to Burma the British have declared their will to restore parliamentary government and are negotiating with the nationalist leaders upon the setting up of a new system of government, entirely independent of Great Britain if it desires. But the old type political leaders, bred in the parliament, are being pushed from the stage by a new type which has thrust its way forwards by organizing private armies based on the quisling army the Japanese had encouraged them to raise. 'The British', a Burmese leader has said, 'taught the Burmese a soft kind of politics, alien to our tradition, though we were trying to pick it up and to understand the value of votes and mass appeal. Then came the Japanese as a tremendously effective machine and we saw the glamour and the power of the armed man, who in every argument carried the day.'

The younger men, leaders of these private armies, wish to seize power dramatically for themselves. That all is changing, that this is the age for energetic authoritarian rule, that the future is theirs if they do not shrink from violence—these are the facts which burn in their minds. What they will do with power they do not know, and limit themselves at present to proclaiming themselves, in general, 'leftist'. They talk of copying a constitution from Yugoslavia.

Only one thing remains stable in Burma and that is the Buddhist religion. In a world of collapsing faiths, where at least the intelligentsia are in private often agnostic, even if as in India using religion for political ends, most Burmese continue to be through and through dyed with Buddhist ideas. The most bloodthirsty or doctrinaire younger politician keeps the Buddhist Lent, visits the pagoda, is shocked by impiety, and reveres, if he does not practise, charity. The recent dissoluteness of the monks has not discredited religion. Nor will the spread of modern science necessarily shake their belief, for Buddhism, being a discipline which in Burmese eyes gives peace, being based on incontrovertible facts of psychology, and having no metaphysics which can be disproved, can be as much the religion of industrial and scientific man of the twentieth century as of the courtier or peasant of the ancient world.

CHAPTER NINE

CEYLON

[i]

Ceylon, in size only about three-quarters as large as Ireland, has been of less importance in the Empire than Burma. Cingalese civilization is like that of Burma, except that it has been for centuries more receptive of Indian influence. Ceylon has, for example, a caste system, while in Burma the only trace of caste is in the disabilities of certain peculiar small sections of the people.

The Cingalese people are kindly, idle, irresponsible fatalists. As devoted Buddhists as are the Burmans, they claim, without truth, that Buddha himself visited the island, and that it was later proselytized by a son of the famous Indian emperor of the third century B.C., Asoka, who arrived in Ceylon by levitation, carrying with him a shoot of the Bo tree under which Buddha received enlightenment. A tooth of Buddha, preserved at Kandy, was a kind of palladium of the State. The tooth had a curious history. In the sixteenth century the Portuguese from Goa seized what they thought was this relic, and their Viceroy negotiated with the Cingalese for its restoration on payment of ransom; but the Catholic Church intervened, forbidding traffic in heathen fetiches, and the tooth which the Portuguese held was thereupon destroyed. But the Cingalese claimed that the Portuguese had captured only a replica of the tooth, and produced again the alleged authentic one. It was said 'The kingdom goes with the tooth', and a sentry was posted over it in British times to see that no enterprising rebel stole it.

In its two thousand years of history, Ceylon was divided between warring kingdoms; and repeated invasion from India left an Indian population which kept its own civilization. Each petty kingdom was of the same pattern, in most respects like the Burmese one. The centre of government was the king and the palace, and, as in Burma, there stood between king and people a class of hereditary chiefs or headmen, at once officers of government and peoples' representatives.

A peculiarity of Ceylon was the scale on which the government demanded compulsory service from the people. The monarch turned his population at various times into a giant labour corps which built palaces, cleared jungles, laid out gardens, and constructed the tanks and irrigation system which was the great achievement of ancient Ceylon.

[ii]

The Portuguese conquered the maritime provinces in the sixteenth century, and the Dutch succeeded them, but the British were the first western people to conquer all the island.

Except in the first few years after the British conquest, Ceylon was not, like Burma, ruled from India, but from the Colonial Office in London, and its experience was perhaps a little happier than Burma's.

Its first and not very successful governor, Lord Guilford, the son of the affable and engaging if calamitous Prime Minister, Lord North, is one of the more notable forgotten eccentrics of the nineteenth century. In the history of British dependencies, in which only institutions are alive and interesting, and in which persons are all uniform and anonymous—a gallery of discreet and unarresting faces[1] —a slightly incompetent governor is a red-letter day. Guilford's governorship was indeed no more than an Oriental diversion in a career devoted to Greece. Becoming a Hellenic enthusiast while an undergraduate at Oxford, he toured Greece, joined the Greek Orthodox Church, and wrote a Pindaric Ode in honour of Catherine the Great, then the hope of the Hellenes. After a spell in the House of Commons he became Secretary of State in Corsica, at that time under British occupation and recently associated with an even more remarkable eccentric. In 1801 began his seven years as Governor of Ceylon. When, at its end, he returned to Europe, he founded an Ionian University at Corfu, receiving for this purpose the support of the Prince Regent. The remainder of his life he spent at Corfu, as

[1] No Empire has such an empty Pantheon as the British. A few local magistrates built themselves legends which have survived for a hundred years; but for the most part the Empire was sustained by the competent nameless. The habits and minds of the governors changed from generation to generation, cocked hats and hard drinking and classical scholarship gave way to the bearded and evangelical, and this to the harassed and neat civil servant of the present day. Few officers challenged attention for their personal qualities. One of the magistrates of the Indian Government whose eccentricities once attracted public notice in England was named Snodgrass, and it is possible that the fancy of Dickens may have been excited by his misdeeds.

Chancellor, eschewing European dress, and habitually wearing classical costume.

In the domestic administration of Ceylon, Guilford reformed the revenue system, started schools, and distinguished himself by a humanity and politeness which contrasted him with his Dutch predecessors; his mishaps came from a shady negotiation with the prime minister of the still independent Cingalese king in the interior, a transaction which recalled the Borgias at their most ingenious. The prime minister, a monster of superlative wickedness, was to incite his master to aggression against the British which would justify British retaliation. In this intrigue Guilford was outwitted; the Cingalese king produced the outrages but his prime minister did not, as had been arranged, join the British; a military expedition had in consequence to be sent to Kandy, and was defeated and massacred, a defeat not avenged for twelve years.

The King of Kandy was finally deposed in 1815. The monarchy and the pageant of life which accompanied it were abolished.

[iii]

The upset of national life after conquest was less than in Burma, and this was the stranger because at one time Ceylon became one of the favourite testing grounds for the colonial ideas of the utilitarian politicians who were so powerful in the eighteen-thirties. Their experiments affected, however, the European civil servant and his amenities of life rather than Cingalese society. The headmen of the villages, the key figures of the old system, were retained, though the government at times suspected their loyalty, and at times under humanitarian influence reduced their powers which they had too often used extortionately against the people. These headmen still exist to-day, and have on the whole played a useful part in maintaining a native spirit in the administration.

Similarly the village councils—like the panchayats in India, but in Ceylon called Gansabhawas—were kept alive more successfully in Ceylon than elsewhere in the British Empire. Indeed as early as the 'seventies the government tried with some success to modernize them and make them more active, both as petty judicial tribunals and as executive agents.

Even the Buddhist church remained better organized than in Burma. For though the Government, because of the pressure of Christian missionaries, refused to sully itself with paganism by becoming its head and protector, it provided, after a time of some uncertainty,

a system of regulation by trustees which has functioned fairly satisfactorily.

In spite of the differences, Ceylon's history was basically the same as that of the rest of the Empire. Most of the same innovations appeared as in India and Burma, and produced the same results. For example, the setting up of western courts turned awry the smooth life of the village no less than it had done in India and Burma. The villages were full of lawyers, lawyers' touts, and petition writers—'the fomentors and conductors of the petty war of village vexation'—and the law proved to be an instrument with almost limitless possibilities for the ancient Oriental game of harassing enemies. In 1869 charges were brought in the courts against one-thirteenth of the total population, and only in 10 per cent of these cases did the charges lead to convictions. In the same year one-third of the adult population appeared in the courts in one role or another, as accused, or witnesses, or petitioners.

Furthermore, as in Burma, the social and political life became complicated by the arrival of large numbers of Indian coolies. These came to work chiefly on the European plantations. As they joined a resident population which was settled from ancient times and was the result of wars between Ceylon and India, the Indian hold in Ceylon was even more formidable than in Burma. The latest census figures showed one and a half million Indians against four and a half million Cingalese. Communal hostility became one of the chief themes of politics.

Ceylon shared the experience of the rest of the Empire in experimenting with parliamentary government. Parliamentary institutions were set up in the present century. Here Ceylon's experience was strange. In the initial stages of popular representation, first launched in 1910, the relations of legislature and executive were so bad that in 1928 a Royal Commission said of them that if they had been a partnership at all it had been like holy matrimony at its worst. In a search for a remedy the model taken for a new constitution was the very peculiar one of the London County Council. The result was scarcely happier, and a more normal type of parliamentary government is at present being restored. Cingalese politics are not dignified; the communal suspicion between Cingalese and Indians has caused the same unseemly struggle as communal tension does wherever it exists; cabinets have been weak and divided; no strong parties developed as in India; politics have been dominated by a few outstanding personalities, and round these rather than around programmes the politicians have grouped themselves.

In spite of this a recent Royal Commission has reported that the country is nearly mature enough for a form of Dominion Status, and the British Government is basing upon this its future policy.

[iv]

Ceylon passed through the same emotional and intellectual changes as the rest of British Asia. Young Cingalese adopted the ideas of the times, became first nationalist, then 'leftists', and linked their nationalism with the Buddhist church. The Young Men's Buddhist Association was at one time one of the chief political bodies. Cingalese nationalists suspect the British of manipulating the communal conflict; they have resented the alleged influence of European tea planters with the Colonial Office in London; they believe that western capital exploits the island. But as Europeans had been in Ceylon longer than in most other parts of Asia—the Portuguese arrived early in the sixteenth century and created a large Christian population[1]—the people of Ceylon are more sophisticated in dealing with the West, and racial feeling is less strong than in either India or Burma. Ceylon escaped, moreover, the experience which has so much unsettled Burma of invasion and campaigning during the war with Japan.

Present constitutional reforms bring Ceylon very near complete self-government; whether its nationalists will thereafter be content to remain in a special association with Great Britain has still to be seen.

[1] In 1556 one of the Cingalese kings became a Christian.

CHAPTER TEN

MALAYA

[i]

In India, Burma and Ceylon, the British governments had been imposed on ancient civilizations and close packed populations. But in Malaya the history of the British Asiatic Empire was different because there the British occupied a more or less empty land. The territory taken over was only a provincial and scantily peopled part of the Malay world, whose centre was in Java. Because of this circumstance the British acquisition of Malaya resembled that of the empty dominions of Canada and Australia, though in Malaya it was Asiatics, not Anglo-Saxons, who under the British flag came to colonize the country.

The history of the Malays under British rule—the scanty people who were found in possession—has been different from that of other Asiatic peoples in that they have changed less.

Pre-British Malaya is easy to reconstruct. Malays of that time were plentifully described, and won the liking of most of those who studied them. One of the first European visitors, a Portuguese of the seventeenth century, said: 'These Moors who are named Malays are very polished people, and gentlemen, musical, gallant and well-proportioned.' Different observers have described them as handsome, athletic, idle, easy-going, improvident, vain, swaggering, given to borrowing, not given to cringing, faithful in their undertakings, capable of great endurance, hospitable to strangers though reserved, lovers of bright clothes and curious weapons, governed by a minute code of manners, conservative, and no great respecters of Europeans. They loved picnics, poetry and craftsmanship in gold and silver. They had a passion for the sea. Their women were witty, talked in a language compounded of riddles and allusions which it was an art to understand, and, for Moslems, were relatively untrammelled. The nervous disorders prevalent among a people often throw light on

their temperament. Malays were subject to two peculiar diseases. One was to 'run amok', about which much has been written; the other, called 'latak', was a state in which the victim loses all self-control and sense of identity, imitating the actions of every person catching his attention.

In religion Malays had been Moslems since the fifteenth century; why and how they were converted at this particular time is still not very clearly understood. Earlier, when connection with India had been close and Indian princes had ruled the country, religion had been a kind of provincial Hinduism; to-day this ancient layer of faith still crops out, especially among the people on the eastern side of the peninsula which is the less developed. The Hindu gods Kali, Vishnu and Ganesh are invoked in spells by Moslem magicians; Garuda, the Hindu demon bird, is taken in procession; Moslems engage in ceremonial washings unknown to their own religion and derived from Hinduism; the king of the Moslem jinns is Siva the Hindu god; meteors are the arrows of Arjuna, the Hindu thunder-hero; the bull with the forty horns which holds up the world is called Nanda, which is the name of the sacred bull of Siva; the Hindu epic poem, the Ramayana, is known all over the northern parts; the shrines of saints and holy men throughout the peninsula camouflage ancient Hindu temples, and justify in the service of a new faith the habit of pilgrimage which was so important a part of the old. In addition to this vestigial Hinduism, there is a yet more ancient animism. Malays believe in four Great Spirits, talking animals, sympathetic magic, and in familiar spirits which are apt to carry out terrifyingly the wishes which a man may form lightly in moments of passion.

Besides their Hindu inheritance the Malays had received through the Arabs who converted them and through their subsequent contact with the Arab world the traditions, history and ideas of the Middle East. They were especially interested in Alexander the Great, whose son and successor they believed to have been Aristotle; and he was supposed to have visited the Malayan jungle as almost everywhere else in the Moslem world. Omens, divination and the interpretation of dreams aroused the same interest as is found in Egypt and Persia.

How this jungle people collected tradition from all over the world, like a child collecting a museum, is still shown to-day in the ceremonial of the Sultans' courts. At the installation of the Sultan of Perak, the monarch, wearing a sword with an Arabic inscription said to have belonged to Alexander, his reputed ancestor, is proclaimed by the hereditary court herald in a Sanskrit formula unintelligible to all those present; in the Sultan's ear is whispered as the Sultan's secret

the name of his Indian princely forebears; the Sultan stands under a yellow umbrella, the emblem of royalty in China; and the names of the drums and trumpets which sound on his proclamation are Persian.

[ii]

Such was the ancient society. As might be supposed, when the British came to Malaya the political structure was not very complex. The peninsula was divided between more than a dozen sultans and chiefs. Since there were no great differences between the States, the account of the State of Perak by one of the civil servants who visited it in the eighteen-sixties is thus really an account of Malaya as a whole.

'(There were) miles upon miles of forest, broken only by silver streaks, where one might, from a very high place, catch glimpses of some river. Excluding a single district, there was not a yard of road in the country, and hardly a decent house: there was not even a bridle path, only jungle tracks made by wild beasts and used by charcoal burners and a few pedestrians. The commerce of the country was by rivers; they were the highways, and the people would not leave them, unless they were compelled to do so. The country folk moved about but little, for they knew the difficulties too well. A boat journey of a hundred miles down river would take a week, and back again a month or more. When people of consideration had to journey by land, they travelled on elephants if they could get them, and cut their way through the jungle. Pedestrians had to foot it as they might; over the roots, through the thorns, wading or swimming rivers and streams, ploughing through miles of bogs and mud in the heat and rain, stung by everything that stings, and usually spending two or three nights in the jungle with any kind of shelter that a chopper and the forest could supply. As for food, the traveller or his people carried it, and even in villages it was practically impossible to buy anything except an old hen.

'The Malay villages, always on the banks of a stream, were composed of palm thatched wooden huts raised above the ground. These huts were scattered about, without the smallest attempt at regularity, in orchards of palm and fruit trees, no attempt being made to clear the undergrowth of weeds and bushes. There would be a mosque, perhaps two, if the village was large—and behind it, in a swamp, there were usually some rice-fields. The people lived on what they could catch in the river or the swamp, on the fruit of their orchards, or such

vegetables as would grow without tending; poultry and goats were a luxury.'

In Perak, even at this period, commercial enterprise had begun, and in one district some adventurous gangs of Chinese worked the tin mines. Here conditions were even more unsettled.

'Like vultures to a carcase, all robbers, thieves and murderers collected round the mines, ready to despoil, by every means, anyone who possessed anything worth taking. If there was a complaint (poor people knew better than to make one) and the parties were hailed before some chief or rajah, or swashbuckler with a few determined followers, the result was usually that everyone concerned returned poorer than he went.'

The Sultan of Perak at this time, who was the seventeenth in his dynasty, had to contend with two rival claimants, and the country was thus kept in a slightly greater state of turbulence than was normal elsewhere. The State government was curiously organized; the main offices were shared out by a strictly regulated system among the senior members of the royal family (a system found in other Asiatic kingdoms and still to-day existing in Nepal). Beneath these high officers, the State hierarchy descended through Great Chiefs, Lesser Chiefs and Minor Chiefs, all hereditary, to the hereditary headmen in the village. Princes of the blood were numerous, idle and turbulent, and politics, like those of England in the later Middle Ages, were in part dictated by the need to find them employment, for when not engaged in external wars they took to rebellion. The courts and encampments, if not distinguished by their architecture, were gay, full of bright clothes, and riotous.[1] Round the Sultan frolicked a retinue of young men, called the King's Youths, licensed to do what they pleased. And indeed for any man of consequence there was neither police nor law.

The ordinary villager took no part in government. He was obliged to supply free labour for so many days to the Sultan, but money-taxes were low or non-existent. There was a gulf between the Raja class and the villager, but there was no class hostility; and the loyalty of the Malays to their chiefs was and remains one of their chief peculiarities. There was more land than cultivators, and one month's work in the year was enough to provide a family with its livelihood. The ugliest blot on the country was slavery; it is curious that in this very unmercantile and improvident society, slavery was the penalty for debt.

[1] I have met a retainer of a Malay court whose sole duty was to have hairs plucked nightly from his beard in which fighting crickets could be suspended in water for their baths.

Such was Perak in the middle years of the last century, and most of the other dozen states of Malaya were in the same condition.

[iii]

Change came about from the advent first of the British, then of the Chinese.

The East India Company established itself in 1786 in the port of Penang. This they obtained by a treaty with the Sultan of Kedah; the circumstances of the agreement were ambiguous, but a good case has been made for saying that the cession was in return for a guarantee of protection against his neighbours and Siam, a guarantee on which, if it really existed, the Company later defaulted. In 1819 the British occupied Singapore and thus constituted the Straits Settlements. Their motive was to obtain trading posts from which to break the Dutch trading monopoly of Indonesia. The slowness with which they spread their authority from these footholds over the interior shows a languidness in the supposedly voracious British imperialism; it was said as late as the middle of the nineteenth century that very few of the officials in Singapore could even have named all the Malay States. But in 1874 the government of the Straits Settlements negotiated a treaty with Perak by which the Sultan more or less voluntarily accepted a British resident and undertook to carry out British advice, and, after this start, similar treaties were concluded one by one with the other Sultans. Thereby Malaya was in fact, if not in form, incorporated in the Empire.

The rather catastrophic disintegration of the traditional society which had been the effect of British rule in other parts of the Empire did not, however, take place in Malaya. Indeed in Malaya the effect of British rule was opposite. It was to conserve. The reason for this was that Malaya, unlike India, Burma and Ceylon, had not been conquered; the native rulers had not been set aside, but had voluntarily asked for British protection.

Contrast what happened in Malaya and in Burma. In Burma the ancient monarchy had been abolished; in Malaya the Sultanates were carefully preserved, and it was through the Sultans' own native machinery of government that the British advisers operated. In Burma land under the liberal economic system was allowed to change hands like any other chattel; over parts of Malaya land was strictly reserved. In Burma a large educated intelligentsia was called into being; in Malaya there was no university, not even at Singapore.

In Burma was set up a complicated western apparatus of law courts and parliament; in Malaya, government was carried on through the ancient institutions.[1]

Change there was, of course. Malaya changed differently from Burma. But it changed none the less. The comparatively young Residents who were sent to the courts of the Sultans persuaded them, with no more sanction than the distant and seldom demonstrated might of the British Government at Singapore, to modernize their administration. In less than half a century the country was transformed from an anarchist pirate land into a neat territory with perfect security and with roads and health services among the best in any Asiatic country. Even a unification of the country was carried through, some of the rulers agreeing to enter a federation, and all to follow a co-operative policy dictated by the British.

The transformation was aided by the economic change when, early in the century, it was found that Malaya was one of the best countries for producing rubber, the demand for which had been increased by the invention of the motor-car; and as the sultanates had changed into modern administrations, so did the jungle into orderly plantations. Aesthetically the results were perhaps deplorable. A visitor described the look of the country from the railway:

'Miserably scraggy little trees planted neatly in rows flanked the railway and continued to flank it during almost all the rest of the day. We rolled through literally hundreds of miles of potential Dunlops, of latent golf-balls, and hot-water bottles to be.'

But rubber meant wealth, and wealth in the hands of a government means, or can mean, modernization.

Yet, profound as were these changes, the traditional Malayan society remained screened from their effects. Government policy resulted in making it a kind of native reservation. The tamed and modernized Sultans enjoyed still the feudal loyalty of their peoples. While the other peoples of the eastern world were in chaos, the Malays continued to live in their villages, happier probably than in the past, peace having been established, but with ideas and institutions little altered. They developed only a very small urban middle class and no Malay Press or political party. Even the economic changes did

[1] During the Napoleonic Wars, the British had occupied Java, and Sir Stamford Raffles spent four years as Governor. His administration in Java was more on the principles later followed in Burma than on those later followed in Malaya. Hitherto Raffles's work in Java has been highly esteemed: recently it has been criticized for the same reasons that British administration in Burma is criticized.

not much affect them; since land was so plentiful, they were not dispossessed on any great scale to make room for the plantations, and the labour for them was recruited from other races, chiefly from immigrant Indians.

This cautious preservation of the ancient institutions was the more curious because, while the institutions remained intact, the people which they served were in fact no longer the same as those who had evolved them. During the British period the Malay population increased from 300,000 to more than two million, and were recruited partly from immigrants from the Dutch East Indies where society had already changed its ancient shape. For the new arrivals the old Malay institutions were as unfamiliar a political dress as would have been institutions copied from India or Burma.

Which were the better off, the Burmese whose native institutions had been destroyed, or the Malays whose civilization had been so carefully preserved? Probably the Malays were happier; but idyllic though their life for a time may have seemed, the sands of their happiness were running out. Perhaps it would have been better for them if the innovations from the West had been allowed to cause more upset than they did to the old social system. By failing to modernize, the Malays were failing to develop the instruments of self-protection against a threat to their life which under British rule became ever more menacing. This was the influx into their country of the astute and tenacious Chinese.

[iv]

Chinese had been in Malaya from early times. Commercial zeal and the overcrowding in their own country propelled them all over the South Sea: this movement is likely to be one of the continuing population drives throughout this century. At first they came to Malaya as audacious gangs exploiting the tin mines. Though their presence might be formally sanctioned by the rulers they maintained their position by a constant war with the Malays. A British officer wrote:

'In the old days the Malays had a game called Main China, each man betting on the number of the coins which a passing Chinese carried in his pouch, and whether they were odd or even. Thereafter, when the bets had been made, they would kill the Chinese and count the coins. . . .

' "They might have done that without killing the Chinaman," I said.

' "It is true", rejoined the Raja, "but it was a more certain way, and moreover, it increased their pleasure." '

The Chinese gangs fought also with one another. One of the first British officers in Perak describes how on visiting the Chinese settlement he found the leader standing at a large table paying so much cash for each head brought in of members of the rival gang.

The establishment of orderly government changed the role of the Chinese and increased its importance. For order meant the building of railways and roads; and in the more or less empty land whose few inhabitants scorned coolie work, labour was the instrument chiefly needed by government. Modern Malaya is built on coolie bones. Immigrants from the south-east provinces of China arrived in large numbers; their import was organized at great profit by labour contractors and shipping companies and known as the 'pig business'. In the last census, before the outbreak of war, it was found that Chinese with 2·4 million outnumbered the Malays with 2·2 million.

In addition to the Chinese, nearly one million Indians came to the country, chiefly to work on the rubber plantations.

The Chinese settlers, like the Indians, were not the cream of their own country, but were the adventurous and turbulent excess of population from South China. Educated Chinese regarded them with contempt just as stay-at-home English people in the last century looked doubtfully at colonials. A part came only for a few years and then returned home with their savings; but a part settled in the country. Men outnumbered women. Their society became stratified, groups forming themselves according to the length of time their members had been in Malaya. In the peculiar circumstances of the country they developed a kind of civilization of their own; it has been said that they worshipped the Virgin Mary, the Prophet Muhammed, and all the ghosts in Singapore; and the worship of a sea goddess who originated in South China has been curiously elaborated. Though most came as labourers, they gradually established a strong position as village shopkeepers, pedlars, merchants and moneylenders. They dug themselves in and took over almost as a monopoly the lower part of the trading life on which modern Malaya depended. In Singapore they began in the years before the recent war to threaten even the preserves of the Europeans, especially in banking.

The eventual supremacy of the Chinese in Malaya was thus the threat with which the Malays were faced. Two peoples confronted each other who were the opposite extremes of human development. One was dour and commercial to a fault: the other, reckless and uncalculating to a fault. But the Malays, unaccustomed to political

action, did nothing effective to safeguard themselves, and merely begged the government to restrict the immigration. Various other circumstances delayed a major communal clash. Competition between the communities was padded; there was more land than population; Malays could always cultivate; and though they resented their exploitation by Chinese merchants, few wished to go into commerce themselves. It was indeed the government which first was apprehensive at the change which had come about. Remittances by Chinese to their families in China itself drained the country's wealth and were a kind of colonial exploitation. Moreover valuable as were the Chinese as a labour corps, politically they were of uncertain allegiance. If some were glad to escape the heavy hand of Chinese government, another part was likely to be an instrument for any Chinese government with which to spread its influence in the South Seas: this was the more to be feared since it is Chinese law and tradition that a Chinese, wherever he goes, remains Chinese, and though naturalized in a foreign country cannot renounce his allegiance to China. The government therefore for a time discouraged Chinese political activity, even proscribing their national party the Kuomintang, and supported the Sultans in their refusal to accord the Chinese a Malayan citizenship. It also took powers to banish summarily any Chinese who was politically a nuisance, and indeed in the twenty years before 1931 deported about 20,000.

[v]

From 1942–5 Malaya was under Japanese occupation. Though there were quislings in each community, neither Chinese nor Malays as a whole showed any welcome to the new regime. But the British on their return could not limit themselves to a mere restoration of previous circumstance, and announced new long-term aims of policy.

There could be no question of the promise of Dominion Status or independence within a short period such as was made to India and Burma, for Malaya was so much less mature politically than these countries. The British plan looks, however, to this as to its ultimate end. And its guiding principle, based on the warning of the horrid fate of countries divided between hostile communities, must be to weld Malaya together into a unit before the rift becomes unbridgeable. The first post-war proposal for constitutional advance has miscarried. It involved a tighter union between the Sultanates and a common Malay citizenship to include both Malays and Chinese who had genuinely settled in the country; it failed because Malays felt

that it was too advantageous to the Chinese, because it seemed that the Sultans had been inadequately consulted, and also because the plan would have subordinated the States too much to the bureaucracy at the centre. The excitement caused by this plan has led the Malays for the first time to build up an effective political organization. At present a new scheme is being worked out.

What will be the future it is too early to say; but the result which is feared by the friends of the country is that even the wisest policy may not be able to overcome the division between the Malay and Chinese communities, and that their rivalry may turn into hostility as irreconcilable as that between Hindus and Moslems in India, or Jews and Arabs in Palestine. This would be all the more dangerous because China in the background would scarcely disinterest itself in the struggle.

[vi]

By the new constitutional proposals the great port of Singapore is to be made a different administration from the mainland, at least for the time being. The decision is a wise one, so different is Singapore in population, in history, in temper, in ambition, from the rest of the country.

Singapore had been ceded to Great Britain in 1819, at which time it had only 150 inhabitants. One of the first acts of government was to sweep out of the harbour some hundreds of skulls which were the result of piracies and which impeded navigation; another, it is curious to remember, was to destroy the only ancient monument in the place, a stone with a long inscription which might have revealed its obscure earlier history. In the course of the century, Singapore, under direct British administration unlike the Malayan hinterland, became as a free port at the crossing of many trade routes the great entrepôt of the Far East. It belonged to the cosmopolitan Far East mercantile civilization which included such international business cities as Shanghai rather than to the languid world of the Malayan Sultanates. One of the wealthiest and most Philistine places in the world, it is a fitting memorial of British Oriental civilization in its most commercial and commonsense manifestation. It enshrined the nineteenth-century concepts of economics, a city existing for trade, whose destinies were arranged from material calculation and which to a surprising extent was free from uneconomic political passions. While the delicate experiment is in progress of turning Malaya into a modern nation, this Babylon is best kept aloof.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE BRITISH ORIENTAL CIVILIZATION

[i]

Through the events described above, the impressive structure of the British Empire in Asia, only three or four decades ago the secure home of peace, and seemingly one of the strongest and least troubled political structures in the world, has in the short while since changed its appearance. The strong masonry, the great bastions, have become tottering walls, as if an earthquake had shattered them. And indeed, nationalism, the force which has shaken them, has the baffling qualities of an earthquake; neither police, nor armies, nor tradition avail against it. Whether the walls must be condemned entirely and taken down, or whether they can be rebuilt—this is still uncertain. But if the Empire is to continue, it must be in a new form as a free confederacy, and governed no longer by British civil servants.

Even if the British role is now abruptly ended, there will remain in the countries of the Empire a large survival of British influence and tradition. If British government disintegrated the old society—and the analysis above dwells necessarily on its destructive power—it also created a new society. Its achievement went beyond the importing into Asia of the new material apparatus of life, the railways, automobiles, factories, artillery, which had been invented in the West. Indeed it is sometimes claimed that in bringing into being a new way of life and new institutions the British have created virtually a separate Asiatic civilization, distinct from that of the past, distinct from that of the Asiatic countries outside the Empire; and this problematic period in the Empire's history is a good time for inquiring what is the truth of this claim.

It is hard to answer. But certain misconceptions may be removed. Whatever the British may have done, they did not set up a purely western civilization in the place of Oriental civilization. What is

western civilization? What unity has the West? What is the common quality in life in Great Britain, the Latin countries, Germany, and Russia? Great Britain acted as a funnel through which there passed into the East the ideas current in a limited portion of the West at a limited period of history: these, operating in various ways, blending with some of the indigenous ideas, extirpating others, themselves being modified, engendered a new hybrid system.

This new civilization was curious in that nearly all its valuable features were political. It is not that the British influence did not affect profoundly all other departments of life besides the political; but in the arts and learning the results in all the countries of the Empire had been chiefly dissolution and a kind of anarchy. The most visible outward sign of the British Empire in Asia is the prevalence of Victorian Gothic;[1] no future generations will visit the remains of the public buildings of Calcutta, Rangoon and Singapore as to-day the tourist in Roman Asia visits Baalbek and Palmyra. The depressing English society—described by E. M. Forster for India and Somerset Maugham for Malaya—was hardly the setting for a Renaissance,[2] though it did certainly produce the scholars by whom oriental learning was resuscitated. British Asia, especially India, has had its indigenous philosophers and artists, but most of the cultural life has been imitation, either of the past or of the contemporary West. In the religious life, Islam developed a modernist wing, Hinduism discovered a new interest in ethics, young men became agnostic or romantic atheists, but in none of the lands was the period a red-letter one. Admittedly genius receives often more admiration in a later generation than in its own, being often totally unrecognized while it flourishes, but whoever travels in British Asia to-day and searches the bookshops, the universities, and the art galleries is fairly certain that no gems are lurking unseen. Nor, in spite of a few outstanding figures, were the past two generations any richer.

It may perhaps be said that the British in Asia introduced a reform in education, or an outlook which valued the reasoning or inventive faculty above the memory. To learn by rote has been the tradition in Asia and this has often shackled the mind or dulled the imagination. Or it may be argued that the British introduced a scientific outlook. But have they really, except among a very small anglicized

[1] There are some good earlier buildings in Calcutta, Madras and Bombay.

[2] It is ironical that the first educated Englishman known to have visited India was a Jesuit father who was a poet and wrote in an Indian dialect a poem of eleven thousand couplets. This was a false dawn.

class? Reverence for the pandit has been succeeded by reverence for the printed word (derived indeed from the old and admirable respect for learning) and belief in the scriptures by belief that to be published is to be authoritative. If modern civilization is based on science, it is at least problematical whether the East by its own resources can support it.

Only in the political life has something new, orderly and considerable come into being. How is this civilization—the British Oriental political civilization of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—to be described? It is not the West European liberal system transplanted to the East, for much of the old Oriental structure of politics had been preserved, such as the administrative system (in part), the use of pomp and circumstance, the reliance on police, the exploitation of the age-old prestige of government. But this ancient machinery had been touched by a wing; it operated—with lapses—as if informed by a liberal spirit.

[ii]

Perhaps the essential features of the civilization can be shown by a contrast between the presuppositions in the British countries and those outside the Empire. Lord Cromer describes how a young Bengali, asked to consider the perils of brigandage if British rule was withdrawn—this was long before Indian politics had developed as they have done since—replied, 'I should have no fear. I should apply to the High Court for protection.' That law was always ultimately supreme had become an axiom; its breakdown was unthinkable. Contrast with this the following snatches of conversation which I noted down recently at a Sunday afternoon tea-party with Christians in a capital in the Middle East.

'Naturally when you take prisoners you want to trouble them a little.'

'We trouble the Jews a little. When we are in trouble they come and say, "Where is your Christ now?" '

'He hung me upside down for twelve hours.'

'He was unkind. We killed his brother, so he drove his tank over our men, women and children.'

'She was the worst woman our people ever produced, and to think we stopped her being troubled by her landlord. We spit on her coffin.'

'This lot of Armenians revolted from that lot of Armenians, so both were massacred, but which were the Bolsheviks we never found out.'

'What we did was all propaganda.'

This was a society where a liberal way of life was not taken for granted, and where high-handed action, kidnapping, and the need for self-defence was not extraordinary.[1]

The British Oriental civilization was a changing thing; what was found at one half century did not exist in the next: moreover what was true of India was often not true of Ceylon or Malaya. But certain characteristics distinguished it during nearly all its phases and, except for certain peculiar areas, in all the countries it touched.

[iii]

The British system was a truncated liberalism: liberalism without self-government. It was liberal in that the rights of the subject were respected, and authoritarian, at least partially, in that the subjects did not rule.

In all the countries of the Empire, the governments left the individual more free from control than had ever before been known in Asia. So long as he did not infringe the law—an up-to-date and reasonably humane law—the individual was free to do what he pleased. He could travel, choose his career, educate his children, speculate, and (within very wide limits) agitate, as he wished. The individual was left alone partly because of the very backwardness in economic policy for which British administration is now often condemned. There was a relatively free Press.

Thus far the type of state was the liberal one of Victorian England. But it was authoritarian in that the peoples were quite clearly not sovereign. In the central period of the civilization, government was not the agent by which the people worked its will, and though the development of popular assemblies began to bring about a change, government until very recently has remained something superimposed.

The system was unstable because peoples cannot rest in a liberty half-way house. Men desire not only the negative freedom of not being interfered with by government, but what has been called the 'positive freedom' of creating, by means of the power of the State, the environment in which they are to live. Thus, when they are freed from the power of government operating as a despotism without principles such as had been the traditional Oriental State, they, after a period of drawing breath and relaxation, seek to gain control of the government to use it to transform their society. Any healthy social class presses for a share of political power and resents paternalism.

[1] Admittedly in parts of some provinces of India—such as Sind—conditions in some of the rural areas have hardly been more secure.

In the British Asiatic Empire, this demand grew up first in India, and was reflected in Ceylon and Burma. When it arose, the British had to decide whether in defence of their regime to curtail the freedom of the subject, thus ending the liberalism which was the central feature and perhaps the justification of the Empire, or to yield to it, thus ending the Empire itself. They chose the latter course. Self-government, especially in its parliamentary form, was accepted as being the rational aim of political parties; the only difference between the British and the nationalists lay in whether the goal was far or near.[1] The popular assemblies, from being mere consultative bodies, turned into the repositories, at least in theory, of ultimate power.

The British Oriental civilization, then, flourished at its most characteristic form in the period of relaxation between the ending of the old Oriental systems of government and the gradual transfer of British power to the nationalist parties.

What were the features which at that time distinguished this civilization from that of the past or of other Asiatic countries?

It possessed the following characteristics or notes:

1. Law became sovereign. However gross may have been at times the travesty of criminal justice due to inefficiency of the courts or inappropriateness of their procedure, there was in fact the rule of law. Law circumscribed the acts of government. From this came a protection of the individual greater than that found in many democratic states.

It is true that in times of commotion, government, especially its local officers, acted in a high-handed way and the ordinary freedoms were suspended. But these times were exceptional.

By law, all persons were equal in the eyes of the judge. In a society with such divisions as the Indian, this was perhaps not enough to establish equality as a fact. Nevertheless, the idea did spread that every individual, whatever his place in the social scale, had rights which were inviolable.

2. There was an intense political activity. If the nationalist parties are only to-day gaining actual power, they have for decades shackled the power of government. The Press, the new techniques of demonstration and agitation, were so many hooks with which they could pull the bureaucracy down from the clouds. Thereby was spread the concept of citizenship, in this form unknown until modern times in the East. If in British Asia there have seemed at times to be too

[1] Even a generation ago such progressive liberals as Lord Bryce and Lord Morley were writing that democratic government would for many decades be an impossibility in India.

many cooks shouting their advice, this has been the necessary stage in any society where large numbers of people have for the first time discovered that they are citizens.

Only as British rule drew to its close did some nationalists begin to favour some other forms of government than the parliamentary or genuinely democratic.

3. In spite of this popular activity, the British Asiatic civilization differed from the political civilization in the British Isles or the Dominions by the failure to link government and people in unity and trust. In India, Burma, Ceylon, government, if regarded on the one hand by long tradition as a kind of paternal protector, was also the object of the same hatred, suspicion and fantasy which according to Freudian psychology children often feel towards their fathers. Perhaps the British might have done more than they did to change the demeanour of government. But if the British did not make government popular, they permitted what was unthinkable in the Oriental states of the past, an organized, legalized opposition.

4. Life was regarded as a thing valuable in itself. Bloodlessness was a kind of cult; nor do such occasional bloody incidents as the massacre of Amritsar in 1919 disprove this, for such violence on the part of government has been as seldom as it was startling. The military arm was always subordinate to the civil arm. British power was exercised with its arms disguised, and in peace-time a soldier was seldom seen in most parts of India, Burma, Malaya or Ceylon. One reason for conciliatoriness lay, of course, in the very small size of the white force ever at the disposal of government, but here also liberal principle was at work.

5. Personal values were stressed as opposed to State values. The assumption was that the citizen should live as a normal human being and that the political temperature should be kept low. Heroic aims were at a discount. If it were desired to express in a nutshell the exact opposite of the outlook of the British administrator, could anything be found better than this sentence of Nietzsche: 'We must learn to sacrifice many people, and to take our cause seriously enough not to spare mankind'?[1] This cool attitude, radiating from government,

[1] In an essay on Alfred de Vigny, John Stuart Mill makes this comment on the matter-of-factness of the Victorian political outlook. 'For politics, except in connection with worldly advancement, the Englishman keeps a bye-corner of his mind. It is but a small minority among Englishmen who can comprehend that there are nations among whom politics, or the pursuit of social well-being, is a passion as intense, as absorbing, influencing as much the whole tendencies of the character, as the religious feelings or those of worldly interest.'

chilled indeed the generous minds of the country, and contributed to the sense of frustration which was the chief political disease of British Asia.

Nevertheless in this atmosphere, one very valuable practice developed; and this was to apply the ordinary standards of morality to acts of State. Who can question that, sensitive as were the religions of the East to the value of the individual soul, the political practice in most Oriental countries had been rough and ready and only moderately influence by religious idea? Living often more or less in a state of siege, traditional governments had been unable to be scrupulous. But in the British period it began to be assumed that government were bound by moral rules not essentially different from those of individuals.

There have been other important ideas and presuppositions of political life in British territory, all more or less novel in the Orient. There has been the discovery that the pattern of the State can be regulated by a constitution. There has been the discovery that by means of law the organization of society can be changed by human will, and that man is therefore far more able to control his destiny than was formerly supposed. And there has been the cult of revolution, also a novelty; it has become accepted that it is normal to find in every country a kind of political priesthood of revolutionaries dedicated to conspire for the periodical blowing-up of society.

The civilization produced a new type of human being—British Oriental Man—just as the Roman Empire produced its own standard type of man. And as in Rome citizens shared in the Roman qualities to a greater or less degree, so in the British Empire; the Indian and the Cingalese were metropolitan man, the Burmese the provincial man, the Malays the frontier man. The qualities of the type when fully developed were indeed very much like those of the responsible British citizen; he was energetic but incurious, spoke good English, valued words, was Philistine in the other arts, admired self-reliance and suspected the government of the worst intentions.

One other feature must be noticed. The civilization, like that of the Roman Empire, was an urban one. The townsman flourished most, often drawing his wealth, like the citizen of Roman Asia, from an exploitation of the peasantry which the peace and institutions of the Empire made more thorough than in the past. It is true that new institutions and new economic trends changed the life of the peasant; but by no stretch of interpretation can it be said that the farmers entered on a new high culture, though of course they benefited from the universal peace.

Such was the civilization of British Asia. It had many defects. Government may have abdicated its authority too far. Its slowness in providing education and health services was to the public disadvantage. Society was left too much to the buffets of economic blasts; and the suffering which this caused, described above in the case of India and Burma, has to be set off against the benefits of freedom. Such action as was taken by government had tended indeed to destroy the old social order and to resolve it into a collection of individuals who were thus rendered the less able to look after themselves. Modern anthropologists say that man is happiest when he is functioning as a member of a group and that the disease of modern life is that the individual is not properly adjusted to the group. If this is so, Great Britain has helped to spread the disease in the East.

Yet the merits of the system are not to be lightly treated. For the first time in centuries the heaviness of government had been lifted from society which had thus been given the chance to evolve something new from its own resources. The individual had been given his head; and if new ideas were not engendered, at least all the popular ideas from the outer world were adopted.

Freedom without self-government had meant also freedom without some of its usually attendant evils. 'The one pervading evil of democracy', wrote Lord Acton, 'is the tyranny of the majority.' But while the British held power, minorities were free as never before. In these conditions they may indeed have developed characteristics which made it very difficult that they should ever live agreeably with the majorities. Yet the degree of the well-being of minorities has always been a good clue to the worth of a civilization.

[iv]

Some observers, while not denying the qualities described above, some good, some bad, would say that the significant facts about the Empire were not its political life or organization, but its economic system, and that this was one of imperialist exploitation. The pomp, philosophy and idealist protestations of the Empire which diversified its drabness are in their eyes merely a façade hiding the extraction from colonial labour of what a Marxist would call their surplus value.

It has been suggested that in India at least a joint British-Indian commission should be set up to try to discover what were the true facts; but the difficulty is to determine the truth. With facts so

genuinely hard to interpret and so temptingly easy to distort, no agreed conclusion is likely ever to be reached. Certainly the motives of the British in maintaining their vast police mission in Asia were very mixed, and economic advantage was undeniably one. Legends abound, such as of the East India Company having run through Bengal like the barber in Struwelpeter cutting off the thumbs of Indian weavers in order to prevent their competing against the Company's textile imports. Such stories may be absurd, but few advocates would enjoy defending the British mercantile record of the late eighteenth century.[1] Nor was there any lack of criticism in England. Sheridan remarked that the East India Company wielded the truncheon with one hand, while with the other it picked a pocket; the Company, he said combined the meanness of a pedlar with the profligacy of a pirate. Half a century later when the English in the Orient were believed to have reformed themselves, a *Times* correspondent said of the commercial men in India that many had lived so long among Asiatics as to have imbibed their worst feelings and to have forgotten the sentiments of civilization and religion; they were as cruel as Covenanters without their faith and as relentless as Inquisitors without their fanaticism. Political power was certainly used at times to keep conditions favourable for British trade as long as possible; and, perhaps even against true British interest, at one time to delay the industrialization of the East.

Certain facts on the other side must, however, be remembered. Against every clear example of exploitation, it is possible to find some economic benefit which the East would not have enjoyed but for the British connection. The economic development of the countries offsetting the so-called 'drain' from them of payment on capital;[2] the undoubted cheapness of the administration; the control by government of the European business men; the transfer of the entire cost of naval defence to Great Britain and the relatively low defence budgets made possible by British power and policy; the vast saving represented by the complete internal tranquillity—all these would need to be balanced in the elaborate and indeed impossible sum of economic arithmetic to discover whether the East had materially benefited or suffered from the British connection. Indeed perhaps the heaviest complaint against Great Britain might be that its capitalists had been

[1] The exploitation was worst in Bengal, and its memory is said to account for the racial feeling there still being stronger than in other provinces of India.

[2] Much capital was lost in unsuccessful ventures, as, for example, in Malaya. This must be set against the high returns in successful ventures.

neither daring nor adventurous enough, and had neglected many of the opportunities of developing the resources of their Empire.[1]

[v]

Is the British Oriental civilization—with its parliamentary institutions, with its emphasis on law, and the rights of the subject, and abhorrence of violence—likely to persist after the withdrawal of British power?

The weakness of the British construction lies in what was noticed above as its chief peculiarity. It is a political civilization. The system does not rise out of, does not express, a lively, coherent, new, tough philosophy or a transformation of instinct or character. It is like one of the floating isles of Laputa in *Gulliver's Travels* in which were all kinds of admirable things but which was suspended far above the ordinary world. The British influence never transformed the ancient societies so radically that they matched the political system which it imposed on them. A new machine was fitted on to an old system. Men tolerated one another not because they had become more tolerant but because they were compelled to do so.[2]

Consider the situation in India, the centre of the civilization. The new political organization is really understood and accepted by a comparatively small part of the people, the anglicized upper class which has hitherto dominated the politics of the country.

Will their ascendancy continue? Below them rises a formidable new

[1] To acquit the British of economic exploitation would not be to say that their economic policies had been wise or enterprising. For example, the economic condition of India just before the war hardly made a very inspiring picture. After a brisk start with state economic activity at the middle of the last century, the Government of India seemed overcome with lassitude or complacency. But its achievement can be underrated. Its enterprise in irrigation has been described so often that the world is tired of the subject, but is none the less extraordinary. A recent report of the Central Board of Irrigation, under the Interim Government, shows that India leads the world in that art, and that the area irrigated annually exceeds seventy million acres, this being more than the combined total in the United States of America, Russia, Mexico, Japan, Egypt, Spain, Italy, France, Chile, and Java. The percentage of area irrigated to the total area of the country is also higher in India than in any other country.

[2] Lord Acton wrote: 'Napoleon once consulted the cleverest of the politicians who served him respecting the durability of some of his institutions. "Ask yourself", was the answer, "what it would cost you to destroy them. If the destruction would cost no effort, you have created nothing. Politically only that which resists endures." ' It would be interesting to apply this test to India.

class, the army of minor clerks, teachers, technicians, foremen, a class which is increasing rapidly and will do so the more that India develops its industry and administration. While it has acquired the technical skill to play its part in modern mechanical life, it understands little of the philosophy on which western society reposes. Trained in the technical schools now being founded, not in a university, it is interested in economic betterment rather than in the liberal rights of man. Power is likely to pass slowly from the upper class to this broader section, and leaders, if still drawn from the élite, are likely to seek from this lower class their principal support and to reflect their sentiments. Still deeper in society, below the middle section, lies the mass of the people—the peasantry and the urban proletariat, the illiterate tenant farmer, the coolie, and the mill-hand. How would these explain the difference between liberal civilization, communist civilization, and the ancient civilization of their ancestors?

Here is the canker of the British world in Asia. Only a minority of the peoples have been converted to the liberal outlook. And in all the countries of British Asia the gulf is deepening between the privileged classes who understand the new institutions (even if not enamoured of them) and the mass of the people, who are indifferent to them.

A second weakness is that even the privileged class which is liberal in outlook is desperately unhappy and unstable. This is true of all the lands of the Empire, but especially, as we have seen, of India. One part of the mind of this class is modern, the other traditional, and in the conflict of the two lies the drama of contemporary politics.[1] It has been said, with that exaggeration which emphasizes a truth, that most of the more advanced people in Asia live on the edge of a nervous collapse, the break with the past having been too violent. Because they have become liberals by a short cut, because their outlook is new and sudden, and has not evolved slowly step by step each generation, they are liable to fly off in a volatile way in some new direction. In this as in so much else they resemble the intelligentsia of Tsarist Russia, of whom it was noticed that, as they had no roots in the past, they were willing to experiment more daringly than their contemporaries in western countries. If this flexibility of mind is in some ways an advantage, it also makes it easy for them to be swept off their feet by new

[1] It is always instructive to notice what types of life a class of people admires. The Anglicized upper classes in India still in their hearts revere the old-fashioned hero, the mystic and recluse. As yet, in spite of the business developments in India and the spread of the cinema, they have not taken to western or American heroes.

fashions in ideas. These, imported from the totalitarian countries, are already making their way. They attract a generation which has felt the weight of too great liberty. Moreover, since Oriental nationalists have felt themselves for so long powerless, it would be natural if they now made a cult of power.

Some of the features of the British civilization are already outmoded. The forms of government in the twentieth century cannot be what they were in the nineteenth. The extreme freedom which was allowed to economic enterprise will certainly be curtailed. The question is whether the more justifiable political liberties will survive in spite of this. The grand fact which the East has learned during its association with Europe is that the State can systematically organize society for the achievement of certain objects. Nothing can stop the East experimenting with this knowledge, neither the danger that government might meet such opposition as to cause breakdown, nor fear of reducing society once again to virtual slavery, nor the warning of sages such as Mr. Gandhi; indeed the more generous the mind, the more it is set upon the endeavour. But the more thorough the organization, the less likely is a generally liberal framework of society to be preserved. The more that governments apply themselves to economic control the more authoritarian they will necessarily become. Similarly if governments try to reduce the gross inequalities in society, they may have to take powers which in the nineteenth century would have been regarded as tyrannical.[1]

Even the virtues of the British system begin to become wearisome: it is an Aristides civilization. For more than a century everybody has been compelled to live according to rules, and these may seem trammels to the ardent who desire a speedy reform of society or the victory of their cause. Unlike Europe, British Asia has not been recently sated with violence and arbitrariness, and thinks of sterner if more heroic times with a certain frivolous incomprehension of what they may mean.

The durability of the liberal spirit is the more uncertain because in all the countries of British Asia there are likely to be increasing stresses and strains in the social and economic systems. British rule has been like a hot-house, keeping alive much which in less pampered conditions would probably have perished, and social change, even social revolution, is overdue. British influence has set afoot revolutions, but

[1] To take an example. India's poverty is due partly to a large section of the population being either idle or ill. Farms are so small that the farmer spends part of the year doing nothing; and because he is poor he is constantly sick and his efficiency suffers. The remedy is a gigantic reorganization of the country's labour power which would perhaps need totalitarian methods.

has not completed them by forming a new society with a stability of its own; instead it has created everywhere, in institutions and in minds, combinations which are radically unstable. They threaten to break apart, and a liberal system has seldom stood the test of great social tension even in the most sophisticated societies.

Easy come, easy go. The liberal civilization came more or less by chance from the association of the ancient world with Great Britain, and as easily it may go. It is perhaps simpler to turn Oriental man into an imitation Bolshevik, competent and ruthless, than into an imitation western liberal.

The age-old tradition of government in the East is that men are desperately wicked and must be ruled from above. Though a few of the leaders such as Jawarharhal Nehru have genuinely a democratic outlook the majority, in spite of using the slogans of freedom, do not really believe that the masses can play a truly active role. In all the non-British parts of Asia—in China, Siam, Indo-China, Java—the trend is towards authoritarian party government, with the masses providing a kind of conscripted demonstration of confidence. This may go with an ostentatious defence of 'oriental culture'.

The summing up would perhaps be that throughout the British Asiatic Empire new political and social institutions and a new political spirit were brought into being, copied from the West, not native to the East. They were like a building set up, not natural like the products of the soil, and thus more likely than these to be shaken down should an earthquake occur. Beneficent as they have been, their appropriateness is doubted. Men transact their political debates, carry out their business enterprises, settle their disputes in ways which are felt to be provisional and temporary. But since all the social and economic life has been based on these institutions, to change them is likely to cause bloodshed and catastrophe. Thus the more pessimistic critics would say that British influence has fostered a false if luxuriant civilization, doomed to wither as soon as that influence was withdrawn.

The countries of British Asia, especially India, recall curiously the vision which many had of London in the uneasy months before the outbreak of the recent war, a city never richer, smarter, or more entertaining than then, but to the perceptive eye already doomed, and with the wings of the angel of death audible.[1]

[1] People in England in 1940 derived a kind of exhilaration from the destruction and breakdown of old conventions in that year, so weary were they of the inglorious civilization of the previous twenty years. But as in the next five years hardship followed hardship, so they became more nostalgic for what was lost. So will it be perhaps in Asia.

[vi]

The bane of the British civilization was to disintegrate society: to cause neurosis.

From society in this state, revolution often results.

In a novel of Dostoievsky, a revolutionary leader, in a society demoralized in a rather similar way, explains his plans, and foreshadows what actually took place in Russia:

'Do you know that we are tremendously powerful already? Our party does not consist only of those who commit murder and arson. Listen. A teacher who laughs with children at God is on our side. The juries who acquit every criminal are ours. The prosecutor who trembles at a trial for fear he should not seem advanced enough is ours. Among officials and literary men we have lots, lots, and they don't know it themselves. On all sides we see vanity puffed up out of all proportion; brutal, monstrous appetites. Do you know how many we shall catch by little ready-made ideas? When I left Russia, the dictum that crime was insanity was all the rage; I come back and I find that crime is no longer insanity but simply a gallant protest. But these are only the first-fruits. Oh, this generation has only to grow up. What a pity there's no proletariat. But there will be, there will be; we are going that way.

'Well, and there will be an upheaval. There's going to be such an upset as the world has never seen before. Russia will be overwhelmed with darkness, and the earth will weep for its old gods.'

This character might feel quite at home in India, Ceylon or Burma of the present time.

PART TWO

RUSSIAN EMPIRE

RUSSIAN EMPIRE

The British Empire in Asia never put forward any appeal which overtrumped nationalism. Thus, when national movements reached a certain force, and the British Government decided, wisely, not to try to repress them forcibly, the Empire had either to break up or (the better alternative) to be converted into a league of equal States.

The other principal western empire in Asia, the Russian, had a different history. For in the Russian Empire after the revolution a new ideal was invented which had as great an appeal as nationalism —the set of ideas summed up in Communism. It is true that Communism has repelled as well as attracted; and it may be that even now the Asiatic subjects of Russia do not obey the Soviet Government quite as readily as is supposed. Nevertheless in the Soviet Union there is not the same disruptive strain of nationalism as in the British Asiatic Empire, and this is because Communism, or at least the belief in the Russian Government as the champion of material progress, has set up a countervailing force of unity.

The Russian Empire did not come into being with the Bolshevik Revolution. It has a history about half as long as the British Empire in Asia. For the study of modern Asia, its history is no less important.

CHAPTER ONE

THE TSARS IN ASIA

[i]

Besides Britain, another European power in the nineteenth century expanded its authority over Asia. The advance of Russia into that continent, as fateful as the spread of the Anglo-Saxon peoples into North America and due perhaps to show all its consequences for the world only at the end of another century or more, began later than the British advance and was more leisurely. Because of its slowness, it appeared to some more permanent; a province once annexed to Russia remained annexed, but an Asiatic province of the British Empire expected always to regain its freedom ultimately.

The British Empire in its whole compass falls into two halves. The first is the empty lands of America, Australia and South Africa which were colonized by Anglo-Saxon people and became the self-governing Dominions, the second the ancient and settled territories into which the British came as administrators but not as settlers. Similarly the Russian Empire in Asia has also two divisions. Siberia, the whole of which Russia had occupied by the mid-nineteenth century, was a more or less empty land suitable for colonization and resembled Canada or Australia. The steppe lands and Khanates of central Asia on the other hand were ancient lands and thus resembled the Asiatic parts of the British Empire. Certain parallels between the British government in India and the Tsarist government in European Russia have already been noticed, but it is instructive to study also what the Tsars and their successors have accomplished as an imperial power in Asia, and that in circumstances so similar to those which faced the British.

Russian expansion into Asia was a riposte, for Russia, existing first in the nuclear form of the Grand Duchy of Muscovy, had for centuries before been on the defensive against Asia. During the later

Middle Ages it was the tributary of the Oriental Empire of the Mongols on the Volga river, the successors of Jenghiz Khan; and even when freed from that and beginning to devour slowly in its turn the Eastern territories from which it had been overawed, it still had to the south, occupying lands which seemed naturally Russian, the Oriental Empire of the Ottoman Turks.

The history of its effective expansion begins, like that of some other great movements, with a forgery. This was of a Testament of Peter the Great; but the forgery was made not by Russians but by their enemies. The document, alleged to have been stolen from the archives in St. Petersburg by the Chevalier d'Eon, a French officer in Russian service, and given by him to Louis XV, appeared first in a book published in Paris in 1812 by a propagandist of the Emperor Napoleon. In the testament Peter exhorts his heirs to keep as their persistent aim the spread of Russian power over the Asiatic continent, beginning with the subjection of Persia, the penetration to the Persian Gulf, and the re-establishment of the trade of the Levant, and ending with the advance to the Indies, which are described as the treasure house of the world. By its fabrication it was intended to frighten other countries at the Russian ambition, and several thousand copies of the book were taken on the Russian campaign by the propagandist staff of Napoleon. Once current, it enjoyed, like other forgeries such as the Protocol of the Elders of Zion, a stubborn life, and flourished especially whenever French and Russian relations were strained. In 1836 an historical novelist, a collaborator of Dumas, produced what he claimed were the memoirs of the Chevalier d'Eon, giving fresh details about the Testament; in 1839 a Polish author added the exact circumstances in which Peter—in his tent after the Battle of Pultava —had written it; and the legend was added to during the Crimean War.

The document, though a forgery, was an intelligent anticipation. The Empress Catherine had ended the danger from the Turks; the Tsar Paul at the start of the nineteenth century ordered in a kind of futurist vision an expedition against India; in 1804 Russia began seriously to threaten Persia; under Nicholas I it established firmly its rule in the hitherto independent Caucasus, which was to be the base for its grand advance to the centre of the Asiatic continent. Thereafter it maintained a pressure on all the lands on its Asiatic frontiers, moving forward as if driven by an inner energy which would not let it rest until it reached the boundary of a strong neighbour on which it could repose. And no such boundary lay in fact in the barren lands between its own outposts and those of the outposts of the far-

away British Empire in Asia. For nearly a century the Russian drive was continuous. A rhythm has been detected by which its outward pressure swayed first towards Europe—for Russia was also expanding over the Slavonic countries and towards Constantinople—then back to Asia, and then to Europe again, according to where it met currently the least resistance.

[ii]

The first Russian moves towards Central Asia had been little more than the accepting of the transfer of allegiance of Moslem princes from the Mongol to the Russian Empire, by which Russia quietly inherited part of the realm of Jenghiz Khan, and the taking up by Russians of the steppe lands of the nomads. How this was contrived among a tribe called the Bashkirs is shown in a novel of the last century by the writer Aksakoff.

'If tales were true, you had only to invite a dozen of the native Bashkir chiefs in certain districts to partake of your hospitality: you provided two or three fat sheep, for them to kill and dress in their own fashion; you produced a bucket of whisky, with several buckets of strong fermented Bashkir mead and a barrel of home-made country beer—which proves by the way that even in old days the Bashkirs were not strict Muhammedans—and the rest was as simple as A.B.C. It was said, indeed, that an entertainment of this kind might last a week or even a fortnight: it was impossible for Bashkirs to do business in a hurry, and every day it was necessary to ask the question, "Well, good friend, is it time now to discuss my business?" The guests had been eating and drinking, without exaggeration, all day and all night; but, if they were not completely satisfied with the entertainment, if they had not had enough of their monotonous singing and playing on the pipe, and their singular dances in which they stood up or crouched down on the same spot of ground, then the greatest of the chiefs, clicking his tongue and wagging his head, would answer with much dignity, and without looking his questioner in the face: "The time has not come; bring us another sheep!" The sheep was forthcoming as a matter of course, with fresh supplies of beer and spirits; and the tipsy Bashkirs began again to sing and dance, dropping off to sleep wherever they felt inclined. But everything in the world has an end; and a day came at last when the chief would look his host straight in the face and say: "We are obliged to you, *bátyushka*, ever so much obliged! And now, what is it that you want?" The rest of the transaction followed a regular fashion. The customer

began with a shrewdness native to your true Russian : he assured the Bashkir that he did not want anything at all; but, having heard that the Bashkirs were exceedingly kind people, he had come to Ufa on purpose to form a friendship with them, and so on. Then the conversation would somehow come round to the vast extent of the Bashkir territory and the unsatisfactory ways of the present tenants, who might pay their rent for a year or two and then pay no more and yet continue to live on the land, as if they were its rightful owners; it was rash to evict them, and a lawsuit became unavoidable. These remarks, which were true enough to the facts, were followed by an obliging offer to relieve the kind Bashkirs of some part of the land which was such a burden to them; and in the end whole districts were bought and sold for a mere song. The bargain was clinched by a legal document, but the amount of land was never stated in it, and could not be, as it had never been surveyed. As a rule the boundaries were settled by landmarks of this kind: "from the mouth of such and such a stream as far as the dead beech-tree on the wolf-track, and from the dead beech-tree in a bee-line to the watershed, and from the watershed to the fox-earths, and from the fox-earths to the hollow tree at Soltamratka", and so on. So precise and permanent were the boundaries enclosing ten or twenty or thirty thousands desyatinas of land! And the price of all this might be one hundred roubles and presents worth another hundred, not including the cost of the entertainments.'[1]

The principal nomads on the route to Central Asia were, however, not the Bashkirs but the Kazaks, or, as they were in the nineteenth century incorrectly called, the Kirghiz. These were divided among themselves into two Hordes; the Lesser Horde had towards the end of the eighteenth century voluntarily asked for Russian protection; and in the 'sixties of last century the entire Kirghiz Steppe, lying between Siberia and the River Jaxartes, was made effectively a part of the Russian Empire.

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Passing beyond this steppe Russia came in touch, no longer with nomads but with more settled peoples organized in regular Islamic states. These were the three Khanates of Bokhara, Khiva and Kokand.

[1] The Bashkirs at an earlier period made several revolts against the Russians, some of which were suppressed with great savagery. On one occasion the whole of the high Bashkir aristocracy was invited to a feast and afterwards thrown into the freezing river through a hole in the ice. It is said that government policy at one time was to encourage eminent Bashkirs to drink themselves to death.

They were the heart of the Islamic world of Central Asia, the succession states built by Uzbek princes out of the shattered fifteenth-century Empire of Timur. They included Turcomans, Kalmuks, Kazaks, Uzbeks, Persians, Chinese, Hindus, Jews and Armenians, and were the great markets for tea, gold cloth, shawls, opium, books and metal-work; they contained some of the most celebrated centres of Islamic religion and learning and were thus of interest to all the Moslem world. The Amir of Bokhara bore the title of 'Bow Bearer of the Caliph of Rum', that is, of the Ottoman Sultan.

Since the achievements of an empire must be judged in the light of what it superseded, the nature of the Khanates deserves study. The governments of the Khans were typical of the Islamic civilization which throughout parts of Asia and parts of Africa was being overthrown or transformed by the western powers. Before their surrender they were described by a succession of English and other visitors in the early nineteenth century. Matthew Arnold's *Sick King in Bohkara* is a side-light on the popular interest they aroused.

Most remarkable of the visitors was the Reverend Joseph Wolff who in 1844 made a journey to try to rescue two English agents, Colonel Stoddart and Captain Conolly. These had been sent by the Government of India in the haphazard method of Oriental diplomacy of the time on a half official mission and, imprisoned by the Khan, had been left by that Government to their fate. Whether Stoddart or Conolly were alive or dead caused a public interest not unlike that in our day over the fate of the explorer, Colonel Fawcett, in Brazil: and both events excited a memorable book from their would-be rescuers. The son of a Jewish rabbi, Wolff was born in 1795 in Germany. He left his home because he desired to become a Christian, was received into the Catholic Church in 1812, and studied Oriental languages at Rome as a pupil of the College of Propaganda; from this he was expelled for erroneous opinions. Thereupon he joined the Church of England, and became in alternating periods a country parson and a missionary calling himself the Apostle of Our Lord Jesus Christ for Palestine, Persia, Bokhara and Balkh. He attracted the friendship of odd characters of the time such as Sir Charles Napier, the Joshua-like Commander-in-Chief in India, and Drummond, the Irvingite and one of the more engaging eccentric members of Parliament. At one time he devoted himself to the discovery of the lost ten tribes of Israel, but his principal passion was the conversion of the Jews to Christianity, especially those in the more inaccessible places. Convinced that most of the world was leagued against him, he saw marvels and dangers everywhere he went.

When Wolff arrived on his mission in Bokhara, the Amir, who had in fact already executed Stoddart and Conolly, seems to have been at a loss to divine his purpose. Wolff describes his first audience. He bowed repeatedly to the Amir, saying 'Peace be with the King'; he carried an open Bible and wore a clergyman's gown and doctor's hood, explaining the red of the hood as showing that he was ready to give his blood for his faith. The Amir burst out laughing and said, 'What an extraordinary man this Englishman is, in his eyes and his dress, and the book in his hand.' Wolff was lodged outside the city, and, as far as can be made out from his confused narrative, there followed a period while the Amir and his ministers debated whether he should be beheaded. To pass the time both Amir and Vizier sent messages to him with such questions as the following: 'Are you able to wake the dead?' 'When will the day of resurrection take place?' 'Why does the English Queen's husband not govern her?' 'Why are there no camels in England?' 'Would the English kill an ambassador from Bokhara?' 'What kind of a sovereign is it that cannot take away any life she pleases?' 'Who was Napoleon?' 'Could the British make a bridge over the Oxus?'

Wolff's account, borne out by other witnesses, is of a state where the Amir had allowed his personal debauchery to overstep the usual limit imposed by custom, where there was the confusion usual to Oriental monarchies of this kind, but where the mass of the people were not ground down with exceptional severity, the government's inefficiency giving them a certain protection. If justice was harsh, it was often evaded. The local chieftains, the begs, were kept in check by the Amir. Spies were a principal instrument of government; every letter in and out of Bokhara was intercepted and read by the Amir himself. The Amir never moved without being accompanied by his whole army, for only when it was under his eye could he be sure of its loyalty. The past still lived. 'People conversed about Tamerlaine as though he were dead but yesterday. I also heard that Jenghiz Khan had a Jew from Germany as his secretary. They preferred in general Tamerlaine to Jenghiz Khan.'

Ultimately Wolff was allowed to depart. His final words are significant:

'There is the impression, from the Dardanelles to the Oxus, and from there to the utmost boundaries of Tibet that England and Russia shall be conquerors of the world, and the people are not dissatisfied with it, but, on the contrary, wish that event may soon take place.'[1]

[1] Nevertheless the Bokharans had no illusions about Russia. A traveller a little before Wolff had written: 'Bokharans say, "Look at the Russians

[iv]

For the Khanates, that event did soon take place. Russia had made a badly planned expedition against Khiva in 1839; the disaster it suffered was a miniature parallel of the catastrophe which befell the British expedition to Afghanistan at the same time. In the 'sixties Russia advanced in earnest; the Khanates brought on their destruction by their levies on Russian traders, and by permitting, or proving themselves unable to prevent, attacks by their tribal subjects on Russian caravans. That they had survived so long was because the Russian Government, advancing towards Central Asia, trenched on the British sphere of influence and proceeded with caution and a certain amount of duplicity. When it launched the attack on the Khanates, it represented it as having been made by local commanders without authority, and these were recalled but at the same time rewarded. The campaigns, it was said, were due to St. Anne's fever—the fever of officers to be decorated with the St. Anne's Cross.

Thus the pre-Bolshevik Russian Empire took shape. Kokand was annexed by Russia outright. Parts of Bokhara and Khiva, including the famous town of Samarkand, 'Paradise of the World', were also annexed, and though what remained of these states was left with a nominal independence, they were thenceforward bound to Russia in treaties of subordinate alliance rather like those of the Indian States with the British Crown. The expansive thrust ended in the 'eighties with the subjection of the last of the wild Turcoman tribes in the lands east of the Caspian Sea.

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As Russia rolled slowly forward, its advance caused alarm and counter-manœuvre in the British Empire. Even the most matter of fact of the British seemed to see the beginning of an Anglo-Russian combat for supremacy in Asia; and in Kipling's time the army officers in India thought of Cossacks as the established enemy just as those in England saw the French or German armies. But the century passed without open war. Distances between the bases of the Russian and British armies were so immense, the means of transport

in Bokhara, at their life, liberty and comfort, and compare it with the black bread and unrelenting tyranny which they experience in their native land". Last, not least, they referred to their cruel banishment to Siberia which they spoke of with shuddering horror, and stated that on some occasions it had driven Russians voluntarily to betake themselves to Bokhara.'

still so limited, that each country had room to hit about it without actively coming into conflict. Central Asia was a kind of giant cotton-wool, absorbing and muffling blows. Moreover the great powers in the nineteenth century feared the consequences of hostilities between them, and did not regard Asia, in spite of its riches and lure, as worth the price. During the Crimea War the British seem deliberately to have avoided carrying hostilities into Asia, as they might have done advantageously, especially in the Caucasus, and were, in fact, blamed for their caution by those in India who favoured a forward policy.

Bloodless conflict, however, there was in plenty. On each side the government gave licence to its agents to plot and counterplot to the limit of causing an actual explosion, and a kind of game grew up with recognized though unadmitted conventions. Struggles of this kind—for diplomatic influence and vantage points—are familiar in history. The combat was fought out partly over the control of the intervening states, especially Persia and Afghanistan, and the position of these has been compared to that of Armenia in the century-long struggle in antiquity between the Roman and Persian Empires. Their fate is worth studying as a case history of what happens to that entity often so useful to the general international well-being, the buffer state.

CHAPTER TWO

TSARIST ADMINISTRATION

[i]

The lands for which Russia, as a result of its conquests, had to provide or supervise the administration fell into two halves. One part, the earliest conquered, was the steppe country of the Kazaks, a prairie land like much of South Russia. Its inhabitants were chiefly nomads. Its beauty at certain times of the year when it is covered with wild tulips, poppies and geraniums excited the Russian lyrical feeling for wide landscapes. The other half, the territories which had belonged to the Khanates of Bokhara, Khiva and Kokand, was desert intersected with very rich oases. Here was scenery which was the quintessence of what the Moslem East has meant for the European imagination. Walled towns, gardens hidden behind high enclosures, a mixed Turk and Mongol population, sombre in expression but dressed in Joseph-like striped coats, camels, donkeys, abundance of fruit—melons, peaches, apricots—dust, sand, beggars and pariah dogs—such have been the oasis cities for centuries. 'Silken raiment, stores of rice, grape syrup, squares of coloured ice.' Visitors remarked that houses, mosques, palaces all seemed to be crumbling, and that everywhere were broken potsherds, and probably even at the most prosperous periods most of these towns have seemed ever since their foundation to be in decay, so unremitting has been the counter-offensive of the desert against the civilization which they supported.

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The political systems which Russia set up were also of two kinds. One was in the area annexed outright to the Russian Empire and directly administered; this was as large as Germany and Italy combined. The other was the still nominally independent Khanates of Bokhara and Khiva over which Russia exercised a protectorate like that of the British Government over the Indian States.

The Tsarist achievement in Asia fell in historical significance below that of the British in the same century, or that of their Bolshevik successors two or three generations later, because the Tsars never transformed the life of Central Asia in the sense of introducing a new civilization. Their regime was little more than a colonial police one, though by later standards a police surprisingly mild. Nevertheless, their administrative institutions were often interesting, and sometimes more enlightened than those which the British fostered.

At the beginning of their expansion, the Russians had been more naïve and more benevolent in intention than were the British in their corresponding period when they were setting up an administration in their first footholds in India. When in the false dawn of Russian enlightenment under Catherine II the first Kazak nomads were brought under Russian rule, the philanthropic rationalists whom the fashion of the times had promoted in her court looked upon them as deserving and unfortunate children. A man was a nomad because he was unfortunate enough to be ignorant. He did not eat bread—because he did not know its taste. He did not till fields—because he had not thought of a plough. He froze in the winter—because he did not understand carpentry. He allowed his cattle to perish—because he had not heard of sheds. The government of Catherine issued a code of regulations for the territory in which altruistic sensibility is matched with administrative absurdity. Officers were instructed to teach the nomads the use of bread, hay-cutting and simple trades. The Christian Russian government built for them Moslem mosques, and only much later did it discover that these people had been not Moslem but Shamanistic, and that the funds of the Christian government had thus been used to convert the heathen to Islam.

The nomads disappointed their benefactors. They continued to pillage Russian caravans. A more military form of government was therefore reverted to. But when in the 'sixties the Russians passed in their conquests from the steppe region to the oases of Central Asia, and had to deal with settled rather than nomadic peoples, and with an ancient civilization, their administrative problem changed in nature and became similar to that which had faced the British in India when they became heirs to the Moghuls.

[iii]

The new administration seems to have been built with little knowledge of or interest in the British system in India. This was the more surprising because to the traveller in British and Russian Asia there

were strong outward likenesses in the two areas. The material things most obvious to the eye were often the same. An American visitor describes as follows the provincial capital of Tashkent in the 'seventies:

'I seemed to be in one of the quiet little towns of central New York. The broad dusty streets shaded by double rows of trees; the small one-storied white houses set a little back from the streets with trees and a palisade in front; the large square full of turf and flowers with a little church in the middle—all combined to give me the familiar impression. The houses are comfortable, in spite of their frugality, and the great wide divans, the profusion of Turkoman carpets, the embroidered cushions, and the display of Eastern weapons, armour and utensils give them an air of elegance and luxury. No one comes to Tashkent to remain, and most of the pretty houses have been built on money loaned by the Government.'

This has a family likeness to all the cantonment cities in India culminating in New Delhi. So, too, the psychological life of these cities, inhabited chiefly by civil servants and army officers, was perhaps not very different from that in the Indian towns as described by Mr. E. M. Forster. So, too, the households of the westernized native upper classes resembled one another, with their juxtaposition of old ways and new, and their piling up in Oriental rooms of western furniture, washstands, basins, sofas, hall-stands, cheap prints and mechanical toys. So, too, the native 'collaborator', redolent of complacent cunning, his 'belly fat with unlawful mouthfuls', was the inevitable figure on the outskirts of both Russian and Indian society.

But the central spring of society was differently organized. The contrasts are instructive.

In India the new law and the law courts revolutionized social relationships throughout the country, even though the British in setting them up had not intended that this should happen; the Russians on the other hand, while introducing modern courts for graver offences, kept intact to a much greater extent the old law and the indigenous courts.[1]

The British, by imposing western ideas of land-ownership and land taxation, stamped out or reduced whole classes of proprietors and created new ones; the Russians remained content far longer with the haphazard fiscal system inherited from their predecessors, nor did they, like the British in their early days, strain the economic life by overbearing tax demands.

The British sowed the dragons' teeth of schools and universities,

[1] A curious innovation was the attempt to set up elected judges in the native courts.

and opened Oxford and Cambridge to their Asiatic subjects; in Russian Asia, education was left to the mullahs, and no student class grew up, poverty-stricken but panting to change their society into a copy of that of the West.

The British built in India a standing native army of about a quarter of a million; the Russians of two battalions.

The British shone at irrigation; the Russians at road-building.

The British government, in spite of the English tradition of local government, neglected and in some places virtually crushed the village self-government; the Russians, who were supposedly dedicated to autocratic government, introduced from the first an elective system into local administration; and though elections were usually manipulated by the civil servants, the attachment by the Russians to the system was none the less peculiar.

In one respect the Russian and British policies were alike, and that was in religious toleration and in the discouragement of all zeal by Christian missionaries. So far was this carried that in both Empires the Christian rulers were at times censured by Moslems for their indifference to their own religion.

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The other part of the Russian sphere, the Khanates of Bokhara and Khiva—or what was left of them after the cessions they were compelled to make—kept their autonomy, and Russian control over their domestic matters was less than that of the Indian Government over the Indian States. No Russian Resident was present continuously at their capitals. The Khans neglected even to extirpate slavery from their states, though they had bound themselves to do so, nor did they put an end to gruesome public executions. 'What building in Bokhara is there that has not horror attached to it?' observed a visitor to the city who is still alive to-day. Away from the capitals, government was often carried on by local magnates or begs. One of these is described as habitually taking with him on tour all his archives, old trophies such as blunderbusses and lances, a stuffed tiger, a museum of gifts received from foreign visitors, his harem, a large collection of saddles, robes, guns, pistols, mirrors, chests, bottles and books, and all the prisoners in his custody.

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Such were the policies and institutions of the Russian system; but these give perhaps a picture rather more pleasing than was the reality.

Central Asia at that time, unlike to-day, was accessible to visitors; there is an abundant literature of the impressions of travellers; all speak of a low quality of the administrative personnel. There was a raffish and frontier atmosphere. The Russians made no attempt to form a cadre of civil servants devoted to colonial administration such as the Indian Civil Service or the Colonial Civil Service of the British Empire, and drew their administrators from the services of the rest of the Empire and from the army. The man who had failed in the civil service in St. Petersburg, the army officer whose wildness had made his regiment too hot for him, came for rehabitation to Central Asia, and the way of advance was through faction and intrigue. Few civil officers troubled to understand the native language, customs or history. Corruption at least equalled that of the early days of British rule in India; the bureaucracy swelled beyond all needs; a Forestry Department was created where there were no trees; to eke out their pay all ranks of the army would sometimes undertake private economic enterprise. A lack of pedantry about the law also resulted in the law being often brushed clean aside, admirable though the checks and regulations of the government may have been in theory. And if these were the shortcomings of the early days of the administration, and if improvement took place later in the century, one canker, the bad blood between the army and the civilian administration, seems to have continued until the end of Tsarist days.

Russian rule was not, however, unpopular. That the regular garrison of the vast area was no more than 50,000 Cossacks is sufficient proof. There were only two revolts of any consequence. If one reason for passivity was that Russian force, if provoked, was used with ruthlessness, another was that the Russian rule did not seem intolerable. Lacking in colour prejudice, tolerant if erratic, human if often wildly inhumane, taking up local habits and often even wearing local dress, the Russians gradually broke down the first prejudice against them. Though they did not foster a native professional class, as did the British in India, they treated as equals the few Moslems who by their own initiative westernized themselves and entered Russian service. Several of their most distinguished officers bore Asiatic names thinly Russianized: Yusupoff was Yussuf, Alikhanoff was Ali Khan. No mass influx of Russians imperilled the livelihood or land of the local inhabitants. The Russians avoided excessive offence and did not feel themselves impelled to extreme reforms. In fact the chief contrast of the Tsarist and British Empires in Asia is that, while the British, whether by design or not, set going a great revolution in Oriental society, under Tsarist rule people did not feel uprooted or that the

world was in a whirl. They had their rule of life as formerly and a pattern lay before them in which to walk. There was no new and ambitious middle class. No restless intelligentsia developed among the Uzbeks or Turcomans. Even the newspapers which began to flourish devoted at one time much of their space to the reprinting of tales from the *Arabian Nights.*

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One of the first travellers over the Transcaspian extension of the Russian railways was an English Member of Parliament who was later to become the most celebrated Viceroy of India of the later period of British rule. Lord Curzon's book, *Russia in Central Asia,* published in 1889, amounts to the British Empire commenting on the Russian Empire. It may be amusing to make some extracts.

Even at that time travel in Russia was not easy.

'The Russian Government is a very elaborate and strictly systematized, but also a very complicated, piece of machinery; and the motive power required to set its various parts in action is often out of all proportion to the result achieved. It would not seem to be a very serious or difficult matter to determine whether a small party—less than a dozen—of tourists should be allowed to travel over a line, the opening of which to passenger traffic had been trumpeted throughout Europe, and an invitation to travel by which had originated from the director-general of the line himself. However, things are not done quite so simply at St. Petersburg. It transpired that for the permission in question the consent of five independent authorities must be sought: (1) The Governor-General of Turkestan, General Rosenbach, whose headquarters are at Tashkent; (2) the Governor-General of Transcaspia, General Komaroff, who resides at Askabad; (3) the head of the Asiatic Department of the Foreign Office at St. Petersburg, M. Zinovieff; (4) the Minister of Foreign Affairs, M. de Giers, or his colleague, General Vlangali; (5) the Minister for War, General Vanoffski; the last named being the supreme and ultimate court of appeal. All these independent officials had to be consulted, and their concurrent approval obtained.'

The military character of the Russian occupation struck Curzon unfavourably:

'A valley bisects the two portions of the town, native and European, which are as separate in every particular as are the lives of the double element in the population, neither interfering nor appearing to hold communication with the other. In the capitals of India, at Bombay,

Calcutta, and Madras, there is far greater fusion, both in private and in public life—the Parsees at Bombay, the resident princes and noblemen at Calcutta, and the most influential native merchants in all three mingling habitually in Anglo-Indian society, and taking a prominent part, in some cases in government, in others in the management of public institutions. In Tashkent, on the other hand, several obstacles preclude a similar amalgamation—the purely military character of the administration, the dearth of any wealthy or capable men among the natives, and the recency of the Russian conquest. I remember once reading the remark that "In Russia the discipline of the camp is substituted for the order of the city; martial law is the normal condition of life"; and of no Russian city that I have seen did this strike me as more true than of Tashkent. Uniforms are everywhere, parade-grounds and barracks abound, the extensive entourage associated with a great administrative centre is military and not civil in character. It is hardly surprising that under such a system practical or far-seeing projects for commercial and industrial development should not be forthcoming; that the fiscal balance should be habitually on the wrong side of the budget; or that Chauvinistic and aggressive ideas should prevail. Where the ruling class is entirely military and where promotion is slow, it would be strange if war, the sole available avenue to distinction, were not popular.'

His sense of what was becoming to a Governor-General, to be gratified by his own manner of living in India, was disappointed at Tashkent:

'The furniture and appointments of Government House are almost jejune in their modesty. The only two large rooms, the ball-room and the dining-room, are practically unfurnished. There is no throne-room or dais; and the only emblems of royalty are the oil-painting of the late Czar and his wife, and of the present Emperor and Empress which hang upon the walls. When the general drives out, his landau is drawn by a *troika* of three handsomely caparisoned horses, whilst the livery affected by his Tartar coachman is a black velvet cap with peacock feathers stuck in the brim. I cannot imagine a greater contrast to the State observed by the Indian Viceroy, who in a country famed for its lavish ostentation, its princely wealth, and its titled classes, is obliged to support the style of a sovereign, who resides in a palace, the corridors of which are crowded with gorgeous figures in scarlet and gold liveries, who drives out accompanied by a brilliant escort, and whose levees are as rigid in the etiquette as those of Buckingham Palace or St. James's.'

Curzon visited also the Khanates and studied the Bokharan army:

'The ideal of military efficiency in Bokhara seems to be limited to precision in drill, in which I was assured by some European officers that they are very successful. Every movement is smartly executed to the sound of a bugle, and the voice of the officers, whose uniform is fantastic and appearance contemptible, is never heard. There are some 150 signals, which it is not surprising to hear that it takes a man several years to learn. Some years ago the drill contained a movement of a most interesting character which has since been abandoned. At a given signal the soldiers lay down upon their backs and kicked their heels in the air. This was copied from the action of Russian troops in one of the earlier engagements where, after crossing a river, they were ordered to lie down and shake the water out of their top-boots. The retreating Bokhariots saw the manœuvres and attributed to it a magical share in the Russian victory.'

He gives the following estimate of the quality of Russian rule:

'First, it cannot be doubted that Russia has conferred great and substantial advantages upon the Central Asian regions which she reduced to her sway. Those who have read descriptions of the state of the country, in the pre-Russian days of rapine and raid, when agriculture was devastated, life and property rendered insecure, and entire populations were swept off under circumstances of unheard-of barbarity into a life-long servitude, can form some idea of the extent of the revolution by which peace and order and returning prosperity have been given to these desolated tracts; and the traveller, who once dared not move abroad without a powerful escort, is enabled to wander with impunity over the unfrequented plain.

'Turning to the dominion of Russia and the means by which it is assured, I make with equal pleasure the acknowledgement that it appeared to me to be firmly and fairly established, and to be loyally accepted by the conquered races. Though we hear a good deal in books of the fanaticism of Mussulman populations, and might expect still more from the resentment of deposed authority, or the revenge of baffled licence, revolts do not occur, and mutinies are not apprehended among the subjugated peoples. I attribute this to several reasons: to the ferocious severity of the original blow; to the powerlessness of resistance against the tight military grip that is kept by Russia upon the country; and to the certainty, which a long course of Russian conduct has reasonably inspired, that she will never retreat.

'It would be unfair, however, both to Russian character and to Russian policy, to suggest that it is owing solely to prudential reasons that there is no visible antagonism to her sway. Such calculations may ensure its stability, but they do not explain its favour. I

gladly, therefore, add the recognition that, so far as I was able to ascertain, Russian dominion is not merely accepted by, but is acceptable to the bulk of her Asiatic subjects, and that the ruling class, though feared, is also personally esteemed. Russia unquestionably possesses a remarkable gift for enlisting the allegiance and attracting even the friendship of those whom she has subdued by force of arms, a faculty which is to be attributed as much to the defects as to the excellences of her character.

'With the followers a not less successful policy is adopted than towards the chiefs. As soon as fighting is over they are invited back to their homesteads, and to the security of undisputed possession tempered by a moderate taxation. The peasant is satisfied, because, under more scientific management, he gets so many cubic feet more water from his canals and so many more bushels more grain from his land. The merchant is pleased, because he sells his wood or his cotton at a bigger price than it realized before. All are amenable to the comfort and utility and cheapness of Russian manufactured articles, in contrast with the clumsy and primitive furniture of their previous lives. Above all, security is a boon which none can depreciate; and if the extinction of the ataman is a cause of regret to a few scores or hundreds, it is an unmixed blessing to thousands. Russian authority presents itself to the native populations in the twofold guise of liberty and despotism: liberty, because in many respects they enjoy a freedom which they never knew before; despotism, centred in the image of the Great White Czar, which is an inalienable attribute of government to the Oriental mind.

'We may trace indeed, in the panorama of Russian advance, a uniform procession of figures and succession of acts, implying something more than a merely adventitious series of events. First comes the Cossack, brave in combat and affable in occupation, at once the instrument of conquest and the guarantee of retention. Next follow the merchant and the pedlar, spreading out before astonished eyes the novel wares, the glittering gewgaws, and the cheap conveniences of Europe. A new and lucrative market is opened for native produce. Prompt payment in hard cash proves to be a seductive innovation. Presently appear the priest with his vestments and icons, conferring a divine benediction upon the newly established order; the *tchinovnik* and kindred symptoms of organized settlement; the liquor-shop and its vodka, to expedite, even while debasing, the assimilative process; the official and tax collector, as the final stamp of Imperial Supremacy. Then when a few years, or sometimes only months, have gone by, imposing barracks rise, postal and telegraph offices are built, a rail-

way is laid, colonists are invited, the old times are forgotten, and an air of drowsy acquiescence settles down upon the spot that a decade before was scoured by predatory bands or precariously peopled by vagabond tribes.

'The information which I have given about Russian policy in the wider spheres of education, manners, religion and morals, will have prepared my readers for the conclusion that, while the Russian system may fairly be described as one of government, it cannot be described as one, to any considerable extent, of improvement or civilization. There seems to be altogether lacking that moral impulse which induces unselfish or Christian exertion on behalf of a subject people. Broad and statesmanlike schemes for the material development of the country, for the amelioration of the condition of the natives, for their adaptation to a higher order of things, are either not entertained, or are crushed out of existence by the superior exigencies of a military regime. Barracks, forts, military roads, railway stations, post and telegraph offices, the necessary adjuncts of government, abound; but the institutions or buildings that bespeak a people's progress have yet to appear. Hence while there may exist a tranquillity arising from peaceful and conciliatory combination, there is not the harmony that can result only from final coalescence.'

CHAPTER THREE

BOLSHEVIK ASIA

[i]

The uprooting of the old life in Russian Asia, delayed longer than in British territory, was in the end carried out with greater zest. The Bolsheviks broke away from the languid and *laisser-faire* attitude of the Tsars, and repeated the performance of the British in the previous century in giving birth to a new Asiatic civilization, but one as different from the liberal one of the west as that had been from traditional Oriental life. The Islamic society of Central Asia was set on its head. Though it had known slaughter again and again in its history—it had been the centre of the Empire of Timur—the change in its way of life which has taken place in the last three decades caused probably more upset than any massacre of the past. What has happened is still regarded with awe by Moslem people on the Soviet borders. For example, recently in Kabul I found it the common gossip that at Bokhara there are to-day no men over forty, all the old men having either been butchered or died of horror.

[ii]

When the Tsarist Government fell the Khanates of Bokhara and Khiva enjoyed a last brief independence. The Amir of Bokhara, especially, in conjunction with Enver Pasha, the Young Turk leader who ended his strange career as a refugee in Central Asia and was killed there by Bolshevik troops, tried to restore the state of affairs of a hundred years earlier. There was a half-hearted effort to gain British protection. There was an outbreak of traditional methods of government. But as soon as the Bolshevik Government had made sure its position in Europe, it carried out the step to which the Tsarist Government, but for the Great War, would have been eventually impelled and annexed the Khanates.

To-day Soviet Central Asia consists of the four republics of Uzbekistan, Tadzikistan, Turkmenia and Kazakstan, constituent

parts of the U.S.S.R. There is little information about these republics. Two have been for many years declared military areas and closed to visitors. The news about them published by the Russian Government is of the building of railways, dams, factories, filatures, hospitals, schools, libraries, theatres. The information need not be doubted, and means that a radical change has taken place in all the conditions of life in the area. But statistics presented as they are by the Soviet propaganda more often blunt than stir the curiosity.

Certain facts are, however, clear.

The Soviets have done what the Tsars failed to do and what the British did in India a century ago. Out of the traditional Oriental society which included only begs, peasants, mullahs and merchants, they have raised a new class, the intelligentsia. This consists of teachers, doctors, engineers, civil servants, technicians of all kinds. It is the administrative class if not actually the governing class politically. And it consists partly of women, itself a change of the greatest consequence in Asiatic history.

The Soviet Government, in creating this middle class, improved on the British by capturing the imagination of those whom it had bred. The British, begetting a similar class, had turned it loose in the world with an education, with advice drawn from their own not very apposite nineteenth-century prophets, but with no aid in finding it an assured income or happy emotional life. The Russians, on the contrary, have provided their intelligentsia with a task which helps to keep them busy and therefore happy : in fact, they created the intelligentsia for the sake of the tasks. Having taken up the old grooves of life, the Russians have at once laid down new grooves on which the new generation moves fairly contentedly. Its destiny is to modernize and industrialize its ancestral lands. Worshipping the statistics of production, writing paeans to Stalin, passing resolutions against class enemies and national enemies it feels that it has a useful place in a world which, though still imperfect, is being improved by a tireless government.

The Russians might claim, however, that an even greater contrast to what has happened in the British Empire is that in the Soviet Empire they have overcome the disruptive force of nationalism. They can say that while Indian, Burmese, Cingalese nationalisms are springing the British Empire apart, in the U.S.S.R. the government has harnessed the many local nationalisms in a single energy sustaining a single unified Empire. The peoples in Central Asia who are transforming their country largely for the use of the Soviet military machine are not Russians, speaking Russian as their native language,

but Kazaks, Tadziks, Uzbeks and Turcomans. Their ancestors fought the Russians as the Sikhs and the Marathas fought the British; but these wars, it is argued, now seem like pre-history.

The cause of their success, the Russians say, is threefold.

The first is that the Soviet Union is a genuine federation in which the nationalists, enjoying local autonomy, have been made to realize, by propaganda but also by genuine education, that the interest of each is best promoted by the union of all.

The second is that Communism is a kind of religion shared at least by the younger people of all the nations, Asiatic as well as Russian, and that in its service the national distinctions, while in no way discouraged, become irrelevant.

The third is that the central government, the Union Government, has won the confidence of the peoples by promoting, and not by merely tolerating, all local nationalisms. Certainly the Soviet Press is never tired of applauding the revival of national dances, the research into local history, and the building of national theatres, or of discovering Turcoman Shakespeares and Tadzik Beethovens, geniuses who a hundred years ago would have been like the ocean gem or desert flower. Nor is there doubt that the Soviet Government, perhaps alone among actual governments, is undismayed by the multitude of languages spoken by its inhabitants, and encourages the study of the philological minutiæ of each.

As proof of the success of its policies in winning the attachment of the people the Russian Government points to the fact that the Union held together under one of the greatest strains of war which any state could be tested by.

[iii]

There is too little evidence to know how far the picture thus given in official Russian propaganda is a true one.

In judging how far the Russians have succeeded in overcoming what they call the 'national tension', one device of the Russian State should not be forgotten. Although the national republics are governed by national soviets, whose members are their own nationals, there is behind these again another more powerful system of government. This is the Communist Party which throughout the length and breadth of Russia controls ultimately all Soviets, which is under central direction from Moscow, and which, though it contains members from all the nationalities, is chiefly a Great Russian organization. The Communist Party rules the policy of the country. The Communist

Party can intervene in the least detail of its execution. Quite a large number of local politicians who had been independent in their ideas disappeared during the purges before the war. Thus in the Central Asian republics the supreme power to-day, no less than in the time of the Tsars, is in Russian hands, and the new intelligentsia if it holds administrative office is not a sovereign class.[1]

Whether there is in fact much resentment at this, whether the Russians are regarded as aliens, it is hard to find out. A surprisingly large number of Kazaks, taken prisoner by the Germans, seemed ready to fight against the Soviet; in Uzbekistan there was said to be complacency at the news of Russian disasters; old hints of transferring from the Russian to the British Empire began to circulate again. Moreover Russian officials in their comments on Central Asians are apt to use expressions which hardly go with fraternal equality.

The most likely reading of the situation is that the people are divided, and while the privileged new middle class supports its creator, the mass of the people still believe, as most Oriental peoples have always believed, that all government, national or foreign, must be evil. A peasant people compelled to learn to run a mechanical civilization cannot escape suffering. It is the same story as in British Asia. The old life falls to pieces and all except a minority of the exceptionally adventurous suffer anguish like the uprooted mandrake. Soviet Asia is perhaps a good world for young men but not for the old. Once over a certain age a man seldom desires to change his life completely, and the Soviet world is too fast for the aged. They are unrespected by the young. What is taken from them is necessary for their happiness, and the benefits they receive are new toys which divert them only passingly. The mass transfers of population, a feature of Soviet rule, cannot but seem to the peoples affected a bitter wrong. They resent also the decline of their religion. The Soviets have from time to time taken action against Islam, turning mosques into clubs, and though they have more recently given up this persecution, they have not yet reassured the pious Moslem that his religion is secure. The writer was travelling in the Persian Gulf on a steamer loaded with pilgrims going to Kerbela when the rumour spread that Great Britain, because of the Azerbaijan crisis and to celebrate Christmas, was about to declare war on Russia. Wild joy surged through the boat.

Thus secularized mullahs, nomads tied unwillingly to the soil, collectivized peasants rise up in accusation. If the action of the

[1] There have recently been reports that in the actual administrative offices the Asiatic officials are being increasingly replaced by Great Russians. How far the reports are correct it is hard to discover.

Soviet Government is judged by the amount of unhappiness it produces at the present rather than by the amount of happiness it is laying up for the future, the verdict upon it might be unfavourable.

It cannot, however, be denied that to the young and the underdog Russia has throughout the Asiatic world an appeal which it can lose only by mountains of wrong-doing, nor that the young and the underdog usually prefer what Russia offers to any nationalist or religious appeal from its opponents. It has been said that the modern scholarly Englishman antagonizes the Oriental by expressing a reverent interest for all that is past and dead in the East but indifference to the present: the Russian, on the other hand, wins their regard because he is unimpressed by their ruins but interested in their schools, roads and hospitals. The drama in the Russian Empire is one of extremely gifted, but socially and economically backward peoples struggling towards the most rapid material advance, and the Russian Government in leading them is unhampered by any fixed prejudices in favour of the rights of, or even common justice to, the individual man. This single-mindedness the East is likely to find sympathetic rather than the reverse.

From time to time I have witnessed the following: in Kandahar poor Moslems lamenting that they were too impoverished to buy wives but that if the Russians came they would receive the wives of the rich merchants; in Persia poor Assyrian Christians who said that prison in Russia was freer than freedom in Iran, and, remembering with nostalgia the shower-baths they had enjoyed in Soviet concentration camps, looked forward to the arrival of their former gaolers; in Syria, Moslem servants who threatened their masters with what would happen when Stalin comes; in India, Communists who see in Russia their only protection against the plutocratic nationalists who are about to succeed the British; in the Lebanon, the Arab Christians who see atheist Russia as their liberator; and throughout the Middle East Armenians and Jews who see Russia putting down the mighty from their seats. The triumph of the Russian revolution has been to spread throughout the Oriental world the conviction that society is insubstantial, and that all who are wealthy and powerful sit perilously and may fall to-morrow; and the power expected to cause the crash and vengeance is Russia.

[iv]

The turning into Soviet citizens of the Asiatic cultivators and nomads who had been brought under Russian rule by the arms of the

Tsars is the great drama of modern Asia—as in the last century was the creation of an Indian bourgeoisie by the British. And its pathos has never been so well expressed as by Bertrand Russell who visited Russia in the first days of the revolution :

'It was on the Volga, in the summer of 1920, that I first realized how profound is the disease in our Western mentality, which the Bolsheviks are attempting to force upon an essentially Asiatic population. Our boat travelled on, day after day, through an unknown and mysterious land. Our company was gay, noisy, quarrelsome, full of facile theories, with glib explanations of everything, persuaded that there is nothing they could not understand and no human destiny outside the purview of their system. One night very late our boat stopped in a desolate spot where there were no houses, but only a great sandbank, and beyond it a range of poplars. In silence I went on shore, and found on the sand a strange assembly of human beings, half nomad, wandering from some remote region of famine, each family huddled together surrounded by all its belongings, some sleeping, others silently making small fires of twigs. The flickering flames lighted up gnarled, bearded faces of wild men, strong, patient primitive women, and children as sedate and slow as their parents. Human beings they undoubtedly were, and yet it would have been far easier for me to grow intimate with a dog or a cat or a horse than with any one of them. I knew that they would wait there day after day, perhaps for weeks, until a boat came in which they could go to some distant place in which they had heard—falsely perhaps—that the earth was more generous than in the country they had left. To me they seemed to typify the soul of Russia, inexpressive, inactive from despair, unheeded by the little set of westernizers who make up all the parties of progress or reaction. It is possible, I thought, that the theorists may increase the misery of the many by trying to force them into actions contrary to their primeval instincts, but I could not believe that happiness was to be brought to them by a gospel of industrialism and forced labour. . . . And at last I began to feel that all politics are inspired by a grinning devil, teaching the energetic and quick-witted to torture submissive populations for the profit of pocket, or power, or theory. As we journeyed on, fed by food extracted from the peasants, protected by an army recruited from among her sons, I wondered what we had to give them in return. But I found no answer. From time to time I heard their sad songs or the haunting music of the balalaika ; but the sound mingled with the great silence of the steppes, and left me with a terrible questing pain in which Occidental hopefulness grew pale.'

PART THREE

THE FUTURE

CHAPTER ONE

NEW ASIA

[i]

In the past hundred years the most arresting facts in the countries of British Asia were their changes internally. Peace, from revolution or foreign invader, could be taken more or less for granted. But from now on the interest will be chiefly in the maintenance of this peace.

For the preservation of peace has been the service of the British in Asia. The violence which had been used in the creation of the British Empire was afterwards exorcized; and even though there were occasional outbreaks such as the Indian Mutiny, perhaps never before had so large a part of the eastern world been so quiet as when the British power was at the height of its fortunes. It was a peace doubtfully welcome. The visitor had sometimes the feeling of a perpetual Sunday morning in which children were made to go to church and wear uncomfortable clothes and pretend to believe what were really to them matters of indifference. But it was peace nevertheless; and there is a celebrated passage of De Quincey on the Roman Empire which might have been written as truly of the British Asiatic Empire in the century before the recent war.

'There was silence in the world: no muttering was heard: no eye winked beneath the wing. Winds of hostility might still rave at intervals: but it was on the outside of the mighty Empire; it was at a dream-like distance; and, like the storms that beat against some monumental castle, they rather irritated and vivified the sense of security than at all disturbed its luxurious lull.'

In this still sanctuary, the new educated classes were free to cultivate the arts of peace, to demilitarize their minds, and to become incurious of what was happening beyond the borders. Except at rare moments they ignored the outer Asiatic world; their vision stopped short at the Himalayas and the Indian Ocean.

Nor was this blindness limited to the people of the region. To many of those in England who were concerned with Indian or Burmese or Cingalese affairs, and to many British officers serving in the area, the region of the Indian Ocean seemed an interior without an exterior, whose affairs could be regulated with little reference to the outside world. Only the handful of specialists responsible for defence looked outwards. Even the Simon Report on India, written less than twenty years ago, discusses the external problems of the country in a space quite disproportionate to its examination of the domestic issues. But by future historians the culmination and most curious example of this manner of outlook may perhaps be seen in the negotiations in 1942 of Sir Stafford Cripps at Delhi. In the month when the shields around India had fallen with a clang, when the Japanese, masters of the Bay of Bengal, had closed the Port of Calcutta and by their sudden presence had caused the greatest movement of population in modern Indian history, hundreds of thousands fleeing from the coastal areas, it was possible for Sir Stafford Cripps and the Congress leaders to discuss the problems of security as if they were subordinate ones, the details of which would settle themselves as soon as agreement was reached in such matters of discord as the powers of the Viceroy, the communal composition of the Cabinet, or the procedure for calling a constituent assembly.

[ii]

Now the British are withdrawing, and bleaker winds will blow into the Indian Ocean. For with India independent, the British Empire in Asia, in the form in which it has existed hitherto, will be ended.

This does not mean that the British will necessarily quit Asia. In Malaya they are likely to have work for many years in steering the political development; in Burma and Ceylon, although these are about to become dominions or independent, British collaboration in some of their affairs is not unlikely. Nor will British activity be a mere afterglow following sunset, ending in night. But the Empire itself, in its old form, will have ended. The British are abandoning irretrievably the key positions in India which enabled them to organize by their own initiative the defences of South Asia, and without India their other bases in Asia lose most of their strategic worth; they will be a string of isolated phenomena; and the history of all Empire has shown that isolated bases at the end of long lines of sea communication, and not supplied and defended by their own hinterland, are peculiarly vulnerable. As long as there is no war, they may remain unchallenged in

authority in, say, Malaya, but their position will be dependent on the existence of a stable order in Asia.

The quietness with which this revolution has been effected should not blind the onlooker to the greatness of the revolution. The stiffening is going out of half a continent—the stiffening which held a group of countries together and the stiffening which enabled their governments to maintain peace domestically.

At one time it had seemed possible that the two great Asiatic Empires of Britain and Russia would decide by conflict which should be supreme in Asia, or alternatively that they would divide the continent between them. But by its decision to end its Empire rather than fight the nationalist movements within it, Great Britain has ended this chapter of history. Now on the one side stands the Russian Empire, growing stronger in military power and tightness of organization; on the other, South Asia, rich in resources and always the lure of the conqueror, starting on a new political course, its diverse countries freed or seeking to free themselves from the control of Great Britain, and trying, too, to effect great changes in their domestic structure.

The danger is that in the place of the one devil cast out, the old imperialism, seven worse devils may come in, international anarchy. In the place of the single majestic structure of the Empire, there may be an independent India (divided, alas, it now seems certain, into an independent Hindustan and an independent Pakistan), an independent Burma, an independent Ceylon, eventually even an independent Malaya, each with weak defences of its own, each perhaps on strained terms with its neighbours. An empire would have been turned into a Balkans. 'Upon the breaking and shivering of a great State and Empire', said Bacon, 'you may be sure to have wars; when they fail, all goes to ruin, and they become a prey.'

The danger is of a kind of political vacuum in South Asia, the greater if, as recent events show is not impossible, there should be a breakdown of government in India. As in nature it is a vacuum which is the cause of hurricanes, so might this vacuum also breed storms.

[iii]

A new defence arrangement for South Asia will thus be needed to replace the dying Empire, and to shelter the countries of the region during the experiments on which they are beginning. However anxious they may be to break with their past, one thing in their past

they cannot afford to renounce, and that is peace; to reform themselves radically and by their own volition, they need to be undisturbed in their own house. And this new defence structure, replacing the old one now out of date, has to be built at a time when the atom bomb has made obsolete all previous defence arrangements, and when fear already names a possible aggressor.

The architects of the new defence system will begin by surveying the state of Asia as a whole. Delhi is still the nerve centre of the south of the continent and a window opening on all the neighbouring lands. Seen from there, what is the look of the external powers by whose play and rivalries the fate of the continent is likely in the next period to be decided?

CHAPTER TWO

THE GREAT POWERS

[i]

Asia at the end of the recent war has an appearance quite different from the collapsing continent of a century ago. Then a whole age was ending and the theme was disintegration and winding up. The air was dusty; there was splendour but in tatters; the bats flew; pillars and walls cracked one by one and were left unrepaired; things were being put away; the spirit ebbed; interest was passing westward, and the East, once the metropolis of the world, became provincial. How different is the present. All is beginning afresh in the Orient. New ideas, new ambitions, new themes, new personalities eppear, and a drama is starting which will be worked out for generations.

Who are the principal actors? The tremendous power of Russia dominates the continent; the Soviet Government seems to hold the allegiance of Siberia and Central Asia so strongly that the Russian Empire is in part a genuine Asiatic state, and not an empire of Europeans over Orientals. But America, a newcomer in Asiatic affairs, begins to counter Russia in many quarters. China, though it has probably more civil war to live through, is becoming a modern state; and Japan, though defeated, has not yet ended its history.

These are the formidable powers whose future actions the observer in South Asia seeks to forecast. In spite of recent alarms, it is reasonable to suppose that all the governments concerned have at present a will to peace, and while manœuvring for advantage, desire also some form of international co-operation. But in a world of tumultuous political movement and of rapid technical change, events may go beyond the control of governments. Prophecy beyond a few years is impossible, and the wisest course for an observer in South Asia is to turn back to the past for guidance.

[ii]

What does the past show of Russia?

The history of Russia in Asia has already been described in earlier chapters. What was not emphasized was the sense of mission which it has nursed for four centuries. Because a Russian Tsar had married the daughter of the last Byzantine Emperor, the myth established itself that after the fall of Constantinople the Muscovite monarchs had inherited the Byzantine pallium and that Moscow was to be the third Rome. At first the Tsars, overshadowed by Poland, the Turks, and even Lithuanians, could do no more than barely keep alive an ambition which no other country took seriously; but as slowly, by constant war, they secured an ample space for the Russian people, they made it possible for their more romantic subjects to indulge the idea that Russia was to be a messiah among the nations.

The idea of a glorious Slav destiny captured a part of the nineteenth-century intelligentsia, that class which was so peculiar and important. Western Europe, though apparently successful, they regarded as corrupt at the centre; and in thinking this the Russians of that time were like Americans to-day, but whereas the Americans believe Europe doomed for its immorality, the Russians thought its bane irreligion. What visions floated before them appears especially clearly in the occasional writings of Dostoievsky, recently translated into French. In the present century the Bolshevik revolution, though made by men without sympathy for romance, ended by strengthening the messianic ideas; the foreign policy of a country is nearly always one of the things which survive a revolution; and the concept of Russia as world saviour merged with that of Russia as patron of international Communism. Behind Russian expansion there lies therefore an emotional, or even religious force, perhaps the most fervent since the expansion of Spain in South America. It has been intensified by Russia's success in the last war.

The natural path of Russian expansion is in Europe as well as in Asia. It has often been pointed out that in the past century and a half Russia was least active in Asia whenever Russia was successful in Europe, but became active in the East when it met a check there. Thus it was most aggressive in Asia after it had been halted in the West by the Crimean War and again after the crisis of the Berlin Congress. It may be that Russia will presently again find a bar to expansion in the West. A wise Indian observer has suggested that while at the end of the recent war much of the western world looked to Russia for leadership, Russia lost its opportunity because it refused to come to terms

with western political tradition; it was not content with marrying its energy and *élan* to the more sophisticated political methods of the West, and resistance to it is therefore hardening. May Russia not then seek compensation in the East where the resistance of old-established liberal tradition is likely to be less?

It is true that since the Bolshevik revolution, Russia has pursued in Asia a modest policy. A half-hearted intervention in China was its only serious adventure in the years between the two wars. Especially it has disinterested itself in India which might have been thought one of the most inviting centres for Soviet propaganda. But Communism will now flicker and now flare up through all the Asiatic lands in the coming century, and Moscow, for ever realist, cannot for ever neglect the combustion which this may cause.

Paradoxically, even religion may propel it forwards. The new Soviet policy of tolerating Christianity and Islam not only removes one of the impediments to the spread of Russian influence, but may actually enlist religion on Russia's behalf. Up to the present, public attention has been chiefly to the new Soviet attitude towards Christianity; in the Middle East some of the Christian communities have already reverted to their traditional belief that whoever rules Russia is the champion of the Christian churches against the Moslems. But Russia may equally well become the patron of Islam. Indeed, once atheism is abandoned, it would not be difficult to represent Communism as Islam brought up to date, so strong is the egalitarian tradition in Muhommedan society.[1]

For these reasons even the critics and enemies of Russia sometimes feel constrained to prophesy an inevitable Russian supremacy in Asia, as Balaam against his will prophesied the successes of Israel. This might come not from the intentions of the Russian Government but from historical necessity, for if there is disorder in Asia, Russia would find it genuinely hard to stay aloof. Nor would this be the first time that conquests had been forced on a country, since the British occupation of India from the first small commercial footholds rose out of similar causes.

These are the facts which the new national governments in South Asia, and especially the new Indian Governments in Delhi, may have in mind when they survey Russia as a neighbour; and from recent Russian action they might suppose that the Soviet Government was

[1] Joseph Wolff in the middle of the last century reported at Bokhara that there were Dervish prophecies that the time would come when there should be no difference between rich and poor, and when property should be in common, even wives and children.

still attached to all the ideas that made for Russian expansion in the past—Pan-slavism, the protection of the Orthodox Church, the desire for warm water ports, the urge to bring under one hand the whole of the Turanian steppe. Even if to a communist or a philosopher, Russia's expansion might not seem an unmixed evil, the governments of other countries cannot welcome it.

[iii]

The second great actor will be China. China is to-day a small power compared with Russia, nor, in spite of its four hundred million people or more, is its relative stature likely in the near future to improve. But over the course of centuries the Chinese Empire has been the most impressive of the Asiatic states; its history has been the most continuous and coherent, and in administrative arts and even in military achievement it has had the most instructive and civilized record in Asia.

What, to the governments of South Asia, is chiefly interesting is that Chinese history has been one of expansion. The organization, the language, the ideas which comprise Chinese civilization were limited three thousand years ago to a part of North-West China; thence they spread out and covered the various alien peoples of the centre and the south, making these almost indistinguishable from the northerners; and in more recent centuries the peoples thus welded together as one have flooded as Chinese over the neighbouring countries, in particular over Manchuria and Mongolia and towards the South Seas. In its long history, China has built and lost empires at a great distance from its homelands. Chinese generals in the Han dynasty two thousand years ago camped on the shores of the Caspian Sea, and fifteen centuries later a Chinese admiral sailed into the ports of South India with a fleet of three hundred ships.

Except for such sporadic adventures as this last, China's expansive energies have, however, been directed to regions other than the Indian Ocean. Communication between China and India itself has been a one-way traffic; India influenced China deeply, especially by the export of Buddhism, but received little from China in exchange. But with the development of air communications and the increasing activity of the Chinese Government and people, China may presently no longer be 'noises off' on the stage of South Asia but instead become an actor.

What has in the past hundred years made China weak and put it out of action as an expansionist power is the double circumstance that it has been passing through an acute agrarian crisis—such as on many

previous occasions has caused prolonged bloody upheaval and the overthrow of dynasties—and that its society was also disordered by the impact of the West. In the nineteenth century western business men, missionaries and expeditionary forces threw into the stagnant Chinese waters the stones, or rather boulders, which turned them into an uproar, dissolving the calm patterns which they had for centuries reflected. In the twentieth century there was civil war, and almost unbelievable political and economic collapse. The general expectation at one time was that China would be partitioned among the western powers.

China, however, did not die. One of the old traditions of China has been of the elixir of immortality found by the wise or adventurous in distant lands; in the Han and Tang dynasties there were emperors who perished in experimenting with elixirs prepared for them; in the twentieth century China as a whole sought, and not without success, to revive its ancient body by the elixir of national revolution.

To what extent China is now recovering its strength, and how strong it will in fact be relative to other powers, is not yet clear, because the revolution on which it started with the overthrow of the Manchu Empire in 1911 is not yet complete. Revolution does not mean a continuous use of the guillotine and the firing squad, but a period of continuous change leading towards the restoration of stable government, and may endure for a very long time. It has been said that the French Revolution which began in 1789 is still in progress, and the lamentable events in that country in 1940 were but an incident of it. So in China revolution has still run only a part of its course. As long as it continues China, whatever the occasional lurid splendour, will remain weak because its energies will be turned inwards against itself.

Its continuing weakness should thus not be underrated. The civil war between its governing party, the Kuomintang and the Communists is not yet ended. While it lasts China is more likely to attract to itself the aggressiveness of other powers than itself become expansionist. Moreover it is hard in present circumstances to imagine that there can be both a strong Russia and a strong China.

Nevertheless should China overcome its internal divisions, it will have both resources and ambitions which may make it a difficult neighbour for the countries of South Asia. In the past China was accustomed to receive tribute from a number of countries on its borders, including Korea, Tibet, Assam, Burma and Nepal. In the nineteenth century China was required to accept responsibility for the acts of its 'vassals', which it generally declined to do, or to disinterest itself in their fate. Thus, one by one, they passed out of the Chinese

sphere. But a country with such a tenacious memory is unlikely to have given up all hopes of restoring its suzerainty.

The preliminary manœuvres to revive the Chinese Empire can already be seen. Both Sun Yat-sen, the founder of the Chinese Republic, and Chiang Kai-shek, its present champion, in condemning imperialism have distinguished between the expansion of the western powers and of China. They argued that whereas the western empires were the product of human 'force' and therefore immoral, Chinese imperialism was the outcome of natural forces, a triumph of moral integrity over evil, an expansion brought about by the voluntary submission of subject peoples to a superior civilization, and ordered by a philosophy two thousand years in advance of the thinking of the twentieth-century imperial powers.[1] A persevering propaganda is maintained, not so much by definite act of the Chinese Government as by a kind of self-expression of the Chinese intelligentsia. That South-East Asia should correctly be called the Indo-Chinese peninsula, that China is the 'natural' trustee for the coloured peoples in this area, that there are cultural affinities between these and the Chinese—all this the world, and especially America, is being coaxed to believe. The large overseas Chinese population is being prepared for its part. Burma has 190,000 Chinese, Malaya 2,000,000, the Netherlands East Indies 1,200,000, the Philippines 125,000. The Chinese Government maintains a hold over these by its juristic principle that all people of Chinese race, whether born in China or not, are Chinese citizens. Cultural penetration, influx of specialist migrants, secret radios, contacts with revolutionary movements—all the familiar paraphernalia which has kept the world on edge in recent years begin to appear in the countries where China has ambitions.

Certainly the manœuvres should not be taken much more seriously than those of a sick man seeking in ambitious dreams for compensation for his sickness. What might give them greater importance would be if China enjoyed in its Asiatic policies, as it perhaps may, the limited support of the United States of America.

[iv]

America will be the third principal actor.

The pattern of international politics is changed the most violently

[1] The Chinese have two conceptions of Government. Wang Tao, the Princely Way, is the way of nature, Pa Tao the way of force. Wang Tao is applauded, Pa Tao condemned. The expansion of Great Britain is believed to be Pa Tao; of China, Wang Tao.

when a quite new actor adds himself to the existing company; from this follow new problems and new combinations. America, now an actor on every stage in the world, can hardly even now be called a neighbour of the Indian Ocean states, but with the progress of inventions and the shrinkage of distance each of the supreme great powers becomes in a sense a neighbour of all the rest of the world. Oriental countries are thus concerned to know in what way the huge American power is to be thrown into world affairs. They wonder with a certain shiver of apprehension what will happen to them if it is used—and also if it is not used.

There are two predictions about American action, the one contradicting the other, and, paradoxically, the fear roused by each is about equal. One is that America, even after President Truman's new policy and its apparent support by the American people, will not continue to play its full part in world affairs—will revert to isolationism—and the other is that it may play too much. Which is the likelier, American imperialism or American isolation?

A foreign policy proceeds as much from the internal structure of a country and from its inherited tradition as from its external circumstances. To predict American action, the best way is to examine America's habits of mind. These are the result of America's domestic history, and in spite of the movement and restlessness of material circumstances in the U.S.A., they are peculiarly unchanging.

Many of these habits make for isolationism. There is the traditional American dislike of too much government.[1] Americans have carried over this instinct to their judgment of international issues; even radicals and internationalists who denounce isolationism and who ask for an international authority may in future be found to shrink from the exercise of force to maintain an international system. There is a habit of looking at the outside world as if it was a theatre, an exciting spectacle to be applauded, but with whose action Americans, as audience, do not interfere. It is a spectacle in the contemplation of which they purge themselves of emotions which in the real life of domestic affairs might have caused a dangerous tension. There is a kind of national pharisaism. In the subconscious mind of most

[1] A considerable percentage of the American population is descended from refugees from police oppression in Europe. For them the State is something menacing; until recently they found America congenial precisely because government was reduced to a minimum; and if in the past decade as the result of visitations of economic distress they have welcomed an expansion of the scope of government, they are still at heart inclined to the maximum anarchy which is possible.

Americans, however travelled, there is the conviction that the old world is wicked. Shocked though they have been by German claims to racial superiority, the Americans themselves have at times the air of being a Herrenvolk, in the sense that they sincerely believe themselves to be the moral leaders of mankind. This enthusiasm makes America strong, but it makes more difficult the relations between America and the outside world. For Americans believe that in the long run the touch of the old world defiles.

Aloofness is the American instinct in international relations—as is gregariousness in domestic matters. And aloofness is the more common attitude because of the difficulty of finding any other policy. America is a democracy, and the nature of democracies, with few exceptions, is to be averse from consistent policies of a positive and intervening kind. Each of their major measures has to be approved by the electorate, and when crisis comes, the easier course is often inaction rather than action. It is easy for Englishmen to deplore this quality in American government, and indeed it was the doubts and indecision of America which perhaps made the last war possible, but England itself has had in the eyes of the continent for more than a century a precisely similar reputation for undependability. Democratic governments may make single bold strokes, often the result of sympathy which has been long simmering, which may have lasting effects on history; a good example was the British intervention in favour of Italian unity in the last century; but democracies seldom adopt as their fixed policy a long-sighted and subtle plan to keep danger at arm's length. The American constitution is especially notorious as a political system which, because of its checks and balances, causes often a paralysis of action in foreign policy, and many signs suggest that it will continue to operate in the future as heretofore. American policy is the result of the struggle of a great number of political organs, pressure groups, and organized interests, the more confused because the groups which clash with one another are anything but solid. They overlap with one another and are constantly changing their membership. The same man may be a member of several different groups, and while he is torn in one way by, say, his business interests, he may be pushed in another by his religious convictions. Similarly the groups drift in and out of the strangest alliances with one another. For all these reasons American policy is apt either to be palsied or else to oscillate erratically.

These are the things pointed to by those who, believing American aid in world government desirable, yet fear that America will return to isolationism, not immediately but after an interval when the strains

of the peace settlement become severe. But those who fear the opposite, a too lively use of American power, notice other things. There is an outpouring of discussion about foreign countries, the volume of which is so great because the previous lack of information was so marked. A fact which at present strikes a visitor to the U.S.A. is the extraordinary interest in map-drawing and in the so-called science of geopolitik. The mass of Americans are discovering the outside world; it is an event as exciting to them as were the discoveries of Columbus to the men of the Renaissance. Asia, especially, fascinates the public mind, for while the complexities of Europe baffle and leave Americans hopeless, they see in the Asiatic countries a new romance, and also, such has been the skill of the propaganda for some of these lands, a new stirring of democratic ideas. The youth of America, serving overseas, may feel this fascination, and may return home with a zeal to spread American influence into all corners of the earth. The absence hitherto of this spirit has indeed been one of the strangest features of American civilization. It is explicable by the fact that the imagination of the young has been satisfied by the epic of the settlement and taming of the American continent. It would take perhaps very little for their horizon to be extended, and for them to see in the taming of the world the same romance as in the occupation of Wyoming and Oklahoma. One of the deepest and oldest convictions of the American mind is of a glorious American 'destiny' in saving the old world. Nor is it only the spirit of adventure which may stir the American giant to giant-like action. Prudence and the compulsion of events drive it to undertake large responsibility. Pearl Harbour has perhaps lodged in the American mind a new permanent concept that from now on safety is to be found only in a policy which mans the outermost defences.

[v]

If the American power is used, what will be its objects? This is one of the principal uncertainties in Asia.

By its liberal policy towards the Philippines, America has won the initial goodwill of the Orient, and it is useless to deny this even if the motives of its policy may be shown, as they only partially can, to have been commercial self-interest.

The danger to which the entirely impartial observer might perhaps set most weight is that American influence would prove so emancipating that it would help shake down what was left of order in the old world, and that, when it came to rebuilding, America would not prove

a very bold architect.[1] Americans seem to see modern Oriental history as an exciting spectacle, the theme of which is the formation of new eastern nations. With their belief in the virtues of nationalism they regard this as a scene to be cheered by Americans, whatever the bloodshed and turmoil it involves, and they speak of the births of new China or new India, regarding the past of these countries as of comparatively little worth.

But this revivalist epicureanism is not in fact the particular danger which is in the mind of the Oriental nationalists when they express their fear of America. What they are afraid of is an American imperialism, but economic and not political, disguised and therefore harder to oppose.

The fear, in short, is that under the guise of championing liberty some of the powerful American business interests may seek to substitute American for European control of the economy of the wealthy centres in the Orient. The danger apprehended is not from the American Government. But America is so vast and has such abundant energies that, like Argus, it has a hundred eyes, and, like Briareus, many hands; and it is the possible activity of these members, insufficiently restrained, which causes alarm. From their talk and their magazines it seems that the vision of some American business men is of American goods, technicians, ideas, swamping the world; of Teheran, as an American journalist has said, being made to look like Texas; of cities in India equipped with a Main Street, soda fountains and drug stores; of American cinema, refrigerators and automobiles as the goal of the endeavour of the ages. Their temper recalls a little that of the German mercantile expansionists after 1870. Unfairly, but not unnaturally, the recollection of Oriental nationalists turns to Mexico, where so-called dollar imperialism received its trials, and they seem to see the shadow of Porfirio Diaz lengthen over Asia.

The irony is that the exponents of economic imperialism use often the language of the champions of universal liberty. They find in the Atlantic Charter an instrument which can be used against all rival imperialisms to that of America. So far the tendency has been to use it

[1] Minorities in Asiatic countries might have a certain apprehension if American influence grew strong. For Americans see the peoples of the world divided as by a fact of nature into a number of great nations, such as the Russians, the Chinese, the Indians. They find it hard to give full respect to the claims of minorities, since when they decide that a social group is an eccentric fraction, dissident but homogeneous with the rest of the nation, they consider its eventual absorption a natural and necessary thing. America's own success in absorbing its minorities has been the most remarkable in history.

chiefly against the British Asiatic Empire, and the cry was that there was no room in the world for the New Deal and New Delhi. National idiosyncrasies are seldom new; and it may be permissible to recall parallel tactics in the past. The following is a passage from *Martin Chuzzlewit*, a book which so far as it deals with America is generally best forgotten.

'Oh, but it was a clincher for the British lion, it was. "Lion", cried the young Columbian, "where is he? Who is he? What is he? Show him to me. Let me have him here. Here I", said the young Columbian, in a wrestling attitude, "upon this sacred altar. Here I", cried the young Columbian, idealizing the dining table, "upon ancestral ashes, cemented with the gorious blood poured out like water on our native plains of Chickabiddy Lick! Bring forth that Lion", said the young Columbian. "Alone I dare him. I taunt that Lion. I tell that Lion, that Freedom's hand once twisted in his mane, he rolls a corse before me, and the Eagles of the Great Republic laugh, Ha Ha. . . .'

'This young Columbian was succeeded by another, to the full as eloquent as he, who drew down storms of cheers. But both remarkable youths, in their great excitement (for your true poetry can never stoop to details) forgot to say with whom or what the Watertoasters sympathized, and likewise why or wherefore they were sympathetic. Thus Martin remained for a long time as completely in the dark as ever; until at length a ray of light burst in upon him through the medium of the Secretary, who, by reading the minutes of their past proceedings, made the matter somewhat clearer. He learned that the Watertoast Association sympathized with a certain Public Man in Ireland, who held a contest upon certain points with England; and that they did so because they didn't love England at all—not by any means because they loved Ireland much; being indeed horribly distrustful of its people always, and only tolerating them because of their working hard, which made them very useful.'

If America should become active in Asia, the chances are that it would seek to act in concert with, or at times by means of, China. It is true that America, which at the height of the war thought of China as a kind of secular New Jerusalem, has suffered a disillusionment about its protégé. But a Washington-Nanking axis has already an existence, if tenuous; and American convenience might best be served if China became the centre of the Asiatic continent, the other Oriental states revolving round it like satellites.

[vi]

Russia, China, and America, together with Great Britain, will be the principal outside powers with which South Asia must deal. Other powers may enter in later; of these the chief may be Japan whose career as a major state has been so singular and calamitous. Whether Japan will have an aggressive future is, of course, uncertain; other countries, Sweden for example in the seventeenth century, have had a brief military glory and then retired to peaceful life. Like all relatively small island countries, Japan finds its strategic position worsened by the conditions of atomic war. But if tension between America and Russia grows very acute, America which crushed Japan as a military power may call it back to being; and if Japan is thus set up as a puppet it is likely to turn quickly into a live actor. Would it then revive its limitless ambitions of the nineteen-thirties?

Everything about Japan is peculiar, and its history is unpredictable. More than any other country it behaves like a temperamental human being. In the eight and ninth centuries the Japanese, a small barbarian people, tried to turn themselves into a replica of their tremendously impressive neighbour, China—just as in the nineteenth century they tried by a similar *tour de force* to change themselves into a western power. In the sixteenth century they set out to conquer Asia, landing over a quarter of a million men on the mainland; they failed, and, alarmed by the appearance of the Spanish and Dutch in the Orient, they retired, after sending diplomatic parties to prospect the courts of Europe, into the most peculiar hermit-life which any country has yet lived, prohibiting all coming and going from their country. From then, until their return to international life in the middle of the nineteenth century, they devoted themselves to maintaining a hieratic society, to curious ceremony, and to arts which were pretty if not exhilarating. Their conservatism at this time was so extreme and extended so far that the government at one time arrested painters who imitated the Dutch in using chiaroscuro. One of their shoguns or dictators excelled all previous eccentricities by making for two decades the welfare of the dog population of the islands the chief object of government.

Japan's history since this seclusion ended is well known—in contrast with the worship of art, industrialization; in contrast with introversion, a boundless extension; in contrast with a code of chivalry, crude lawlessness. The spirit which has lived through all these changes and phases is most intelligibly portrayed in a remarkable travel book of the last century, *Tales of Old Japan*, by Lord Redesdale. It is a spirit

energetic, macabre, artistic, humourless, unintellectual. Even to-day, Japanese children are taught such songs as the following:

Now when the moon is bright I see
The stories conjured up for me
Of suicides—by moonlight told—
To me, a boy, of heroes bold
Who killed themselves most pleasantly.

Whether or not they are likable, Japanese are formidable. They act, even if foolishly, with more unity than any other people. The skill with which, since defeat, their governing class have fought inch by inch to save what they consider to be Japan's interest, and the discipline of the country in its adversity cause, if not admiration, at least wonder. India's contact with Japan may therefore not yet be over.

[vii]

These seem to be the inner mechanism, behaviour, and probable aims of the various external powers (other than Great Britain) which either have interests in South Asia or are being pushed by events to activity in that area.

CHAPTER THREE

THE SUCCESSION STATES

[i]

As British authority withdraws from South Asia, in what condition will be the different countries of the former British Asiatic Empire to resist the pressure upon them from outside?

Suppose that an adverse power, wishing to break up the bloc of former British territory, drew up what in the recent war was called a plan of political warfare, what are the weak points which it might notice in each of its victims, and how would it assess its chances of success?

[ii]

India would be the centre for attack as the centre from which the unity of the region has been maintained.[1] To-day the political power of Great Britain in India is being transferred to the national leaders. The chances of India being able to sustain the burden adequately will be weakened by the division of the country into Hindustan and Pakistan. Nevertheless the two parts of the country may co-operate closely enough to take away some of the effects of division. And it may be represented not merely as ungenerous but as anachronistic

[1] Hegel wrote as follows: 'India as a Land of Desire forms an essential element in general history. From the most ancient times downwards, all nations have directed their wishes and longings to gaining access to the treasures of this land of marvels, the most costly which the Earth presents treasures of Nature—pearls, diamonds, perfumes, rose-essences, elephants, lions, etc.—as also treasures of wisdom. The way by which these treasures have passed to the West has at all times been a matter of world historical importance, bound up with the fate of nations.'

to suppose that Indian governments will be any less competent to maintain India's safety than the rather palsied British administration which they replace. Has not the loss in 'stiffening' through the elimination of a few hundred experienced English civil servants been already discounted by the country's growing political maturity and by the healing of the schism between government and people which British rule had caused?

An enemy would be rash which ignored India's strength.

India has a large army, tested in the battles of more than a century; even if it is now divided into armies of Pakistan and Hindustan, they will probably be in close alliance. India has an imposing fabric of government, the most elaborate in Asia. At least until very recently, orders of government have been obeyed rapidly throughout the country. Indian officials, in the highest positions of government, have shown that they possess skill at least equal to that of their European colleagues, even though the newer recruits may not be of quite the same high standard. In spite of war strains, the financial position is not unsound; industry is growing; there are great resources in raw materials; the system of communications, already good, is being improved. Capacity for war now depends largely on a country's achievements in physical science, and in this branch of knowledge, Indian scientists have shone. At least to the same extent as China, India is likely to be a 'great power'.

An enemy would, however, perceive opportunities. He would probably argue as follows:

'War is the grand test of a nation's vitality, and India in 1942 under the threat—not the actuality—of invasion, scarcely gave a performance deterring the aggressor.

'Admittedly, India's weakness at this time was due in part to the quarrel between Indian nationalism and the British regime. Nationalists could not rally against the Japanese because they were thwarted by their struggle with Great Britain; but they promise that when the British give up all concern in the internal affairs of India, they, after a period of transition, will mobilize the resources and unify the will of the country so effectively that in any future crisis the Indian record will be different. This promise is not to be lightly regarded. Peoples to-day are responsive to organization. Patriotism is as strong amongst young Indians as among young Chinese or Russians. Indian nationalism is a force of great moral, and perhaps constructive, value.'

But the enemy, while thus cautiously admitting that the nationalist triumph in India may give the country a new power and purpose, might continue as follows:

'My opportunity lies in the disunity of India.

'If under British rule the divisions in society were whited over, the cracks are now showing more clearly again. The machine of the State rests on a crust of society which is splitting apart.

'There are two distinct and separate nationalisms in India. Whatever the constitutional settlement—whether or not Pakistan is created as a full independent state—the area that is now called India will be racked by communal hostilities. It will always be possible that Moslems may regard the Islamic peoples of the Middle East as more their compatriots than are the Hindus, or to save themselves from their Hindu neighbours they might even, if all else failed, turn to that great power whose advance in Asia has been so majestic and continuous. And Hindus might similarly treat with foreign powers. Nor might the lesser communities fail to play various disruptive parts. In the earliest known political treatise in India, there is the maxim that in a domestic quarrel it is good tactics to call in the foreigner.

'As long as communal division persists, the community which gains power will be tempted to seek the rewards of power in discriminating against the loser. Thus there will always be a more or less desperate opposition.

'The paradox is that India is violently nationalist, that the aim of nationalism is to secure uniformity among its citizens, and that no country in the world is divided into so many sections. Nationalism cannot restrain itself from trying to hammer the country into unity; and it could with more safety hammer dynamite.

'The divisions are not only communal. Class-war may be sharper in India than elsewhere. Consider what opportunities the agitator may find in the sixty million Untouchables.

'To bring two million men under arms during the war was to start new unrest. Peasants who until ten years ago had never been more than ten miles from their village have as soldiers been sent round half the world, have become as familiar with complex war weapons and combustion engines as with wooden ploughs and water buffaloes, and have learned to think of the overthrow of Empires as a routine task.

'Although only a minute part of the huge population is at present interested in politics, the interest is spreading; and it is an obvious rule that the greater number of people taking part in politics, the more likelihood is there of violence.

'There is the growing habit of defying the government, taught by Congress as a means of coming to power. Triumphant, it will find this weapon used against itself. Moreover new parties will insinuate them-

selves into the ramifying borings with which Congress began the undermining of society.[1]

'A national government has yet to forge an army on whose obedience it can rely.

'Mere nationalism is not likely to cure at once the sick Indian soul.

'The past of India shows what anarchy the country is capable of if ordered government should break down; and the almost incredible recent history of Germany and persecution of the Jews shows how a country may re-enact in most anachronistic ways the events of the past. When government, whether alien or native, weakens in India, the tradition is to loot. And the instinct is likely to be strengthened if the present economic stringency continues, and the strong see in violence the simplest means of obtaining the cloth and food now in short supply.

'In this light, how interesting are the recent events—the Mutiny in the Navy, the communal riots in Bengal and Bihar, the tension. The cracks will not necessarily widen. But they show where the weakness lies.'

Thus an adversary might reason, standing like Milton's Satan on the outskirts of the unfolding new world and contemplating the creatures whose doom he intends. And unfortunately even the well-wisher, seeing the liberation of India as a forward step in human progress, and noticing favourably the contrast between the optimistic will of Indian youth to reshape their world and the disillusioned cynicism of European youth, cannot expect smooth times. So difficult will be the task of organizing a society so vast, so archaic, and so turbulent.[2]

[1] In one of his novels Dostoievsky describes what the Nihilists had done to Tsarist society:

'Each of these (cells) proselytizing and ramifying endlessly, aims by systematic denunciation to injure the prestige of local authority, to reduce the villages to confusion, to spread confusion and scandals, together with complete disbelief in everything and eagerness for something better.'

[2] A letter written recently by a shrewd Indian observer expresses these doubts more concretely. He says:

'The irony in India is that you have set up the most sophisticated form of government over a society the most archaic—one of which it may truly be said that "the most ancient heavens through thee are fresh and strong". Here on the one hand you have a form of government copied from England, based on toleration, liberty under law, a temperate individualism, all drawn from the stuff of English society and developed as the result of a very long political history in which a succession of most lucky chances, which you had little right to expect, has made you what you are. On the other you have a society in which a large part of the population sincerely

Mr. Nehru has often stated that the future problems of India are economic and not political; and enlightened men might well desire that the political problems were in fact settled so that the country might devote itself untroubled to its pressing economic tasks; yet the political difficulties are real, cannot be wished away, and, if not overcome, may cause the economic situation to deteriorate.

Nor indeed will the economic problems be easily solved. The transformation of society by new means of production is the classic cause of political revolution. This transformation is being accelerated.

Two economic circumstances are particularly ominous. One is the increase of population. According to the census of 1941 the population is already nearly 400 million—perhaps a greater total even than that of China whose figure is unknown—and is growing at the rate of five million a year in what has been called a devastating torrent of babies. Here, perhaps, is the circumstance most likely of all to upset Indian peace. Malthusian gloom over expanding populations is, it is true, out of fashion; the disasters which were once predicted from their swelling figures have not always come to pass. Technical changes have enabled society in the West to accommodate the increasing manpower; and now that the population there is about to decline, the anxiety is rather that there will be too few citizens. But in the eastern agricultural empires, Malthus's pessimism has proved better founded. For the troubles in China over the past thirty years, a population crisis is perhaps the chief cause—just as in the past China has gone through a time of troubles every three or four hundred years whenever the population, after many decades of prosperity, has outstripped the means of subsistence. In India, population is being poured into

believes that all the visible world is illusion; where Brahmins, a caste in many respects like your Druids of two thousand years ago, enjoy a power and prestige often commented on but seldom appreciated except by those who have lived in Indian society; where magistrates may be soused with water by peasants who hope in this way to procure rain in their district; where hospitals exist for sick rats, mice and bugs; where the railway companies warn passengers against professional poisoners; where at the court of one of the most powerful princes officers are appointed whose sole duty it is to seek out ants and offer them grain; where, at least in some provinces, goat stealing is a graver crime than wife-slaughter; where the wives of pious Hindus drink the water in which they have washed their husbands' big toe and where the bath water of a Moslem religious magnate is sold for handsome sums to his followers. These may be small details, grotesque details, in our national life, but they are symptoms. Ours is an archaic society which needs modernizing, and the form of government to carry through this change we must devise for ourselves. It is unlikely to be Westminster democracy.'

an economic system whose sides can scarcely hold it indefinitely. In normal times the country can just support this huge population, but with the least interruption of normal times, catastrophe results; the recent Bengal famines were an example. India is thus like a man whose nose is by a hair's breadth above water: the merest ripple on the water means death. Over all the fertile parts of the country the people now compete for land, and the result, as happened in China, is that holdings become smaller, rents grow higher and social tension grows between the tenant and the landowner. Although it has been found in many countries that when the standard of living rises beyond a certain point, a decrease of the birth-rate automatically sets in, in India the rise in population may prevent the standard of living ever reaching this point, or an explosion due to the population crisis may occur before it does so. Unquestionably the greatest benefactor of India would be he who could make two ears of wheat or rice grow where one grew before and one baby grow where two grew before. But in a vast illiterate peasant community, birth-control, at least in our times, is hardly practicable.[1] Nor can industrialization, even on the grandest scale, draw off more than a small fraction of the increasing surplus of farmers. Should atom power be harnessed and used for irrigation, large tracts of desert might be cultivated, and so the danger would for a time be removed. But, failing this, a growing agrarian tension is probable, such as has gone before many catastrophes in the East. The surging flood of superfluous people may turn into a revolutionary army, trampling down any constitution, however well devised.

The second danger is from the lopsidedness of the economic structure; upon this the Radical leader, Mr. M. N. Roy, has written a great deal. Recent economic progress, real though it is, is insecure. The high capitalist edifices lack the exterior line of small economic enterprise which has been the salvation of capitalism in the West. It is often argued that the factories, banks and business institutions in India have not grown organically out of the economic life but are something imposed on a substratum which is primitive or feudal. The two parts do not match and the one cannot sustain the other; a great industry is growing, but because the peasantry remains so poor and backward—due partly to the delay in reforming age-old institutions—the country will in the end be unable to absorb the products of

[1] In the villages, fertility is still regarded as an asset. A family with a few children is regarded as a poor thing. Recently a Viceroy's wife on visiting a village was greeted with placards reading, 'Welcome, Mother of Millions, Nature's Masterpiece'.

industry. From this, it is said, will come strains imperilling the whole social order, as from a rather similar maladjustment are alleged to have come many of the stresses in pre-war Japan and Germany which led to revolution and war. Nor is a national government in India very likely to remedy this fault. On the one hand it is pledged to further huge industrial development; on the other, from all present signs it is likely to be fettered by the classes which will oppose the far-reaching egalitarian social reforms which could restore soundness to the economic system.

'*Parnell came down the road, he said to the cheering men,*
"*Ireland shall win her freedom, and you still break stone.*" '

[iv]

The signs in short are that India approaches one of those periods of crisis which from time to time have shattered all great societies, signs which are usually the same. Society, having outgrown its customs and institutions, is felt to obstruct right living; and men of energy and imagination, in whatever activity they engage, feel themselves impeded and frustrated. They criticize all that is inherited from the past, especially of the political system, and feel that forms are throttling life.

Crisis may develop slowly. Hindu society—though not Moslem—is naturally conservative; the attachment by so many millions to cows and Brahmins and to the ancient ways is a strong preservative against revolution. The nationalist leaders, who have become conservative, believe that by their coming to power they have actually saved the country from social revolution. Moreover the situation has still to ripen. In the appalling reign of death during the Bengal famine hundreds of thousands perished without making any attempt to loot the city of Calcutta whose wealthy citizens did not disguise that their own store-houses were full. As yet no set of ideas beyond the simple one of nationalism binds together all the aggrieved and turbulent. Communism may, however, play the same part in rousing the next generation to revolutionary action as nationalism in the last. The rapid growth of the Communist Party, already attracting many of the young men who morally are the most admirable, may be the first aftermath of nationalist triumph and of the disillusionment which usually follows success. The so-called Congress Socialists are also revolutionaries. These may be especially disruptive. Some are revolutionary by temperament with no purpose beyond revolution for its own sake.

[v]

Such is the India which its new masters, the popular parties, must manage. The interest of their neighbours will be to see whether they are able to secure obedience and conduct a stable government. What are their chances?

Power in the political parties is in the hands chiefly of lawyers and what in other countries are called bourgeois politicians. Anticipating their coming to office, they have built up authoritarian parties which have shown themselves strong in opposition. A tug on the rope of party discipline has been enough to break the careers of too independent members, to ensure that energy is used for the common purpose instead of domestic strife, and to maintain an obedient, almost ventriloquist Press. Those who criticize them for adopting authoritarian methods are often short-sighted. The danger with which they are likely to be faced is a disruption of political society—general disorder such as recently in Bengal, a growing unreliability of police and army, the defiance of the centre by insubordinate provincial governments. They would have done India an ill service if in devotion to the theory of democracy they had shrunk from using a resolute and controlling hand, though it may be hoped a humane one.

The doubtful question indeed is whether when the test comes they will be resolute enough. Hitherto the parties have manœuvred under a shelter maintained by hands other than their own. Political rallies have often been described—the docile, white-dressed audiences—the jargon of politics—the value attached to parlour formalities, to points of order and apologies, the sense that what is happening is in a void and that the political leaders, while claiming to be revolutionaries, would often vanish at the blast of true political upheaval. Consider the life of the average leader. He has drifted into politics because at school or university he discovered in them an opening to a larger world. Attached to the faction of some dignitary he has found that by following the party line he was assured of an easy life. It is true that the softness of Indian politics can be exaggerated, for has not Congress in two rebellions shaken so badly the Government of India that the British deemed they could not risk a third? Nor have the leaders yet enjoyed for long the creative experience of holding power, that experience which sometimes matures a man at greater speed than any other in nature. But their capacity is at best not yet proved. The present nationalist leaders are all surprisingly old. Whether they can hold their young men is doubtful. Rhetoric serves admirably as an

aid to government when a strong machine exists, but it loses its value if the machine breaks down.

Pessimism is unhelpful; but while speculating on what was likely to happen, I chanced upon a volume of Burke, and the following sentences—written at the time of the States General in France, when Napoleon was quite unknown—seemed not irrelevant.

'After I had read over the list of the persons and descriptions elected (into the Parliament) nothing which they afterwards did could appear astonishing. Among them, indeed, I saw some of known rank; some of shining talents; but of any practical experience in the state, not one man was to be found. The best were only men of theory. . . .

'Judge of my surprise when I found that a very great proportion of the Assembly (a majority, I believe, of the members who attended) was composed of practitioners in the law. . . . The general composition was of obscure provincial advocates, of stewards of petty local jurisdictions, country attorneys, notaries and the whole train of the ministers of municipal litigation, the fomentors and conductors of the petty war of village vexation. From the moment I read the list, I saw distinctly, and very nearly as it has happened, all that was to follow. . . .

'It is known that armies have hitherto yielded a very precarious and uncertain obedience to any senate or popular authority. The officers must totally lose the characteristic disposition of military men, if they see with perfect submission and due admiration the dominion of pleaders. . . . In the weakness of one kind of authority, and in the fluctuation of all, the officers of an army will remain for some time mutinous and full of faction, until some popular general, who understands the art of conciliating the soldiery, and who possesses the true spirit of command, shall draw the eyes of all men upon himself. Armies will obey him on his personal account.'

[iv]

If India, because of its domestic circumstances, is vulnerable to disruptive action from outside, still more so are the minor satellite countries of South Asia. Burma especially would seem made for the hand of a designing adversary. The Japanese success in 1942 in organizing a fifth column in the country shows how easy is its penetration by a power bent on the overthrow of its government. What has happened since—the ravaging of its economic life, the increased political excitement which results from the recent upheavals, the rise of young leaders with a following of private armies—gives to intrigue

many new opportunities. Like India, Burma will soon, if it wishes, be free from the British connection; but its record with parliamentary government does not promise that there will be a stable regime. Moreover what chiefly unites Burmans is dislike of India, the result of the migration to the country of India's coolie population.

Ceylon is perhaps too small to be anything but an easily controlled appendage of India. But Malaya, until 1941 the quietest corner of the British Empire, accumulates the poison for a future bitter communal struggle. Throughout so much of the world to-day the conflict within the boundaries of a state between hostile communities is the chief political theme. In Malaya, since the rival communities, Chinese and Malayan, are almost equal, a battle for supremacy is certain to take place. The Chinese are organized, the Malays are organizing. Here is opportunity for intervention from outside. As the conflict grows, Malaya's present union with the other countries of South Asia is likely to be endangered. Many of the Malayan Chinese certainly desire to see their country linked in some way with China itself; the Malays, though opposed to the Chinese, have equally no inclination towards India, and their hopes lie, if anywhere, with Java; and the million Indians in the country, mostly coolies, could give to their parent land nothing of the same aid which the wealthy, educated and close-knit Chinese might give to Nanking. Professor Toynbee has forecast that Malaya will be the theatre for the struggle, probably peaceful, between India and China for the control of the South Asiatic seas; and he expected that China would be the victor.

[v]

An external power, planning its political warfare against British Asia, would, however, not limit its survey to British territory, but would be equally interested in the lands which have been outworks or interstices of the Empire. If it cannot reach the centre, it will, in a more conventional way, deal first with the circumference. Afghanistan, Persia, Iraq, Siam, Sinkiang, Tibet, Indo-China, Java are all countries too weak to provide for their own defence; the governments of some are unstable; and others are more likely to join in an attack on the interior countries of South Asia than to act as their first line of defence.

Persia has perhaps the worst prospects. The condition of Persia has been made clear by recent events there. Persia is a large mountain country, of great natural beauty and small population, with an upper class languidly charming, steeped in poetry, and determinedly re-

sisting the knowledge that Persia has fallen for ever from the position of a conquering imperial power. It has a social system from which a strong government can hardly be expected to grow. Wealthy landlords rule in part of the country over a poor and not very virile peasantry; the rest is occupied by a turbulent tribal population.

The traditional form of government was absolute rule by the Shah. In the nineteenth century his titles used to be King of Kings, Shadow of God, Centre of the Universe, Exalted like the Planet Saturn, Well of Science, Footpath of Heaven, Sublime Sovereign whose Standard is the Sun, whose Splendour is that of the Firmament, Monarch of Armies Numerous as the Stars. Early in the present century the Persians made a pathetic but not ignoble effort to bring themselves to the position of a small but modernized state, and the urban and possessing classes, allied surprisingly with the mullahs, tried to set up parliamentary institutions. There was revolution, but also counter-revolution, and Persia remained unreformed. Dictatorship alternated with pusillanimity. 'When our constitution works', said a Persian minister to the writer, 'we have anarchy. When it does not, we have tyranny.' The last dictator, Reza Shah Pahlevi, who fell after the Anglo-Russian intervention in 1941, had for his own protection made a vacuum of Persian politics; thus when he abdicated there was no effective government to succeed him. The older generation of politicians came out of retirement but proved, when the challenge came, no effective guardians of their country's integrity.

Even if Persia rebuilds itself, it is hardly likely to act in close union with the other countries of South Asia. Especially it will be disinclined to associate with India, for, with its peculiar recollection of history, it believes itself to be the parent of Indian civilization and a more important country. 'Oh, India, yes we have often conquered that,' remarked a young lady to the writer, after he landed in Bushire.

The present independent status of Persia is regulated by the Tripartite Treaty of 1942 between Russia, Persia and Great Britain, reinforced by the Teheran declaration, to which the U.S.A. is a party. But Russia's recent action in Azerbaijan shows that it has not forgotten the division of Persia into spheres of influence in 1907 or the British intervention of 1919. Whatever may be the considerations behind Russian policy—memories of the past, fear of Anglo-American control of the country, a building up of an outer bastion of Russian defence—there is little doubt that the maintenance of a really independent Persia, especially in the north, accords ill with Russian policy. And because of its internal condition, Persia is vulnerable to the underground attack in which a communist party is so successful.

Another outwork of the South Asia region whose internal position is hardly secure is Iraq. Iraq is a small country of uncertain population, of whom the majority are Arabs.[1] It is the landward continuation of the sea and air communications from India through the Persian Gulf to Europe; and, because of this, was the scene of intervention by forces from India in both great wars. From 1920 to 1932 it was a mandatory of Great Britain : since then it has been independent. Its government, which is by a king and oligarchy working through the not very convincing form of parliamentary institutions, has been more stable than might have been expected. Yet a quiet future is unlikely. The young men are restless against the oligarchs; a large Kurdish population regards the government as alien; and peace in Iraq depends too closely on peace, which is improbable, throughout the volcanic Arab world.[2]

Still weaker than Iraq is Afghanistan. Afghanistan is a very interesting land. It is one of the last states run on the true principles of Islam, a perfect 'mullah's paradise', and the provincial towns such as Kandahar and Ghazni are like a series of illustrations of the *Arabian Nights*. But it is hopelessly ramshackle. It is an empire of a minority of the people, the Pathan tribesmen, ruling over Persian and Turki-speaking peoples who fall into five or six different ethnic groups. Most of the Pathans live in the mountains and their interest is less to maintain their supremacy than to make an expedition and loot the capital whenever the monarchy falls into difficulties. Instead of being a pillar of their own regime, they are a battering ram always liable to be used for its overthrow. They are a governing race which does not believe in government. And their subject peoples feel no reverence for a Pathan monarchy or even for an Afghan state. These, so far as they are politically awake, turn with interest, even if because of religious scruple with anxiety, towards Tadjikistan and Uzbekistan, constituent republics of the Soviet Union; it is often overlooked that people scattered all over Afghanistan speak the same language as the border peoples in the U.S.S.R. The administration of the country is conducted as a family party, and most of the great offices are shared

[1] A census of 1935 gave the population as three and a half million. But during the war eight million persons registered for sugar rationing, and seventeen million for cloth rationing.

[2] The small Sheikhdoms of the Persian Gulf are also of importance in the security of India. These are small Arab principalities which are in effect protectorates in special treaty relations with the British Government which is responsible for their defence and foreign relations. World interest in them has been increased by the discovery in some of them, especially Bahrein, of abundant supplies of oil.

in the royal house, an old habit of Asiatic kingdoms. There is an efficient spy system, and the government has made intelligent use of the telephone as a means of maintaining its authority; thereby it, and not the opposition, knows exactly what is happening in every part of the country. But it is able to keep only a little ahead of the forces of upheaval, and a small incident with the tribes may at any time widen into a major revolt, sweeping the Kabul regime before it. Because of its domestic weakness and of its fear of Russia the present Afghan Government has been inclined to a sort of tacit alliance with India; but this may change if a predominantly Hindu government rules in Delhi.[1]

To the north lie Sinkiang and Tibet. Sinkiang, a vast stony area whose population is as thin as it is heterogeneous, is a kind of appendage or colony of China, but its people have rebelled against Chinese government whenever its power has been weakened. Twice at such times in the past century Sinkiang has been the scene of Russian aggression and subsequent recession. The last Russian withdrawal was in 1943, and its motive puzzled the Foreign Offices of Asia. The Chinese governmental machine, moving back, caused another of the habitual revolts, and the present state of affairs is obscure.

Tibet also has at various times been under Chinese sovereignity, but at present is virtually autonomous, its government being a theocracy of the Dalai Lama. The Chinese Government does not conceal its desire to establish its authority in the country.[2]

On the eastern side of the Indian Ocean the countries outside the Empire are Indo-China, Siam and the Netherlands East Indies. On each the eye of an aggressor country must rest with interest: on Indo-China because it possesses a potential naval base in Camranh Bay from which the South China Sea could be controlled; on Siam because it is a possible advance base for assault on the Indian Ocean; on Java for the same reason. Japan's early occupation of Indo-China and Siam made possible in 1942 its capture of Singapore. Each country shares the common present political experience of

[1] If the British expedition in 1841 had been successful, southern Afghanistan would probably have been annexed to the Indian Empire as it was formerly to the Moghul Empire. Since India itself is a patchwork of many peoples, there is no intrinsic reason why it should not belong to the Indian Empire.

[2] In 1913 an agreement was reached between representatives of the British Government, China and Tibet that the outer zone of Tibet (controlled from Lhasa), while forming part of the Chinese dominion, should be autonomous; but the Chinese Government repudiated the assent of its plenipotentiary.

Asia. Politics have become popular, and the struggle between competing groups, which, like all new parties, are reluctant to compromise, is likely to keep them disturbed. Indo-China is a mosaic of peoples and cultures, and the history of the region prior to the French conquest was one of constant warfare. In Indo-China and in Java there is also, in addition to domestic conflict, a struggle between the nationalist parties and the dying imperialism of France and Holland. Here are evident opportunities for an outsider to intervene; and for the interests of India, it is unfortunate that some of the nationalist parties have fixed hostility to India due to the national fear of an overmighty neighbour and of economic penetration.

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The political prospects in Sonth Asia are thus hardly encouraging.

At a time when the true aims and interests of the new national governments lean all towards domestic matters and the recasting in a brief lifetime of the institutions of centuries, now outworn, the unfortunate circumstances of the rest of the world and the evil legacy of its recent history draw them away to the task of building moats and barriers on their borders, or at least to the anxious inquiry of what is the best modern version of these in a world where the power of military aggression has become so terrifying.

CHAPTER FOUR

DEFENCE

[i]

In a sense, all speculation about security is unreal, or very unreliable. The change produced in military possibilities by the atom bomb is a leap from one set of circumstances to another with so great a gulf between that there has hardly yet been time for an intelligent judgment of what is now needed for security. It is as if the strategists who won the battles of Crécy and Agincourt had had to fight the rest of the Hundred Years War with submarines and poison gas. Moreover even while the mind labours to overtake and master the new circumstances, they are likely to change again still more radically as scientific discovery follows discovery.

It may be that no defence is possible against the atom bomb. True, in the past every new invention in attack has been countered with an effective new invention in defence; but why should this always be so? If war came again, the destruction on both sides might be so complete that the word defence would be a mockery.

Perhaps the result will be that no country will dare to use the atom bomb. But certainly in the immediate future the game of prestige and power politics will continue.

[ii]

The countries of South Asia have thus to grope in darkness towards their proper defence policies. What they decide to do will depend on how they picture the course of a future Asiatic war.

A strategist in South Asia might start with the following premises, though very cautiously and with the conviction that he was probably overlooking vital factors.

By atom bombs, rockets, fast aeroplanes, huge industrial output, and large-scale air communication, it is possible to project war more

effectively than in the past into the enemy's homeland. Therefore a distance between a country's frontiers and its heart has become more than ever indispensable to defence. Small areas have become much less defensible than large ones. In a small country industry and administration are crowded together and are easy targets for bombardment.

A large industry has become of more vital importance than before for survival. War is now the final test of the relative efficiency of rival national industries.

The need for manpower has been increased, since though great results can be achieved by relatively few combatants, strength in future will lie with the big land masses organized to produce the maximum industrial force.

With these premises in mind, the strategist will inquire what changes the new inventions have made in the defensibility of the South Asia region. When he has finished his survey, it may be that he will find that the simple outstanding considerations which had governed defence in South Asia for more than a century have been a little less affected by the revolutionary changes in war than might have been supposed.

Nature has made South Asia a zone which, *if defended as a whole*, it is hard to storm; and even the new weapons of war have not taken away all its natural advantages. The components of a successful defence may still be available there.

Consider the assets of the region. Space, a growing, if vulnerable, industry, man-power, all these, which the new warfare makes the prime military assets, the South Asia region possesses. In the middle lies India, the nerve centre, the seat of industry, the reservoir of man-power; on the outskirts are a row of protective border states. If deserts and mountains separating India from the outside world give no longer the security which they once did—for modern war makes light of deserts and is slowly overcoming mountains—and if with the increased mobility of war the buffer states have lost some of their solidity, India, the centre of the defence system, still enjoys the advantage of wide space between it and its adversaries. It is hard to get at.

But with the British authority lifted, at once in India and Burma and later in Ceylon, the old unity will be lost. Instead of a garrison with a single command, there will be half a dozen different powers, not very well disposed to one another. How can security be organized in the new conditions?

That each of the countries should rely on its own defences, its own

diplomacy, or on being innocuous or inconspicuous, would be a certain way to disaster. This was the course which, pursued in Europe after faith had been lost in the League of Nations, caused the doom of the small nations. Countries as weak as Burma and Ceylon cannot defend themselves. And India, though a colossus in the making, requires for its own defence the integrity of the small countries, since in the hands of an enemy they would be bases for the assault upon itself. Nor can it be yet assumed that the military disadvantage of small states will be remedied by a fully dependable system of protection through the United Nations Organization. Perhaps it may in time, but the United Nations Organization has yet to demonstrate that it will be a more efficient protector than was the old League of Nations.

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How, then, is defence to be organized?

The essential need seems to be to preserve some sort of military unity in South Asia.

The British Empire in Asia, by which this was secured, is in liquidation. Can a new and different unity be created?

There is little doubt that to do so would be in the general interest. The building of large blocs is the trend in world politics, and the United Nations Charter recognized this in allowing for regional organizations as part of the world organization. To break down an existing bloc would be a retrograde step and would create a kind of Balkans in the short or long run endangering peace.

Military prudence and political logic suggest therefore the transformation of the former British Empire in Asia into a South Asian confederacy into which each partner should be admitted as an equal, though clearly the part which each plays could not be equal.

A machinery for consultation alone will not suffice; the British Commonwealth itself has survived its last and greatest crisis not because the relations between the different parts were consultative only, but in spite of that fact.

Any proposal for such a confederacy will certainly excite many objections. Constructive proposals are likely to come on nationalist public opinion in the different countries as novel suggestions with all the fears and apprehensions which a political novelty can always be made to excite. But in no other way except continuing union does safety lie, in no other way can the natural defensive advantage of the terrain of South Asia be exploited.

This might be accepted, but it might yet be argued that because

of the hostility of the different peoples in South Asia to one another a *single* confederacy was an impossibility. The impediment would be the fear and suspicion of India; and an alternative idea which has begun to grow up is of a limited confederacy of the chief Buddhist countries, Burma, Ceylon, Siam, and Indo-China, but omitting India. The peoples of these countries mix cordially with one another; they have been described as the 'Sarong bloc', the sarong being a garment worn throughout the region. But could their bloc defend itself efficiently if they held India at arm's length? It is very unlikely.The man-power and economic resources of India are essential for security in South Asia.

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If a confederacy is to be effective, it must then consist of all the former countries of the British Asiatic Empire and also perhaps of some of the other countries of South Asia which find it to their advantage to adhere. A Regional Council for defence would be an essential organ. This is not the place to discuss the details of hypothetical organizations so airily envisaged; but a council would be required to concert the defence scheme for the whole region, to divide responsibilities, arrange for economic development, and formulate a common foreign policy. Some kind of Political and Economic Council might also be needed, with consultative and perhaps arbitral functions which might later grow into something more; the difficulties certain to rise between India and Burma in economic issues show the need for a body of this kind, and without it there is danger that all the countries, great and small, will quarrel with one another and co-operation even in matters of life and death will become impossible. Political and economic policy cannot to-day be treated in isolation from the policy of defence, and there is no branch of the national life which will not sooner or later have its contribution to make towards defence problems.

A confederacy of this kind would not be a substitute for a larger world organization. This will, if it establishes itself, be the best guarantee for peace, and indeed a confederacy of South Asia might well function as a regional organization of the United Nations such as was provided for in the San Francisco Charter.

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In a confederacy, though all partners would be equals, the chief responsibility would inescapably be India's. It is to India that Great

Britain will make over many of the responsibilities which, using India as a base, it formerly undertook throughout all Asia. Indeed it is hard to see how a confederacy could survive if disaster should befall during the present political changes in India, and that country survived not as a single unit but became divided into opposed and hostile states. In what follows, it is assumed, however, that this disaster will be avoided and that the parts of India, even if divided, will concert a single foreign and defence policy. For its own security, Pakistan will need the economic backing of Hindustan. Thus 'India' is spoken of as a single entity, even though it is recognized that this 'India' may in fact consist of two states.

How may 'India' in these circumstances view its capacity to take the lead in a confederacy?

That it will have an ambitious foreign policy is almost certain. It is true that some nationalist leaders, with a vision fixed inwards like that of the Hindu mystics, see no need for India to exert its influence externally. Mr. Gandhi is the chief of these, but his pacifism is not accepted by Congress as a whole. After a short term of office, any governments in India—provided 'India' remains united—are likely to pursue broadly the same policy as their British predecessor; and this will not be surprising since they will be guided by the same motive as in the past, namely to preserve the security of the State. The great international drama is of peace and war, of sovereign states compelled by forces beyond their control to contend with one another willy-nilly. India, even after division, will aspire to be one of the great powers of Asia, and the vision may do more than anything else to turn Indian politics away from sterile introversion and hold the country together against separatist tendencies within.

But though India may wish to wield the sword of its predecessor, will it have the strength to do so? May it not prove a Samson with his hair shorn?

An Indian government—or a confederacy or alliance of Hindustan and Pakistan—will eventually have at its disposal many of the same elements for defence as had the British. Indeed, if present troubles are surmounted, it should in the end have an enthusiastic national backing denied to the former alien regime and be aided by the lessening of communal tension. But the political change will be so great that its ability to organize these elements will, at least for a time, be uncertain. Though it will have the raw materials for defence, their manufacture will need time. Time indeed will be India's chief requirement, time to recover from the shock of growth, time to reorganize its armies, build its national officer corps, heal the communal division

and ensure for the new regime the loyalty of all sections of the people; time to make all its people literate, repairing thus the neglect of the previous regime, since without this the national spirit can never be as formidable as it might; time to extend its communications for up-to-date needs; time to develop its industry whose real expansion has only just begun; time, in short, to develop the efficiency whose present lack causes India to be like a giant asleep.

It is therefore not unreasonable or ungenerous to suppose that a certain time, perhaps a fairly long time, must pass before India, whether as a single power or as a partnership of Hindustan and Pakistan, can play the same part as Great Britain formerly. In two departments of defence it will be especially empty of resource. As yet it is impossible to know the effects of the atom bomb on sea power, but navies are hardly likely to melt away, and the building of an Indian navy of the necessary dimensions will be a long task. By the sea, India is easily approachable. No intervals exist between it and the ocean. India is a peninsula, its coasts extend for 3,000 miles; a naval power in control of the Indian Ocean, or a predominant air power supplemented by naval craft, could block its commerce, bombard some of its principal cities, and land forces wherever the defences are judged most vulnerable. Secondly, India requires air power. India has been described as potentially an enormous airfield from which the whole of South Asia can be controlled and defended. But it lacks an actual air force. Though an aircraft assembly industry now exists, India had not under the British regime manufactured from start to finish a single aeroplane. Can it on its own, without long delay in training its technicians, develop this industry? And can it unaided bring all its industries to the pitch of modernization which is the first need of security?

To an increasing extent, war is a contest of economies. The country which is a little ahead—perhaps a few months ahead—in technical ingenuity has an immense advantage. Admittedly India has many distinguished scientists; but their use in co-operation with industry has only just begun.

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A South Asian confederacy could therefore provide only in part for security. It must be buttressed or shored up by something else. And what should this be but the United Nations Organization as a whole?

But what is the United Nations Organization? Behind it lie the three great powers, Russia, the United States of America, and Great Britain. Though later it may become a genuine organ of international government in which all countries will play their part, at present it is

the instrument of the three major governments for concerting common action. The hope is that they will reach agreement for a common policy in South Asia, each abandoning any intentions or interests which could be suspected of imperialism, and jointly affording any stiffening or economic aid which may be required.

But if hope of a reliable international guarantee for South Asia should fade, and if India or the two Indias, as the chief power or powers in the region, should seek an intimate agreement with one or more of the great powers—even while always maintaining a line to all the others and seizing every opportunity of greater concord with them—in which direction should they turn?

The greatest disaster would of course be that Hindustan and Pakistan allied themselves with different external powers. But this, though possible, is not at present probable.

China, with which certain Congress leaders would desire, and rightly, the most intimate understanding, is itself more sick than India is likely to be; there is no advantage in an alliance with a civil war. Russia will certainly attract the hope and even allegiance of the many under-privileged sections of the Indian people, but for this reason will be feared by a non-communist Indian government.

It is possible that Hindustan might feel a certain inclination to work with Japan. Japan's attack on India in the late war has left behind little resentment. Indeed, many Indians feel that it was Japan's challenge to Great Britain and America which won Asia for the Asiatics and paved the way to India's freedom, even though Japan lost its own war. Japan may come to be regarded as a martyr for Asia's cause. Moreover, the Japanese samurai tradition may attract the Indian military castes who, with the departure of the British from India, are likely to play again a greater part than in the past hundred years. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that Japan will again enjoy sufficient strength to make its alliance of very great value.

Hindustan and Pakistan may therefore find themselves impelled to closest association with Great Britain and the United States of America. Common action between 'India', Washington and London would be an extremely strong force for peace. America's bases in the Pacific would secure India's flank.

Yet, desirable as such action might be, the difficulties in its way should not be underrated. In particular the American contribution would be doubtful.

Isolationism in America is still to be feared, even after the dramatic new departures in American policy, and American intervention in international politics may be too much like a hit-and-run raid.

The American love of freedom has expressed itself in sympathy for Indian emancipation, but what would America do to keep it free? Let it be supposed that the Asiatic world again stirs uneasily; so huge a volcano cannot be long at rest. Would America undertake new hazards in an effort to bring peace to an incorrigible world, or would it in disgust withdraw and concentrate American energies in the American hemisphere, the development of whose resources and civilization may still seem to offer ample scope for the brains and idealism of its people? America has all the instincts of a Crusader, but of a Crusader like Peter the Hermit who launched a Crusade and drew back, leaving others to carry it on. American action if there were another great economic depression is also unpredictable.

America's participation is thus not very dependable. If it were withheld, the joint action of India and Britain, continuing in a new form the same alliance as in the past, though less satisfactory than common action by the three powers, might at least be a steadying and a reinforcement of the international system.

The details of co-operation would presumably be decided in the forthcoming treaties between Great Britain and Hindustan and Great Britain and Pakistan which are to accompany the change of Indian regime.

NOTE

Indian ministers, whether in Hindustan or Pakistan, will probably differ little in practice from the former British regime in what they regard as the essential interests of India in foreign policy. The interests are determined chiefly by geography and technical science, and, failing any unpredictable changes in this last, will be much the same in the next decade or two as in the past few years. Briefly, the principal ones are as follows:

'The integrity, neutrality and, if possible, alliance of all the border states from which India might be attacked—Persia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Nepal, Burma, Ceylon, Malaya, Indo-China, Siam, Netherlands East Indies.

'Access to the oil of the Middle East, Burma and the Netherlands East Indies.

'Welfare of Indian communities in these border countries, and the promotion of Indian trade.

'Safety of sea and air routes in the Indian Ocean on which the security and commerce of India depend.

'The desire to play a part in the external world and in the affairs of the family of soverign powers which is fitting to its own status, culture and past history.'

It is not unreasonable to say that at present only in alliance with an external great power can India, i.e. Hindustan and Pakistan, protect or forward all these interests. From 'India's' point of view every great power has certain disadvantages as an ally. But on balance, Great Britain may seem to have the least.

CHAPTER FIVE

BRITAIN AND INDIA

[i]

Why should Great Britain, whether or not in co-operation with America, undertake these dangerous responsibilities in Asia when the nationalist parties of its present Empire denounce it as imperialist, and would deny it all rewards and privileges? A relatively small island off the north-west of Europe, with a population one tenth that of India, and only doubtfully able to rely on the support in foreign policy of the British Dominions, Great Britain has no strength for unnecessary adventures. A sentimental pride might lead it to assume, like Spain in the seventeenth century or France in this, a role it could no longer play; but the punishment when realities found it out would be humiliating and costly. The limitation of commitments to what is within its power, and to what is indispensable to vital interests, might seem the only sound policy.

It is, however, Britain's weakness which is itself the case for Britain continuing to play a part in Asia. If it were stronger it could more safely confine its interests near home; but its position in Europe having worsened so much, it cannot now with prudence withdraw from Asia.

Its action there follows from the fundamentals of British foreign policy. In the past this has been to maintain British independence, and in the future must be to secure domestic autonomy by the building of a world system of a kind which will not be dominated by any power whose sway is obnoxious to the civilization and liberties of the Anglo-Saxon peoples. Thus in the past any British government was chiefly concerned to protect itself from the military powers which one after another grew up on the European continent. It pursued this aim by promoting a series of alliances with the smaller European states, especially those which, having a sea-board, were in unimpeded communication with the British Isles. Thereby, with the minimum

use of the limited British man-power, it ruined all those who sought for hegemony in Europe. In this it acted very much like Athens in antiquity, heading the maritime states in a league counterbalancing the land power which threatened to overwhelm both them and it; and, like Athens, it had as its principal weapon the sea.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, still following this policy, Great Britain by a series of chances was able to break out from its preoccupation with Europe, and become for a time the dominant world power. Then its interests seemed to be livelier in the distant oceans and the deserts of Central Asia or the African jungle than in the boundary lines of Denmark, Austria or France. From the position it built up in Asia and Africa it derived the strength to maintain itself apart from the European continent. Yet it could not ignore the Continent. For strong as was the Empire with its navy, its dominions and colonies, yet England, the heart of the system, was threatened with destruction if the continental power should ever cooperate against it, or be combined against it by a European dictator. Thus it fought the wars of 1914 and of 1939 in alliance with continental armies opposing Germany.

Until it is safe to repose full confidence in an international security organization, the same reasoning must govern British policy as in the past. At present a military power is coming into being on the European continent, or rather over both Europe and Asia, whose power may presently—though perhaps more slowly than is sometimes feared—make that of Hitler seem as second-class as the power of Louis XIV and Napoleon now seems in comparison with Hitler's. It has behind it the force of an ideological movement which, though it is said to have lost its first explosive force and to have become formalized, has probably no more exhausted its revolutionary consequences than had Christianity in the second and third centuries; the belief that Russia is to be a messiah among the nations has been discussed in an earlier chapter. It is true that no great power follows policies of pure romanticism and the present Russian government is realist beyond doubt. But over the long period, governments, however rational, are swept along by the ideas of their peoples, and England cannot be indifferent if a unique military strength in Europe is in the hands of a country with a sense of mission.

[ii]

Much might prompt a Russian government to feel that it was serving the interests of the age by promoting the unity of Europe.

Political disunity has been the curse of modern European civilization; and change in communications makes it an anachronism as well as a tragedy. There is a theory of Professor Toynbee that most civilizations, after a period of troubles in their mid-career, are in the end brought under a single political system, not through the initiative of a power at the centre of the civilization but by a country on its periphery. This, less sophisticated, and with capacity less exhausted, takes up the championship of the civilization when those who originated it begin to flag and droop. One of the examples he gives is semi-barbarous Macedon unifying the Greek world after Athens, Sparta and Thebes had failed. May not Russia see France as Athens, Germany as Sparta, and itself as Macedon?

Nobody can deny that European union in some form is desirable; but whether Russia, if it had a preponderant hand in its construction, would show such restraint as to make a home in which the ancient culture of Europe revived and flourished can at least be questioned.

Britain, especially, whose political ideas have spread over so great a part of the world, would hardly contemplate entering voluntarily into a European union whose guiding principles were not those of the liberal and Anglo-Saxon civilization. And if it desired to remain free from inclusion against its will, then it would need to be cautious of abandoning its present position as a world power, linked by countless alliances, and of taking the new status of a relatively small European country. There is no virtue in itself in carrying on an old tradition; but in certain circumstances may Great Britain have any alternative but to revert to its old plan of matching a continental military power by a confederacy of maritime small nations? If it is forced to this, it may console itself by the reflection that peace, not war, has been the result of this policy over the greater part of the times when it has been followed.

[iii]

Two objections may be put forward to Great Britain acting in any such way. The first is that, if the end sought is a high civilization, the fatal way for a country is to enter on manœuvres of power politics, and that if its end is to save its soul, that is best done by eschewing all military pride and voluntarily occupying the position of a lesser power. It is not the exercise of power externally which makes a nation influential in history, but what it does internally. The effects of that,

if it is notable, radiate out and penetrate into much larger countries which affect to regard it with condescension. Sweden, in our day, having long renounced the ambitions of the time of Charles XII, has by its social experiments and its arts gained an empire over men's minds. In the small state man is freer, less weighed down with the public burden of contributing to national grandeur. By its nature, a great power is something rather vulgar.

To this, the best answer is perhaps still that of Seeley, writing in 1883:

'A small state among small states is one thing and small states among large states quite another. Nothing is more delightful than to read of the bright days of Athens and Florence, but those bright days lasted only so long as the state, with which Athens and Florence had to do, were in a similar scale of magnitude. The lustre of Athens grew pale as soon as Macedon arose, and Charles V speedily brought to an end the great days of Florence. . . . Russia and the United States will presently surpass in power the states now called great as much as the great country states of the sixteenth century surpassed Florence. Is not this a serious consideration for a state like England, which has at the present moment the choice in its hands between two courses of action, the one of which may set it in that future age on a level with the greatest of these great states of the future, while the other will reduce it to the level of a purely European power looking back, as Spain does now, to the great days when she pretended to be a world state.'

The second objection is that to think of security in terms of Empires, alliances and military power is a disservice to peace, and is to promote the war which is feared. Security now is to be sought in the United Nations Organization; and the coming into being of this, which Seeley did not foresee, has given a new lease of life to the small nations. But can a British government really afford to stake its all upon the success of the United Nations Organization? Its growth in authority would certainly solve many of Great Britain's worst problems, and deliver it from its worst dangers, and thus its government has every interest in strengthening the organization. Any alliances which it makes should be designed, not to secure national security simply, but to secure it through a system of international government. The bad start of the United Nations Organization may perhaps be taken by some as an augury for its better future, just as the finest day often comes after a cloudy morning; and it may be remembered that the League of Nations by contrast had a brilliant beginning like the flashing start of a day ending in torrents of rain. Yet, though it is a

duty to be optimistic about U.N.O., a government would be negligent indeed if for its security it had no second line of defence.

[iv]

Suppose, then, that it is agreed that the interests of Great Britain require a continuance of military understandings. Security cannot be achieved by alliances limited to Europe. The boundaries between the continents are down; and if there is to be a counterweight to a military power stretching from Poland to the sea of Japan, it can only be a league of maritime states extending from Europe and the Mediterranean eastwards through the Indian Ocean to the South China Sea and even Australia and New Zealand.

The dislike which many people feel of the technical terms of the cult called Geopolitik is understandable, for Geopolitik in the guise of a science was an incitement to war. But the earliest of its theorists, Sir Halford Mackinder, in the days when it was a respectable science, drew a picture of the probable course of world affairs which cannot easily be regarded as false. Time and the improvement of communications, he said, would bring into being a single military power at the centre of the land mass of Europe and Asia combined; and if this was not to extend to cover all the old world, the states on the seaboard must combine to produce a power offsetting that of the Continent. The centre, called the Heartland, would then be in equilibrium with the periphery, called the Rimland. All the maritime countries of South Asia belong naturally to the Rimland as much as do those of Europe.

There is an unwillingness in England, inherited from the last century, to think of Asiatic policies as inseparable from European policies. In the Crimean War the British Government refused to try to embarrass Russia by serious aid to the tribes in the Caucasus who were still resisting its advance. One of the most reflective books on post-war organization—that by Professor Carr—contained very little on Asia. And even when attention is turned to this continent, it is as a rule concentrated either on the Far East or Middle East, and India is treated as a sort of no-man's-land between the two regions. Yet unless Asiatic countries, and especially India, are included in the Rimland, its power would scarcely over the long run be great enough to withstand the Heartland. India, with its rising strength, could provide the military man-power and military economic production which, in an alliance with Great Britain, would offset what is lost to the defence of the whole by the diminishing strength of England itself.

There is another and more compelling consideration. If maritime South Asia is not organized in a bloc able to stand outside the central European and Asiatic blocs of the Soviets, may it not in the end be driven by force of events, and whether or not Russia seeks expansion, into the Soviet system? The organized force which Russia might then be able to launch against the west of Europe, shorn of any Asiatic allies, would perhaps be irresistible.

Suppose, again, that as the result of social strains and social changes, law and order should break down throughout South Asia, as happened in China after its revolution of 1911. Such a collapse of order in any large part of the world is a principal destroyer of peace. Great Britain, whose supreme interest is peace, cannot afford to withhold its influence anywhere in the world if by so doing it enlarges the risk of war. And confusion in the Indian Ocean would also cut across the communications between England and Australia.

The foundation of any British alliances in Asia, let it be remembered, must be the union with India, or, as it may be, union with Hindustan and Pakistan. Sometimes it is suggested that Great Britain could continue to play this Asiatic role even if the union with India were severed. The effects of a rupture with India are minimized. Has not England still a magnificent series of Asiatic naval and air bases apart from India—Aden, Trincomalee (in Ceylon), Singapore —and can it not by means of this chain continue to impose security on the Indian Ocean? But to all reasoning of this kind the answer must be that without Indian man-power and resources no British authority could very long maintain itself in the Indian Ocean against a determined assault. All experience has shown that isolated bases are peculiarly vulnerable. The Portuguese Empire in the Indian Ocean in the sixteenth century fell because it was no more than a string of ports unable to generate locally the force for their defence; and in the present war the loss of Singapore showed that in changed conditions of warfare the principle is still true. If Great Britain is to continue over the long period to be an Asiatic power, it must therefore be with India consenting.

It goes without saying that, if there is to be alliance with India, it must be with both Hindustan and Pakistan. Great Britain could afford an alliance with neither if it was of a type which brought it into hostility with the other. What use would be the strategic points in Pakistan without the goodwill and economic resources of Hindustan?

These are the reasons why Great Britain might do well to persevere in its Asiatic and especially its Indian policies in spite of obloquy. Union with India is now a requirement of British security, security of

the British Isles, and it is strange that it has by the revolution of circumstances become such for the first time only when the political union is for the first time seriously endangered.[1]

[v]

Great Britain may have an interest in continuing the Indian connection; but why should India, which believes itself to have suffered from the British connection and has now the chance of breaking free, agree to a British alliance?

The links between the two countries are snapping one by one. Hindus and Moslems will be alike in reasserting their independence. The use by the Indian intelligentsia of the English language and their interest in English literature, in the past a strong bond, will from now on almost certainly diminish. Many of the English traits in India will be carefully uprooted. Under the new regime, the history of the British period will probably be written in a way little flattering to the British, as happened in America after the War of Independence. Political leaders, whatever their personal interest, will not dare to be too anglophile; if they were, it would be used against them by their rivals. At least for a decade or more, mass sentiment is likely to continue anti-British. Already in Indian films the anglicized Indian is a stock figure of fun. If the first effects of Indian self-government have been a sensational improvement in the relations of Indians and British, that is like the sudden flickering up of mutual esteem which sometimes takes place when the partners in an unsuccessful marriage have obtained their divorce.

England, as a result of the diminution of its power from the changing circumstances of the age, has lost prestige far more than people at home realize. Wounding as it may be to British self-esteem, let it be recognized that Indian governments might now inquire very carefully into the advantages before entering into a British alliance.

Furthermore any government of Hindustan will desire, from the most respectable motives, to break free from the sordid international hostilities of the past, and to be friends equally with all the great powers. An alliance is always directed against some power, and India at this stage desires to be against nobody, least of all to see its cities

[1] Lord Curzon wrote prophetically: 'The future of Great Britain will be decided, not in Europe, not even upon the seas and oceans which are swept by her flag, or in the Greater Britain which has been called into existence by her offspring, but in the Continent whence our emigrant stock first came, and to which . . . their descendants have returned.'

laid waste by atom bombs instead of seeing the entire country transformed by the energy let loose by the nationalist victory. Its leaders will wish to be as free of entangling friendships as were the founders of the United States of America.

Many Indians are attracted by Pan-Asia ideas, as was shown in a recent Asian Conference in Delhi. A close connection with a non-Asiatic power might seem a kind of treason to the Asiatic continent.

Proposals of alliance will therefore cause suspicion; and only if Indians feel that their security absolutely demands it, and that the alliance serves the common interest of building up a world organization of security, will prejudice be overcome.

Yet is not this likely to happen, not perhaps immediately, but as the new Indian governments find themselves increasingly apprehensive in a disturbed world? It will be driven to associate itself with one of the great powers. It is improbable that its interests would propel it towards any bloc of which Great Britain was not also a member.

[vi]

There are three bars even to this cold alliance. One is the Indian feeling against official Britain. The second is the Indian grievance over the discrimination against Indians in certain countries of the British Commonwealth. The third, related but different, is the colour bar.

The first is not very serious. The British shine when they are winning or losing, seldom when they are holding a position. When placed in jeopardy, a sufficient number of British civil servants become tireless, resourceful, conciliatory, tenacious and charming. The independence of the territories over which they once lolled will be an excellent medicine for the British who, alarmed into action, may eventually recover by diplomacy many of the advantages which they have forfeited.

The second grievance is the treatment of Indians in the Empire. The countries of whose action Indians complain are South Africa, Kenya, Burma, Ceylon, and to a lesser extent, Malaya. In Burma and Ceylon the quarrel is less with British officials than with the xenophobic political parties, and is thus an Asiatic family feud; but in the other three countries the grievance widens into a belief that India and the white races are in conflict.

Only to a small extent is the conflict in fact a race one. Its origin is fear of economic competition. In each country society is new or

changing, and the classes now privileged fear that they will be dragged down economically by the inrush and uncontrolled activity of a large Asiatic population willing to live on a low standard. Such is the attitude in every new country of the class which has arrived to the class which treads on its heels. In such lands there is a basic aversion to the sight of the underdog improving himself. Moreover, the Indian community abroad unfortunately does not represent India at its best. Its typical moderately successful members are the money-lender, small merchant, or policeman, its poorer members the coolies. Wherever one goes through the ports of the Indian Ocean region, the prosperous Indians are Sindhis or Marwaris living in shacks and hovels and reputed to be worth millions, or the less attractive type of Punjabi or Madrassi general merchant oozing the spirit of go-getting enterprise. The son of one such remarked to the writer in Baghdad that he cheated the customers in the evening, not in the morning; for if he cheated them in the morning God would get even with him later in the day. Hence the contemptuous attitude towards the Indian community, hence the social restrictions, for the European communities which impose them believe that they are legislating against an industrious but squalid people whose intrusion threatens their own bourgeois ways and virtues.

The grievances of Indians which vary in the different countries of the Commonwealth, are that they may not migrate freely, that they may not take part in local politics, that they are prevented by a licensing system and other means from engaging in free economic competition, that they are subject to wounding prohibitions in the use of hotels and restaurants, that they are segregated when they travel in buses and trains, and that they cannot reside freely where they wish.

How these grievances are to be removed it is hard to say. Great Britain reaps in its Asiatic policy all the embarrassment which they cause, but is not the cause of them, and its hands are tied in remedying them. The chief offender, whose attitude to Asiatics has become for Asia a symbol of race injustice, is South Africa, and Great Britain cannot coerce a Dominion. Yet as long as the racial policy continues, even though it affects a minute proportion of the Indian people—in all the British Empire the number of Indians outside India is only 3½ million—and even though Great Britain has no responsibility for it, it will be a weapon for the extreme nationalists who do not desire Indo-British co-operation. The best hope is that the growth of India's prestige, the raising of its standard of living, the arrival of more impressive Indian commercial men, publicity increasing the knowledge about India, its new power of retaliation to protect its

dignity, and diplomatic discussion between the countries will cause a gradual abandonment of obscurantist policies.

For the colour bar, Great Britain is more to blame. Sometimes it is said that the colour bar is already broken, and certainly it is down here and there in England, but no Oriental can even now spend a week in this country without meeting some vexatious reminder that his colour causes embarrassment. In England this is not due to any assertion of racial inferiority, but follows from a lack of knowledge of the East and fear of the unfamiliar. But overseas the colour feeling has taken more offensive form. There is still so much complacency among the British over the insults they have offered in the past, and such a confident belief that these belong to the past and are now forgiven, that it is worth while mentioning some of the galling restrictions which still exist. In Singapore, just before the Japanese invasion, there was a large garrison of the Indian army; British officers of the army were invited to use the swimming-pool of the fashionable country club, but Indian officers—holding like their British colleagues the King's Commission—were debarred, an insult which, along with other similar ones, may well explain why some subsequently joined the Japanese. Until the present changes, scarcely six months went by without the familiar headline in an Indian paper about an Indian being ejected from a railway compartment by an Englishman, who, guided by some ironic spirit, seemed always to fix his discourtesy on some Indian hitherto disinterestedly friendly to the British. In Singapore before the war the only mixed club of English and Asiatics was one for conjurors. In India there were until very recently famous clubs which Indians might not enter whether as members or guests; and though logic can justify exclusive clubs—for why should not people of one category form clubs exclusively for themselves—nothing can alter the fact that Indians regard clubs of this kind as racially arrogant. The Oriental who is beamed on in London has met too often in India with a British face which is freezing or vulgarly rude.

These are mild examples compared with what took place in the nineteenth century, and what is still remembered. How the English colour prejudice began—whether it was inherited from the Portuguese in India, or was an infection from the Hindu caste system, or, as it has been suggested, began with the arrival of insular and suburban wives of civil servants, or came from some other cause—is not certain. In the early years of British rule the relation of races was comparatively free and easy, and only from the middle of the nineteenth century did the bar go up. The British in India were the British middle class living in the artificial condition of having above

them no upper class of their own people, and below them no lower class of their own people. It was a state of existence which led to a combined arrogance and defensiveness. But historians of the future will perhaps never cease to wonder why a people which accomplished so much for its dependencies, and was so liberal in many of its political constructions, so wantonly threw away the affection and regard which might have been its reward.

Certainly these are formidable bars to future cordiality. Their seriousness should not be minimized. But when all is balanced, the solid advantages of a British connection will, perhaps, prevail over these emotional antipathies. A hundred years of the British connection has given India a sensitive knowledge of, and facility of joint action with, the West such as is possessed by no other eastern power. India understands Great Britain better than Britain understands India. Indian statesmen will not overlook that, by co-operation with the British Commonwealth, their power of influencing world affairs would be heightened; or even that, if they chose to remain in the Commonwealth, India, with its overwhelming numbers and resources, would occupy a leading place in a large area of this elastic and changing organization.

[vii]

Why, finally, should the lesser countries of the present British Empire—Burma, Ceylon, Malaya—agree to work with India and with Great Britain?

Perhaps they will not. All, except Malaya, are likely to receive in the near future full liberty to decide their foreign policies; Malaya also eventually. Feeling in them is likely to be no less resentful against Great Britain than it is in India; but also there is feeling against Great Britain's possible partner, India. For with Britain lifting its rule from India, India, if it remains stable, will be regarded by the small neighbouring countries as a menacing and predatory power. India has already an interest in all these countries—a large Indian population, money lent, trade to be extended, strategic interests. On the one side India will seek to defend and extend these interests; on the other side, the lesser powers will seek to curtail them.

Security, however, is an interest which may perhaps override all lesser interests, and as it may force India and Great Britain to co-operate, so may it bring in the lesser countries. And Great Britain may be regarded as guaranteeing them against a possible rapacity of India. Should a South Asia confederacy expand its scope beyond

defence, this too may be in the interest, economic and social, of the smaller countries. It may also give their statesmen a chance to play a more striking part than would be possible on the parochial stage of their own country.

The same fears and inducements would present themselves to the rulers of the small countries of South Asia which were not included in the former British Empire. As the new organization shaped itself in Asia, these also might weigh the advantages of attachment to the confederacy.

It is not difficult to prove theoretically that the real interest of all concerned is to maintain the unity of South Asia. But to convince the inflammatory and insular opinion of a dozen or more nationalist parties—that is a task indeed.

CHAPTER SIX

THE BRITISH ROLE

[i]

The role of Britain in Asia has thus changed. It is no longer to transform institutions or to construct a new society. Primarily it is the more modest one of co-operating with the countries of its former Empire in a system of security, presumably under the aegis of the United Nations Organization.

The assumption in this is that the old hostile competition of sovereign powers will continue, though, due to the United Nations Organization, this may not lead to war.

But it may be that this dreary assumption is unnecessary. For may not the facile platitude that the invention of the atom bomb has ended an age be in fact the truth? Either a new war will take place, which will result in universal breakdown, or else war will be too much dreaded to be embarked on. Every State, knowing that every other has atom bombs trained upon its cities, ready to be launched by the pressing of a button and impossible to intercept, will hold its hand for fear. The ruins of Germany may prove a useful *memento mori* for the whole world.

Suppose this should be so, and suppose also that the new governments of South Asia suffer no more than the ordinary domestic buffets and upsets, what prospects of construction open up, and how much more congenial would be the role of Great Britain. The history of the area would be of social change and economic advance. How the widespread social tension will be eased nobody at this stage can say. The solution may change the political complexion of the Continent, altering all the present tendencies; but of the economic progress a forecast can be made from the plans at present before the different countries.

[ii]

The East to-day is obsessed with its poverty—a sad fact after more than a century of British rule. Having during the recent war had a glimpse of prosperity due to the artificial conditions of boom which were then created, it resolves to put itself economically on a level with the modern world. It is this which has caught the imagination of the contemporary youth of Asia. Their principal desire is that their countries should be covered with hospitals, schools, roads, airfields, and all the insignia of modern life, so that they may no longer be wounded in national self-respect. They desire that when they go to their villages, they shall no longer fall into open drains or find lepers wandering at large.

In India a principal concern of the last days of the government which has now been superseded was to prepare plans for the modernization of the country. These included the improvement of communications, of education, of health services, the development of key industries, the technique for government control of their expansion, and the education of the very large technical staffs to operate the new industries. Some of these plans may be scrapped by the new governments, but, if they are, they will be replaced by plans still more ambitious; while the government was drawing up its schemes, the Bombay industrialists published their own, which overbid the government's, and the People's Party of Mr. M. N. Roy published a third which overbid both. The war-time expansion of the national revenues proved, too, that if the government started on bold plans, their financing need no longer as in the past check them at their start. There is no doubt that the new governments in India will act with vigour, whether on an all-India basis or for the states of Hindustan and Pakistan. The only question is of their success in maintaining the political order and the financial stability which will be needed no less than energy.

India, incomparably the largest of the countries of British Asia, is the centre of economic interest. But Burma and Ceylon will have their lesser places.

Future inventions may of course change all the plans of to-day. If the harnessing of atomic power should make possible in India the construction of irrigation wells in areas now thought to be irreclaimably desert, some relief of the menacing population problem would be in sight.

From these prospects may rise new opportunity of co-operation between the Orient and Britain. The end of political union, even if

this was formally complete, would not mean the end of economic collaboration. Old association, the existence of the huge sterling balances canalizing the demand of India at least towards Great Britain, and the relative cheapness of British prices, should ensure that Great Britain will enjoy a very fair share of increased eastern trade. Nor is this all. However strong may be the national feelings, the economists and business men of South Asia know that, using entirely their own resources, they can advance less rapidly than with foreign aid. Great Britain especially can offer what the eastern economy to-day most needs—not capital, but scientific knowledge and technicians experienced in Indian conditions. Joint operation in India of British and local capital is already beginning—the Tata-I.C.I., Birla-Nuffield arrangements are an example—and this may prove advantageous to both sides.

British aid in increasing by every means the wealth of these countries will in the end prove a wise investment, since increased production means increased demand. This is the justification for action which enriches the Orient without yielding any immediate return; aid in increasing the productivity of agriculture would be an example of this since by this means the purchasing power of the East is in the long run best increased. It will justify also the fostering of industry competitive to British industry, for the calculation will be that, as long as the economy of the Orient is expanding, its new demands on the outside world will outweigh those which are diminishing as the East becomes able to supply itself. Providing the technical apparatus for the modernization of South Asia might keep a part of British industry busy for decades.

[iii]

If Great Britain is to play the part still open to it in Asia, it must both hold by its own civilization the imagination and sympathy of the East, and show a sympathy with Oriental matters.

A century ago the British Empire was regarded by intellectuals in the East as an agent of progress in the same way as Russia is regarded by many of them to-day. How it lost its appeal and came to be resented as a kind of fetter has been described earlier in this book. In the last few decades it has offered little to the East which has caught its imagination.[1]

[1] It is strange how uninteresting have been the comments of most eastern visitors after travelling in the West. Indeed, if it were desired to prove that the West had a livelier curiosity than the East, what better method would there be than to compare the eastern and western literatures of travel?

It may perhaps be objected that if the soul of contemporary British civilization is described, it must necessarily be a much less exciting thing than Russian civilization to an awakening and turbulent Asia. The very description of British life may be held to show how weak will be the appeal of Britain in the coming period. The cults of law, tolerance, and 'bloodlessness' are not romantic. The British have been described recently as the 'bores of the East'. The virtues of the suburb do not impress the revolutionary. He feels that something different is demanded by the East in its present plight. Let a man visit the Indian village, or one of the spreading industrial towns such as Ahmadabad, let him see the filth, illiteracy and stagnation and consider what organization and discipline will be required to clean the streets, house the workers, and remove the social debris of ages, and, if he has any sense of urgency about the need, he may well doubt the value of a political life regulated nicely by liberal principle, in which the government finds its hands tied by law, and the individual is free to engage in activity other than what it decrees.

All this may be true. Yet mankind is many-natured. The Oriental is by tradition as individualist as, say, the Frenchman, and totalitarian control of his life would soon cease to please him. He may still be attracted by whatever the western world is destined next to evolve. Especially his attention may be roused, and his own ideas changed, by the experiment in England of reconciling socialism with individual liberties.

But if there is to be a genuinely close relation, the interest must be reciprocal. All that Britain gains by its on the whole respectable policies, it often throws away by its indifference to the culture of Oriental peoples. The British public has a limitless capacity for becoming bored about the Orient. How little has English culture itself been affected by Britain's eastern adventure. This may be a ground of complaint by the eastern peoples, who will say that no true friendship is possible in which there is not a two-way traffic. For a time in the eighteenth century British home politics became mixed with Indian, but this was for the unedifying reason that it was feared that the wealth of British traders in the East would be used to debauch Parliament: this danger passed, and thereafter it was said that the easiest way to empty the House of Commons was to talk about India. At the end of the eighteenth and start of the nineteenth centuries England produced a band of Orientalists but left it to the European continent to digest and assimilate their work. Afterwards the outstanding event in Britain traceable to India was probably the curious Theosophy movement, by which mysticism made its unexpected and

fateful return to English middle-class life. But these, with certain habits such as the wearing of pyjamas and the taking of daily baths, and the use of a number of Hindustani words, were the sum of India's influence upon Britain.

And public interest in Asia is lessening, not increasing. This was shown in the recent war. The ordinary Englishman was more interested in the short-term problem of defeating Japan than the long-term problem of the organization of Asia. Possibly this was the result of a sound instinct for first things first. But it is instructive to look at a bibliography of recent work on the East and to notice how many books and articles are by American authors, how few by English. If India goes out of the Empire, the probability is that British interest in its fate will decline still further. In this indifference of the public to Asiatic questions lies the doubt about the ultimate survival of British influence in Asia, however resounding may have been the victories of British arms in the recent war.

CONCLUSION

This may be a gloomy book, but it is hard to see where its thesis is wrong. It may be recapitulated as follows. British administrators, using the man-power and resources of India, built a solid Empire throughout South Asia. The upper classes of the Empire were anglicized; but the institutions and ways of life of liberal society were superimposed upon the old Oriental society in such a manner that the two did not fuse. The society was therefore unstable. At the beginning of the present century the nationalist movement became formidable in India, the centre of the system, and by the 'thirties the British, whose wiser representatives had always regarded their dominion in India as temporary, had decided that, unless they were to engage in constant bloody strife with the nationalist parties, the time had come to transfer their power by gradual process to popular government. In India and perhaps Burma this transfer is now completed, and the nationalist parties, regarding the society which they have inherited from the British as alien and unsatisfactory, will apply themselves to its drastic reform, though not necessarily to the restoration of the old. Unless thereby they produce a new generation which is spiritually more at peace with itself, a revolutionary phase will have begun which is not likely to end soon.

And a revolution has begun not only in India but throughout South Asia, for it was by the joint power of Great Britain and India that peace has prevailed throughout South Asia. A first task of the new Indian government will be to address itself to the problem of how to ensure the peace of the sub-continent under the new system. In doing so it will bear in mind that in Burma, Ceylon and Malaya nationalist movements have developed which are suspicious that Indian nationalism may turn into Indian imperialism.

The chances of avoiding a breakdown of the former unity of the region—with its dangerous international consequences—might seem to lie in the conversion of the former British Asiatic Empire into a free confederacy of South Asia, which would form a regional unit of the United Nations Organization. If Great Britain is to play any further role in Asia, it must, like the other external powers with interest in the region, give sufficient proof that its interest is security, not imperial domination.

To the north, outside the zone of the Indian Ocean, a great new

Asiatic civilization develops, that of Russian Asia, and is supported by a government and a political party which, however realist, has probably a belief in its mission to make its civilization universal or at least cover all Asia. Large sections of the peoples of South Asia will desire to be included in the Soviet Empire. Whether South Asia can continue apart will depend on whether a sufficient part of its peoples desire independence, whether the countries of the region, especially India, develop new aims and beliefs which are thought to be worth fighting for (this being in the long run of greater importance than armaments) and whether the western powers are willing to back its autonomy. The separate existence of South Asia and the Soviet Union would not necessarily divide Asia into two warlike camps; through the United Nations Organization, Russia should be able to interest itself in South Asia at least to the same extent as Great Britain or America.

The picture in Asia might then be of a new stability, with Russia dominating the north, the south held together in a confederacy under the wing of the United Nations Organization, and China in the east. But perhaps the restive forces, dividing aims and bitter emotions in South Asia are too strong to allow of such a happy arrangement. In that case the setting of the sun of the British Empire will be followed by storm. 'Behold at eveningtide trouble.'

Even if trouble come, there is no need to despair. In every phase of history there is compensation for the miseries of human life. The excitement of a high cause, the exhilaration of combat, the value of energy, change and new creation may more than offset the suffering and insecurity which will beset South Asia. Jawarharlal Nehru has said that the embrace of the British Empire is the embrace of death; and a crowded hour of independent life may be worth an age in its soporific clutch.

Different tempers will judge the scene differently. On the one side are those who, seeing the world cumbered with too much bloodshed, and recalling that most of the slaughter and destruction of recent years had their origin in ideas which at the outset were always exciting and sometimes generous, value now security above all, and regard the will for change, even when this seems to be overdue, with a certain circumspection. On the other side are those who value an age by what it engenders in new ideas and institutions, and what it calls out in energy and achievement; in this light they regard the sufferings of wars and revolutions, deplorable though they may be, as unfortunate concomitants of, not as deterrents from, high endeavour.

Between these views it is difficult to decide. The mangled continent

of Europe, the dismal ruin of China, may suggest that vitality can demand too high a price. But who will defend a government which, for fear of violence, kills the life of a people?

At least it can be said that one age has endured long enough; it is time that the East created something of its own instead of borrowing; and, as the Chinese say to comfort themselves in trouble, the new times, if turbulent, will make good reading in the history books for posterity.

POSTSCRIPT

IN June the British Government, in agreement with the Indian National Congress and the Moslem League, decided to transfer power in India to two separate Dominions, Pakistan and Hindu India (which chooses to be called not Hindustan but India).

All the consequences of the decision have not yet revealed themselves.

Pakistan is likely to remain at least for a time a British Dominion. It will thereby be assured of British military aid if attacked. Whether India will proclaim soon its complete formal independence of the Empire is still uncertain. The British decision to 'quit' has wiped out much racial animosity of the past. It is also not yet clear what will be the relation between the Dominions and some of the larger Indian States which are unwilling to federate with them.

Great Britain must now negotiate treaties with both Dominions. The Indian army has been partitioned, and the two Indias, even if in alliance, will in consequence of this suffer a weakening. On the other hand, if partition has in fact taken the sting out of the communal problem, the governments of both India and Pakistan will be stronger than would have been a unitary government of a deeply divided single country.

India is drawing up a constitution based substantially on the Government of India Act of 1935.

The economic results of partition are under investigation. It seems that Pakistan, though a small and weak country, will have a relatively sound economy. India on the other hand will be in difficulty, at least in the immediate future. With the recession of Pakistan it will have lost the regions with a surplus of agricultural products: thus its

balance of payments will have been disorganized and it will find it hard to make its purchases of absolutely necessary imports, let alone the equipment it needs for development. Pressure on the British Government for release of sterling balances will thus be very great. Much of the development and reconstruction plan may have to be abandoned. This will in turn affect adversely India's military strength.

The economic plight of India (as opposed to Pakistan) is primarily the result of a continuous increase of population over two decades while production has remained more or less constant. If India is to avoid social crisis, a very great effort will be needed to increase production, especially of food and raw materials.

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