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**Empire:**

**Exploitation and Resistance**

Professor Richard J Evans

In 1889, a world anti-slavery conference gave King Leopold of the Belgians permission to levy import duties in the Belgian Congo, in order to pay for the elaborate infrastructure of roads, railways, steamboats and military posts which he claimed he needed to bring slavery and the slave trade to an end in his private possession. Seduced by the promise of acquiring the territory on his death, and by the prospect of profits from economic enterprises there, the Belgian parliament advanced him a huge loan with which to begin the work. Leopold, always strapped for cash as a result of the ostentatious ceremony and display with which he compensated for his very limited powers as a constitutional monarch in Belgium itself, saw in the Congo the opportunity for quick returns and big profits. It began with ivory. His agents sallied forth into the territory, shooting elephants, and buying up or seizing ivory from traders. A Belgian senator traveling through the Congo in 1896 reported constantly encountering files of African porters black, miserable, with only a horribly filthy loin-cloth for clothing, frizzy and bare head supporting the load – box, bale, ivory tusk…most of them sickly, drooping under a burden increased by tiredness and insufficient food…They come and go like this by the thousands...requisitioned by the State armed with its powerful militia, handed over by chiefs whose slaves they are and who make off with their wages.

Discipline on local populations was enforced by beatings with a hippopotamus-hide whip, the *chicotte* [seen here in a photograph from 1908, see PowerPoint image number 3]. One Belgian magistrate in Leopoldville came across thirty small children being mercilessly flogged because some of them had laughed on seeing a white man. To enforce control, Leopold used a private army, the Force Publique, which by the turn of the century numbered 19,000 men and consumed half his entire budget for the colony. The pattern of conquest was similar to one that can observe elsewhere, with local and regional African chiefs and rulers resisting the encroachments of Leopold’s men. In Katanga, a clash with members of the Sanga people led to their chief taking refuge in a large cave, outside which the Force Publique then lit fires, asphyxiating 178 men inside. From 1892 to 1894 the Force Publique fought a prolonged war with an army of 10,000 led by the Zanzibari slave and ivory trader Arab trader Tippu Tip and his son Sefu for control of the ivory trade. The Arab strongholds were razed to the ground and the trade routes reoriented from east to west, through the Congo rather than through Tanganyika.

It wasn’t the conquest of the Congo that marked out the Belgian colony from others, however, but the way it was then run. A worldwide boom in rubber, stimulated by the spread of the pneumatic tyre, hosts, insulation for electrical, telephone and telegraph wires, and much more besides, prompted Leopold to devote frantic efforts to harvest the wild rubber that grew in profusion in the Congo before cultivated rubber trees in Latin America and Asia reached maturity and undercut the prices he got for the wild variety. Profits for Leopold’s company and other concessionaries reached more than 700 per cent as prices multiplied thirtyfold and Congo rubber earnings increased nearly a hundredfold between 1890 and 1904 alone. Workers, effectively slave labourers, could not be pressed into gangs, but had to be sent out into the forest ever deeper to cut the rubber vines that grew often many metres up into the canopy, collecting the sap but destroying the plants.

The work was difficult and dangerous and Belgian officers forced men to undertake it by taking their families hostage until the right amount of rubber was delivered. Tens of thousands of men carried the heavy solidified sap to collecting depots under the close supervision of the Force Publique. If the quantity was too small, the hostages were shot, the women raped before being killed. If a village resisted, Leopold’s men, African troops under white command shot everyone, and then to prove to their officers that their bullets had not been wasted on hunting, they severed the right hands of the victim, smoking them to preserve them on the way back to the depot. Often the atrocities were carried out by militias hired by concessionaries such as the A.B.I.R., the Anglo- Belgian India-Rubber Company. One traveller, reaching a village in an area where resistance was strong, noted 81 hands being smoked on a slow fire. “See!”, he was told: “Here is our evidence. I always have to cut off the right hands of those we kill in order to show the state how many we have killed.” If the number of hands was insufficient to match the number of spent cartridges, soldiers simply cut off the hands of the living to make up their quota.

These atrocities soon reached the notice of critics of colonialism in Europe and the USA, fed with information by the young E. D. Morel, a clerk in a shipping company trading with the Congo, who had forged contacts with missionaries in the area horrified by Leopold’s cruelties. More detail was added by Roger Casement, a British consul in the Congo. As these men publicised the horrors their cause was taken up by the writers Mark Twain and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. A vigorous defence of Leopold’s supposedly humanitarian rule by his friends and allies was met with a cascade of facts and figures, stories and reports. Shootings and deaths from exhaustion and maltreatment among the workers caused tens of thousands of deaths above all among Congolese men, but far worse in statistical terms at least was the fact that the explosion of trading activities from the mid-1890s carried diseases such as smallpox and sleeping sickness to areas from which they had previously been absent; populations weakened by hunger and overwork succumbed in huge numbers. The birth-rate plummeted as women refused to have children and men were taken away to work on the rubber forest or on the 241-mile railway Leopold built to transport his booty, employing never fewer than 60,000 men at any one time under the most atrocious conditions. By 1924 the Belgian authorities were so concerned about a shortage of labour in the Congo that they ordered a census. When compared with late 19th-century estimates it found that the population of the Congo had fallen by 50 per cent, from 20 million to ten.

The outrage aroused by the Congo atrocities across the world reflected not least the skilful publicity raised by Leopold’s critics. The King was forced to hand over control of the Congo to the Belgian government in 1908, and died the following year. The state administrators began to replace wild rubber collecting with the planting of rubber trees. Yet forced labour continued, and became even worse with the discovery of copper, gold and tin. A report from the gold mines of Moto revealed that in 1920 some 26,579 lashes were administered to refractory or erring workers. Between 1911 and 1918, five thousand workers died in the copper mines and smelting works of Katanga from industrial accidents. And the campaign against the atrocities in the Congo did not touch the French Congo, where similar outrages took place, though since there were far fewer rubber vines, they were on a much smaller scale. A study of one French trading post the fluctuations in rubber production correlated statistically with the number of bullets used by company police between 1904 and 1907, and one estimate puts the population loss in the French Congolese rainforest area at fifty per cent as well.

Yet this attracted little or no worldwide criticism, and indeed even the German genocide of the Hereros went largely unnoticed. Belgium was a far easier target than France, Germany or for that matter Britain or the USA, whose war in the Philippines caused over 200,000 deaths. Between 1914 and 1918, however, Belgium became instead of a byword for cruelty and mass murder the heroic victim of German invasion and occupation, and the atrocities were largely forgotten. At the same time, the First World War had brought about a dramatic, even revolutionary change in international relations that was bound to have an effect on colonial rule. Sickened by the mass slaughter on the battlefields, the suffering and the waste of human life in the centre of Europe, the nations gathered at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 were determined that a new moral order would prevail: diplomacy was to be open, a new League of Nations was to ensure fairness and decency in international relations, and each European nation was to have the right to determine its own future and to rule itself. A clause committing the nations to racial equality introduced by the Japanese was defeated by opposition from Britain and Australia; still, it won a majority of votes and signaled a new moral atmosphere, bolstered by the redistribution of the German colonies to other nations on the grounds that they had been run with violence and cruelty, a clause that would seem to commit other nations to doing better, especially if they were on the receiving end of the distribution.

Colonial administration therefore shifted after 1919 from direct exploitation and control to indirect rule of one kind or another. This applied for example to the French colonial empire, the second largest in the world after the British. Earlier in the century the French had still believed in the ‘civilising mission’, or in other words spreading the benefits of the French Revolution, liberty, equality and fraternity, across the globe, but the experience of colonisation forced a retreat: even where indigenous kingdoms like Dahomey, whose female soldiers,quickly dubbed the Dahomey Amazons, and customs of mass human sacrifice on the death of a king, to provide an army for him to take to the afterworld,fascinated and horrified Europeans, were destroyed, it was clear that their inhabitants could not be turned into Frenchmen; it would simply cost too much in money and lives. As Jules Harmand’s book *Domination and Colonization* concluded in 1910, it was necessary to ‘better the lot of the aborigine in all ways, but only in directions that are profitable to him, by letting him evolve in his own way….by *indirect rule*, with a conservation…of the institutions of the subject people…’ This proved to be easier in some French colonies than in others, since in some areas, notably New Caledonia and the Pacific islands, where the French had almost completely destroyed previous political structures, but in others, for example Indo-China, local mandarins were used to run things while the French controlled them from behind the scenes. In the African colonies, chiefs were appointed by the colonial government rather than succeeding to their posts by hereditary right. The major difference with the British Empire was that there were no self-governing colonies of settlement like Canada or Australia.

After the First World War, however, indirect rule became the standard approach to colonial government on a wider scale. The Dutch empire, centred on Indonesia, where the Dutch Crown had taken over rule from the former Dutch East India Company at the beginning of the 19th century, was perhaps the longest-established example of this style of colonial government. A war of conquest from 1825 to 1830, in which 200,000 people are estimated to have died, including 8,000 Dutch troops, ended in thesurrender of the leader of the anti-Dutch forces Prince Diponegoro.Indonesia was under the control of a governor-general answering to a colonial ministry in Holland that was staffed by specialists rather than being part of the mainstream political system. Through the 19th century therefore, the governor-general held the reins of power, but from 1916 he shared it with a legislative assembly whose members he nominated himself; by 1929 there were indirect elections with the electorate divided up into different racial groups, and while the assembly only had an advisory function, it was clearly steadily gaining in influence. This signalled some key features of Dutch colonialism, namely its rejection of the idea of a ‘civilising mission’, and its use of native ‘regents’ or aristocrats each governing a ‘regency’ or district of a former sultanate. Native states were often preserved intact as protectorates. Indonesian law continued to govern the affairs of Indonesians though not of Europeans.

Despite the growth of a plantation economy land seizures were restricted and labour conscription limited. The so-called Culture System, under which villages and plantations had to deliver fixed and often excessive quotas of produce such as coffee, tea, tobacco, rubber or cocoa, and devote 20 per cent of their land to producing for these cash crops for the government rather than food for themselves, led to widespread malnutrition and was brought to an end after protest from Dutch liberals in 1870. The system had made the colonisers and Indonesian traders rich and the colony profitable, suggesting to men like Leopold II of the Belgians that empire could mean money; and this provided the basis for the growth of an Indonesian elite that was increasingly taken into partnership by the Dutch, with entry into the civil service and participation in education, though in separate schools. By the 1920s indirect rule had become linked to colonial schemes of improvement, with roads and railways being built and strong state investment in a modern economic infrastructure.

Indirect rule was the strategy adopted by the Russian empire in Central Asia too, conquered between 1840 and 1870 and above all in the 1860s. The strong states of the area farmed by the Uzbeks, such as Khiva, were subdued in a series of violent wars in which the main towns, notably Samarkand, were taken by force, but they retained as protectorates, while the nomadic Kazakhs, Kirghiz and Turcomans had no real central administration and were run directly by governors-general responsible to the Tsar. Conveniently, the village commune self-administration prevalent in European Russia after the emancipation of the serfs in 1861 could be extended further east as well, and the Tsar also abolished feudal land tenure, creating large numbers of free peasants in areas like Turkmenistan. Other aspects of Russian society like the education system, however, were not extended to the conquered populations; in 1912, for example, in one district of Turkmenistan, 95 per cent of Russian children attended primary schools but only 2 per cent of non-Russians. This reflected the influx of Russian settlers from the 1880s onwards, until of the two main administrative regions, in 1914 Turkmenistan had a Russian population of 6 per cent and the Steppe some 40 per cent.

The Russian influx into Azerbaijan following the discovery of oil in the 1870s was even greater; and inequalities in wealth grew, though the prosperous elite also increasingly included Azeris as well as immigrants. What united all these areas and makes it reasonable to regard them as Russian colonies was the fact that they were non-European, conquered in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, contained an overwhelmingly Muslim or in Siberia non-Christian native population, and treated indigenous peoples as inferior to the administrators and settlers who came from the metropolis. As communications improved, these settlers increased in number, with millions moving east for example as the Trans-Siberian Railway, started in 1891, was completed in 1916. The vast distances, the relative sparseness of population in many areas, the nomadic character of many tribes, all this made Russian rule difficult to impose, and where indigenous administrative structures existed, the Russians grasped eagerly for what was in effect a system of indirect rule.

It was above all in Britain, however, that indirect rule became a guiding principle of empire. The leading advocate of indirect rule, Frederick, Lord Lugard, governor of Nigeria from 1912 to 1919, recognised the impossibility of imposing direct rule on the powerful northern Muslim Emirates such as Kano and so opted for leaving administration, including finance and law, to what he called ‘native authorities’, so long as part of their tax revenues were sent on to the colonial treasury. They were to be supervised by the British authorities, which retained control over foreign affairs, and they had to agree to obey laws and regulations issued by the colonial British government. In this way Lugard thought that the disadvantages of weak ‘indirect rule’ would be avoided and what he regarded as the abuses of native administration curbed, along with the harshness of ‘direct rule’, which destroyed native institutions and weakened indigenous social cohesion. Lugard called his system *The Dual Mandate*, to quote the title of the book he published in 1922, after he retired. There was no doubt about who was in control; but that control could be exercised indirectly to everybody’s benefit.

Lugard’s ideas had a wide appeal to British politicians and colonial administrators between the wars. They fitted in well with the new humanitarian approach to international relations that came to the fore after the destruction of the First World War. They promised an avoidance of the colonial violence and excesses that had aroused so much controversy before 1914. They recognised the influence of new ideas in anthropology that stressed the validity of non-European modes of thought and behaviour and challenged the racist idea that non-Europeans were unfit to govern themselves. And above all, perhaps, they saved money. Under Lugard’s system, the financial burden of daily administration fell on the indigenous institutions rather than on the British colonial power. Lugard’s doctrine provided the template for British administration in Africa between the wars. In practice, very few areas were as well supplied with effective indigenous administrative structures as northern Nigeria, where Lugard had evolved his doctrine, but this problem was solved by creating or appointing chiefs and so-called ‘native councils’, as for example in Central and Eastern Africa. Often, their function in administering the British Empire at a local level was recognised by titles and awards of various kinds.Similarly in the French empire, indigenous institutions were even reconstructed where they had been destroyed; the nominal authority of the Bey was preserved in Tunisia and the Sultan in Morocco, and native mandarins were now used as part of the French administration in Indo-China.

The new principle of indirect rule was in fact not so new: it derived above all from the long history of British control over India. On the face of it, this was less than obvious. India was different to all other colonies in the British Empire; there was no other colony like it in any European empire. It was very large, with a population of around 200 million in the 1860s, and it had previously been ruled by another great power, the Mughal Empire, which in some respects provided a ready-made infrastructure of rule and to which the British claimed to be the successor – justifying Disraeli’s proclamation of Queen Victoria as Empress of India.India was not suitable for emigration and settlement; Christian missions did not achieve very much in a land dominated by great religions such as Islam and Hinduism. The assimilation of Indians into British culture was an impossible ideal. After the 1857 rebellion and the dissolution of the East India Company it was ruled autocratically by an appointed Governor-General whose power was limited only by a small council of civil servants. Over time this was expanded, and in 1909 it was enlarged to include elected members, but it had no power to introduce laws or stop whatever the Governor-General was doing – this did not come until 1921. Gradually provinces were created, also with councils, but these too had limited power until 1921. Until the First World War this was a kind of *ancien régime* autocracy.

British rule in India rested on two key institutions. First of these was the civil service, a central, elite organisation operating across the entire country, and staffed by British men, with only 5 per cent of the posts occupied by Indians as late as 1915. Only in 1922 were the entrance examinations set in India as well as in Britain, and by 1935 a third of the service was staffed by Indians. The Indian civil Service was well paid and in the light of the corruption scandals of the late 18th century honest and conscientious. It collected the taxes already levied by the Mughals, above all the land tax, which under the Mughals had been administered by officials known as Zamindars, often indistinguishable from high aristocrats; it administered justice under a codified system begun in 1861 that mixed British and Hindu principles and customs, and it provided political advisers to the 600 or so mostly small princely states that survived the Mutiny (not least because the move to assimilate them into British rule was thought to have been one of the causes of the 1857 rebellion).

The princely states collected their own taxes and ran their own affairs but under the advice of British officials who encouraged change and modernisation. Over time the growing habit of educating the younger generation of princes at British schools and universities, as well as the intensification of communications through better transport, telegraph and so on, and the increasing employment of British or British-trained civil servants to administer them, the princely states developed an amalgam of Indian traditions and European modernity that struck many as an ideal example of what could be achieved by indirect rule. Not just in the princely states, however, but also in the areas under direct rule, British control depended effectively on the passive co-operation of Indians, both elites and masses, and this was achieved above all by the retention of Indian customs, institutions and basic structures of administration, along with sufficient reforms to provide good and honest government.

The full panoply of modern Victorian administration was applied to India, with the founding of educational institutions such the University of Madras (1857) and the adoption of the principle put forward in Macaulay’s 1835 report on Indian education that schools and colleges teaching in English should be used to create a new Indian administrative elite that could act as intermediary between British and Indian society. Police forces were created from the 1860s and unified in 1905. Free trade was used to destroy autonomous industries such as textiles in the early part of the century but India’s incorporation into a rapidly globalising world economy stimulated new industries and an increasing rate of urbanisation, helped by the construction of roads, railways and canals. The shock of the 1857 rebellion in short had stimulated the British to be cautious and conservative in their handling of Indian society and Indian traditions, and to engage in a sustained policy of improvement and development to convince Indians of the benefits of British rule.

Yet underpinning all this was the application, or threat, of force, in the form of the second great institution of British rule in India, namely the Indian army.Strategically, the Indian army supplied what Britain, the world’s largest seapower, so signally lacked, namely a large regular land force. The British regular army numbered around 250,000 men and had to defend and garrison colonies all over the world. The Indian army numbered more than 200,000 men after the changes introduced following the rebellion, and it could quickly be expanded by calling up reserves. It was paid for by taxes levied in India and indeed took around a third of all Indian tax revenues. In the key area of the rebellion, Bengal, the proportion of European to Indian troops was fixed at one to one, in Madras and Bombay one to two, and altogether there were 73,000 British and 154,000 Indian troops in the charge of British senior officers in 1885. British regiments served in India in rotation, with ‘sepoy’ regiments remaining separate. Recruits were taken from so-called ‘martial’ areas like the North-West Frontier, Nepal, or the Punjab which had largely stayed loyal in 1857, as well as from the poorest and most illiterate social groups who were seen as less likely to get ideas of rebellion and revolt. The Indian Army was an asset not only in ruling the subcontinent but also in establishing British supremacy in South and South-East Asia more generally, in providing backing for the British acquisition of colonies in East Africa, and above all in the First World War, where 800,000 Indian troops fought in the front line, with nearly 50,000 missing or killed in action.

Yet British rule in India brought problems too. The intensive land taxes levied by the Raj and collected with considerably greater efficiency than their equivalents had been under the Mughals caused some changes in land use and turned bad harvests into famines, with 2 million dying of starvation in northern India in 1860-61, 6 million across India in the 1870s, and another 5 million when the monsoon failed in 1896-7,with the situation made worse by an outbreak of plague. Communications were still not good enough for effective relief operations to be mounted, and as late as 1921 only 3 per cent of Indians had any formal education, making disease prevention difficult; reading and writing were the prerogative of only a small elite. It was only from the 1890s that the germ theory of disease began to influence public health authorities in developing more effective preventive measures.

India was also the major reservoir of indentured labour, a kind of modern quasi-slavery where workers were paid but had neither freedom nor any significant rights. 60,000 South Asians were sent to Fiji to work between 1879 and 1920, 25,000 to Mauritius, and 30,000 to build Kenya’s railways in the 1890s, more than a third of them suffering death or serious injury during the construction. The total number of South Asians, almost all of them Indian, working across the British Empire by 1900 totalled more than a million. Many stayed on; by 1930 there were more than 600,000 Indians living in Malaya. The spread of Indian labour across the British Empire indicated its global nature, but it also caused disruption to Indian communities on the sub-continent, and led to racial tensions in some colonies, notably Fiji.Most importantly, in political terms, the British tended to favour Hindus over Muslims, and their educational and administrative policies began to solidify rival Hindu and Muslim elites, jostling for position within the Raj.

Still, in India and increasingly after 1918 in other parts of the British Empire, modernisation was seen as the best means of bringing stability and order to colonial societies. Conquest was followed in the end by development. A case in point was the Kingdom of Upper Burma, where fear of growing French power in Indo-China and the possible advantage this would give the French in building commercial relations with China prompted British concern when the King’s death in 1878 sparked a struggle for the succession, in the course of which the majority of his 110 children were brutally slaughtered by being strangled then trampled by elephants (since it was taboo to spill royal blood). The victor, King Thibaw,was not disposed to yield to the British. Indeed it was not so much disapproval of this violence as concern at the fact that the new King began to open negotiations with the French, who agreed to build a railway and set up a bank, that led the British to send in 10,000 troops in 1885. The British defeated the Burmese forces and proclaimed the annexation of the territory in 1886 at the end of what became known as the Third Anglo-Burmese War.This was denounced by Liberal MPs as ‘an act of high-handed violence…an act of flagrant folly’, through which the Burmese political system had been destroyed, leaving chaos behind. Guerilla resistance proliferated, led by some of the remaining princes, and soon the British had 40,000 troops in the country, engaging in a ‘pacification’ campaign that involved the execution of ‘dacoits’, or rebels, and the burning of their villages.

By 1890 peace had descended, to last up to the 1940s. Law and order had been brought to Burma. The ‘Burman’, remarked one British civil servant in the Governor’s office, was ‘a happy-go-lucky sort of chap, the Irishman of the East’. He needed keeping in order. As another commentator declared: ‘If riches and personal comfort, protection of property, just laws, incorruptible judges and rulers, are blessings as a set-off against Utopian dreams of freedom, then Jack Burman has a happy future’. What this meant in practice was the wholesale conversion of the countryside to commercial rice production, with vast tracts of forest being felled and British firms bringing in thousands of indentured labourers from India to do the work. This in turn meant improved communications, roads, railways, seaports, urban and commercial development. Meanwhile the habit of British soldiers and administrators of taking Burmese women as their wives or more usually concubines, much complained-of in the 1890s, led to the emergence of a new Anglo-Burmese elite that dominated the administration of the country in the interwar years. Burma, meanwhile, became the primary source of rice for large parts of the British Empire, above all to India, where it supplied 15 per cent of rice consumed, and East Africa.

Commercial interests therefore dominated; but there was an imperial ideology of improvement as well, summed up already in 1899 in Kipling’s famous poem written in response to the American conquest of the Philippines, when he exhorted Europeans to

“Take up the white man’s burden

Send forth the best ye breed

Go bind your sons to exile

To serve your captives’ need;

To wait in heavy harness

On fluttered folk and wild –

Your new-caught, sullen peoples,

Half-devil and half-child.

Take up the white man’s burden

The savage wars of peace –

Fill full the mouth of famine

And bid the sickness cease.”

Cartoonists like this American one (see PowerPoint image number 32) were quick to pick up Kipling’s message, interpreted here as John Bull determinedly carrying a rather happy collection of Indians, Zulus, Chinese and Egyptians over the rocky paths of slavery, vice, cannibalism, cruelty and ignorance up the hill to the final goal of civilisation, with Uncle Sam, sweating profusely and looking old and tired, following in his footsteps over barbarism and oppression carrying a basket full of Cubans, Hawaians Filipinos and in general a decidedly less willing and more difficult collection of the colonised.

The racism was in Kipling’s poem too, along with the reference to ‘savage wars of peace’ through which the colonies had been gained, but Kipling and even the cartoon, however doubtful its reference to American intentions, contained a commitment to improvement. To serve the growing economies and industrialising societies of the colonies educated clerks and administrators were needed, but this in turn, whether it involved local education or education in Britain or other European countries began to create elites that imbibed European notions of nationalism, democracy and liberal values, however much they might be adapted to local circumstances. In some colonies, including Burma for example, a sense of national identity predated colonisation and lasted all the way through; in others it required the language of European liberalism to find an articulation, and the model of European political parties in the age of mass democracy in the late nineteenth century to gain institutional expression.

Already 1885 saw the formation of the Indian National Congress,based at first on the ideas of the Theosophical movement, a quasi-religious organisation dedicated to world brotherhood, and involving Englishmen as well as Indians; its aim at first was to exert pressure for educated Indians to take a greater part in government and administration, but soon it gained widespread support among the educated Indian elites and began to exert pressure that led the government to grant concessions including the Indian Councils Act of 1892, allowing corporations to nominate educated Indians to legislative councils, and in 1909 to stand for election. In 1917, following the massive commitment of Indian troops in the war, the British government announced in effect that India was to be set on the road to becoming a Dominion like Canada or Australia, based, as the Secretary of State for India, Edwin Montagu,put it, on ‘the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realisation of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire’. In 1919 limited administrative powers were passed to provincial councils and in 1935 full ministerial powers were transferred to the provinces, with the promise of transition to a federal system of government run by Indians.

By this time the driving force was the Congress was Mahatma Gandhi, a British-trained lawyer who had practiced in South Africa and returned to India in 1915 to lead a campaign of non-violent civil disobedience based particularly on refusal to pay taxes, which he realised were causing major damage to the rural economy in many areas**.** Before long he was demanding not just self-government and Dominion status but independence for India. The conditions that had allowed the British to gain control over India were now disappearing. They had been able to take advantage of the break-up of the Mughal Empire and the ensuing disunity to take over one Indian state after another, or play them off against each other, but by uniting India themselves and binding it together with a unitary system of administration and communications they had created the possibility for a new united nationalist movement to emerge. They had encouraged the growth of an educated elite but this was not imbued with European-style ideas of national self-determination, adapted as Gandhi insisted to Indian conditions. They had on the other hand fastened on to traditional Indian institutions from the land tax to the Maharajas and princely states, and to the new educated elite they were beginning to seem like an obstacle to progress. It would take the Second World War before the fragility of British, and more broadly European colonial rule became fully apparent, but the writing was already on the wall long before this, and not just in India. It was indeed possible to take an altogether different view of the white man’s burden, one in which the imperialist was imposing a burden on the colonised, not the other way round.

Once more it was Kipling who gave expression to the moment, but this time long in advance, in a poem written under the overwhelming effect of the review of the Royal Navy, the largest fleet ever assembled, on Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee in 1897; a poem that ran directly counter to the mood of the time, but acquired a prophetic dimension in retrospect:

“Far-called our navies melt away

On dune and headland sinks the fire

Lo, all our pomp of yesterdays

Is one with Nineveh and Tyre.”

Kipling reminded his readers of the transience of all empires, including even the British Empire, on which the sun never set. In my sixth and final lecture in this series, on March 27th, I will describe and analyse the fall of the European empires in the short years from 1945 to the 1970s, and try to come to a conclusion about how and why they rose, and what legacy they left to the world.

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