12

WHEN Kipling first went east from India, he noted that though the stinks of Lahore and Calcutta had something in common, the stink of Burma was different: he was struck by the numberless energies of the Chinese, and the startling vigour of Japan: but wherever he went in the eastern Empire he observed that the British appeared to be exactly the same. 'It was just We Our Noble Selves', he wrote sardonically of a party in the barracks above the botanical gardens at Singapore. 'In the centre was the pretty Memsahib with light hair and fascinating manners, and the plump little Memsahib that talks to everybody and is in everybody's confidence, and the spinster fresh from home, and the bean-fed, well-groomed subaltern with the light coat and the fox-terrier. On the benches sat the fat colonel, and the large judge, and the engineer's wife, and the merchantman and his family after their kind—male and female met I them, and but for the little fact that they were entire strangers to me, I would have saluted them all as old friends.' They were just the same people as he knew in India, except that they were pale from the Singapore climate, 'and the veins on the backs of their hands are printed in indigo.'

2

Nobody, of course, runs so true to type as that. The subaltern probably cherished a passion for the poetry of Baudelaire, the spinster spoke fluent Cantonese, the merchant and his kind were Seventh Day Adventists. To the stranger nevertheless the British in their Empire do seem to have been instantly familiar, whether they were the stiff, pomaded or parasoled representatives of the gentry or irrepressible soldiers of the line. Britishness was very strong in Victoria's later years, and British people were unmistakably British.

For the most part they were bigger and fitter than other Europeans. A prosperous century had made even the poorer classes so, and several hundred years of success had filled out the gentry: according to Florence Nightingale, London was the healthiest city in Europe. The tall stature and upright bearing of the English gentleman was provèrbial, and is confirmed in every old photograph of regiment, First XV or Union committee. Five members of Lord Salisbury's patrician Cabinet were more than six feet tall. Salisbury himself was six feet four inches, and Henry Chaplin, his President of the Local Government Board, weighed 250 lb.[1] The average height of Army recruits in 1897 was five feet seven inches and their average chest measurement was 34 inches—substantially bigger than the conscripts of the Continental armies. It was a time of British athletic supremacy; only the Americans could compete. The public school idea of *mens sana in corpore sano* was percolating, in a desultory way, into the upbringing of the masses, and no other people in Europe was so keen on sport—sportsmen on the Continent merely copied what the English did.

These physical advantages were sustained by a detachment of bearing. The most rabid of the New Imperialists were quite proud of the fact that the British were not liked: certainly it was no part of the national ambition to be loved. The British were aware that of all the peoples of the earth they were the most commonly resented, but a shell protected them, composed of pride, duty, shyness and a sense of membership. An Austrian traveller in Egypt at about this time describes the remote composure of a young Cook's official, when a German threatens to sue the company for the loss of his trunk—wildly valued at £200. The Englishman instantly guarantees to pay £200 compensation if the trunk does not show up within an hour. Ten minutes later it arrives, the German is all abashed, and the Austrian ruefully compares affairs in his own Empire: 'How

[1] It was of Chaplin (1840–1923) that Lord Willoughby de Broke once said: 'No one was half such a country gentleman as Henry Chaplin looked.' In 1864 he had been jilted by Lady Florence Paget, who eloped and married the Marquis of Hastings: when Chaplin's horse Hermit won the Derby at 66 to 1 three years later, Hastings lost £140,000 on the race. They lived imperially then.

many underlings and how many Councillors of the Imperial Court would have been needed to register and deal with such a complaint, and how big their file would have grown within six months, and how sure we are that, even six months later, that claim would not be settled!' G. W. Steevens, travelling to Egypt in 1897, describes the all-British company on the mail train to Brindisi: 'Fair-haired, blue-eyed, spare-shouldered and spare-jawed, with puckered brows and steadfast eyes that seemed to look outwards and inwards at the same time, they were unmistakably builders—British Empire builders.' Can one not imagine them, this trainload of bronzed aliens, sharing their private jokes, exuding their particular smells of tweed, tobacco and lavender, as they presented their hand baggage to the customs officials at Modane? It is as though they were encapsuled there, snug in their own ways, honouring their own club rules and rolling securely across Europe to catch their P. and O. Foreigners and subject peoples alike recognized this separateness, and it was essential to the character of the Pax Britannica. This was not so much a haughty Empire as a private one.

3

The aristocracy of Empire was the official class, together with the landed gentry of British planters: in Crown Colonies the two classes often intermarried (in Mauritius and Guiana, so Royal Commissions reported, a prime cause of bad laws and harsh administration). It was not a very aristocratic aristocracy. Viceroys and Governors were often noblemen, and their wives Society beauties—Lady Horton, wife of a Governor of Ceylon in the 1830s, was the subject of Byron's *She Walks In Beauty Like The Night*. British regiments posted overseas contained their quota of young bloods. But the great mass of the imperial service, like the officer corps of the colonial forces, was pre-eminently upper middle class. The English aristocracy played no great part in the everyday running of the Empire, having greener dominions of its own at home, and Eton was low on the list of schools that educated the imperial administrators. '*Here's their ground*', Kipling wrote of India's British rulers:

They fight
Until the Middle Classes take them back,
One of ten millions plus a C.S.I.[1]

They were the children of a unique culture, that of the English public schools, with its celibate discipline, its classical loyalties, its emphasis on self-reliance, team spirit, delegated responsibility, Christian duty and stoic control. One did not cry when one said good-bye to Mama at Paddington station. One did not, as a general rule, wish to appear too clever, or too enthusiastic. One loyally upheld the prefectorial system, while realizing that certain rules were made to be broken. The public schools, greatly expanded in the second half of the century, and ever more dedicated to their own code of conduct, lay somewhere near the heart of the imperial ethic. 'It would be terrible to think of what would happen to us', wrote Eustace H. Miles, amateur tennis champion of the world, 'if our public school system were swept away, or if—and this comes to very much the same thing—from our public school system were swept away our Athletics and our Games.' A man's best proof of fitness to rule in India, Miles thought, was to have been a captain of games, and certainly the public school system was well suited to the imperial needs. It produced men of high spirits, courage and assurance, ready to rough it and unafraid of responsibility. If it was intellectually narrowing and chauvinist, well, this was an Empire that survived by the separateness of its rulers, their conviction that what they did was right, and that all else was second best. The public school man was generally able to see the other person's point of view, provided it reflected his own values—civilized values, he would say. His inability to grasp the aspirations of Indians, Africans or Malays stemmed from his absolute certainty that their whole manner of thought or way of life was, through no real fault of their own, misguided. At his worst the public school man was a snobbish hearty: at his best he combined authority with Christian kindness and what he would have called *grit*: the rarest of his virtues was human sympathy, the rarest of his vices cowardice.

[1] Commander, that is, of the Most Exalted Order of the Star of India. In 1967 there were, by my count, seventy-seven living members of this chivalric order, but there will be no more, for conferments ended with the Raj in 1947.

And the most irritating of his traits, at least in the imperial context, seems to have been smugness. From the memoirs of the imperial Civil Services there generally breathes an air of conscious rectitude—disguised often in jollity and boyish dash, but seldom altogether absent. The Empire-builders were very pleased with themselves. 'No country has ever possessed a more admirable body of public servants than the Civil Service of India', wrote Sir John Strachey, a distinguished Indian Civil Servant himself. 'How is it', another Anglo-Indian asked of himself and his colleagues, in a rhetorical question addressed without a blush to his fiancée, who must have loved him dearly—'how is it that these pale-cheeked exiles give security to a race of another hue, other tongues, other religions which rulers of their own people have ever failed to give? Dearest, there are unseen moral causes which I need not point out. . . .'[1] G. W. Forrest, another Indian Civil Servant, once observed how difficult it was for a stranger to disentangle the different social sets of Calcutta—their laws of procedure, their jealousies and their relations with each other. The Official set, however, was easily recognizable: their position was 'by Royal enactment assured', and their wives 'viewed from an eminence' the Mercantile circle below. The imperial protocol was strict and all-embracing—in India, sanitary commissioners and inspectors-general of jails shared seventy-sixth place in order of precedence—and von Hübner tells us that if ever 'members of the lower classes', other than grooms, showed up in Singapore, the Government found means of returning them to Britain, if necessary at its own expense. White prestige must be maintained, and caste was in the air of Empire.

People of grander imagination often disliked these official airs. Bryce thought the average Indian Civil Servant pretty boring—'a good deal of uniformity . . . a want of striking, even marked individualities . . . rather wanting in imagination and sympathy . . . too conventionally English'. Kitchener infuriated the Official ladies of Egypt by his preference for the society of glamorous Levantines.

[1] He was William Hunter (1840–1900), who rose to eminence as administrator and historian, and was knighted. I cannot resist another apposite quotation from his letters home: 'It is useless talking of the poverty of a country's literature unless you do your best to encourage men of letters by buying their works. I have impressed this on my chum, Gribble.'

Winston Churchill, who was in India in 1896 and 1897, did not at all take to Anglo-Indian society. 'A lot of horrid Anglo-Indian women at the races. Nasty vulgar creatures all looking as though they thought themselves great beauties. I fear me they are a sorry lot. . . . Nice people in India are few and far between. They are like oases in the desert. . . . I have lived the life of a recluse out here. The vulgar Anglo-Indians have commented on my not "calling" as is the absurd custom of the country. I know perhaps three people who are agreeable and I have no ambitions to extend my acquaintance.'

4

Poor Anglo-Indians! Twenty-one and very new to the country, Churchill was applying to their provincial attitudes the standards of his own background, glittering with the wealth and genius of London and New York. Life in the official circles of Empire may not have looked exciting to him, but it pursued a staid and comfortable course, much in the tennis-party tradition of the lesser British gentry at home. The scale of things was often grotesquely swollen, though, so that a married couple in India might easily have a staff of twenty-five servants, imposed on them by a caste system even more rigid than their own: bearer, children's nurse, cooks, table-servers, a tailor and a laundryman, a water-carrier, gardeners, grooms and grass-cutters. In camp, if a fairly senior official took his wife on tour, the establishment might grow to fifty or more dependants. Living in what was virtually a private village with this immense *ménage*, the imperialist forfeited any kind of privacy—the servants knew everything—and the manner of life remained supremely orthodox. The planting community of Ceylon, for example, formed as serenely exclusive a community as any county society at home. Planters nearly always married into one another's families, when they returned from their education in England, and they lived a well-ordered country gentry's life. People were normally At Home once each week, and there were frequent calls, and dances at the Queen's in Kandy, and golfing week-ends at Nuwara Eliya, and the bungalows were lofty and cool and lapped in lawns, and there was an English vicar at the church

up the road, and all seemed changeless, useful and very agreeable.

The family tradition was strong in the imperial service. The same names appear repeatedly in the honours lists and church memorials, and fathers' footsteps were loyally followed. The two Napier brothers in the Indian Army were the sons of Lord Napier of Magdala, who had served in the Mutiny and virtually created the hill station of Darjeeling. General Henry Rundle, Kitchener's chief of staff in the Sudan, was the son of Joseph Rundle, who had first planted the British flag on Aden soil in 1839.[1] Generations of Stracheys had served in India, and there had always been a Skinner in the 1st Bengal Lancers, since Colonel James Skinner[2] founded the regiment as Skinner's Horse in 1803.

This imperial *élite* was, as conquerors go, well behaved. Its values were solid. Its rules were mostly sensible. Corruption was rare, and what Churchill thought vulgar was often no more than a dogged determination to stick to the habits and traditions that gave the Empire its stability. *Fin-de-siècle* London was rich in scandals of fraud and bankruptcy—the Mundella scandal, the Hooley scandal,[3] the disreputable failure of the Liberator Building Society. Few such disgraces marred the recent record of the overseas Empire. The graft was almost always petty, and there are worse sins to a ruling class than thinking yourself more beautiful than you are.

[1] Rundle (1856–1934) later became Governor of Malta, but his father might not have liked the *Dictionary of National Biography*'s estimate of his military genius: 'He never took a risk, and was rewarded by never meeting a reverse.'

[2] This glorious adventurer was the son of Hercules Skinner, a Scottish soldier in India, by his Rajput mistress. He was apprenticed to a printer in Calcutta, but ran away and joined the Mahratta Army, transferring to the British flag in 1803. Skinner's Horse was originally a body of deserters from the Mahratta forces, placed under Skinner's command, but the title was later transferred to the 1st Bengal Cavalry and Skinner ended his days in respectable glory, Commander of the Bath and landlord of a large estate granted him by the Indian Government. The family have lived in India ever since.

[3] Anthony Mundella (1825–97) had been President of the Board of Trade in Gladstone's last Government: he was a director of the New Zealand Loan Company, and when that company went into liquidation in doubtful circumstances, was forced to resign from office. Hooley was a financier with wide industrial and trading interests: when he went bankrupt it turned out that he habitually bought the names of eminent noblemen, to give respectability to his boards. Scandalous indeed.

5

'They walk dolorously to and fro under the glare of jerking electric lamps, when they ought to be sitting in shirtsleeves around little tables treating their wives to iced lager beer.' So wrote Kipling of Calcutta's commercial community. By now the merchants of Empire, no less than the governors, were mostly men of habit and convention, conservative men who honoured the proprieties. It was not the thing to smoke in the streets of Calcutta, and in the evening, in that city of slums and emaciation, the richer British box-wallahs emerged in top-hats and frock-coats to promenade the Madan, driving steadily here and there in broughams, hansoms and victorias, exchanging bows and transient assessments. There was, however, much more variety to the unofficials of Empire. They come from a wider range of backgrounds, and from the photographs of the time they glare out at us—for there is often something accusatory to their expressions—with striking suggestions of force and originality.

Let us look at a few faces from the imperial gallery of the nineties, chosen at random from a railway camp, a *Spy* cartoon, an African police station and a settlement of the Australian Outback. Here, for a start, is Ronald Preston, the railhead engineer of the Uganda Railway, then under canvas with his gangs half-way to Lake Victoria from the sea. We see him sitting at the entrance to his tent with his wife Florence, wearing a linen suit and a shirt without a tie, and holding a gun across his knees. He has prominent teeth and large ears, and all around him are trophies of the hunt—zebra skins, antelope horns, tiger hides. He looks lean, loose-limbed, a little sad, as though he has been condemned to live for ever under canvas, building railways and shooting animals: and beside him his wife, in a long skirt, mutton-sleeves and a little black boater hat, gazes forlornly out of the picture into the surrounding wilderness, very faintly smiling[1].

It is the White Rajah of Sarawak, Sir Charles Anthony Brooke,

[1] She had reason to look forlorn. The Prestons had already spent half a lifetime building railways in India, and they were never to go home for long. Preston died in Kenya in 1952.

who returns our stare so urbanely from the *Spy* cartoon in *Vanity Fair*. What kingly ease of deportment! What perfection of buttoned frock-coat! How exquisitely symmetrical the heavy white moustaches and the curled grey hair above the high forehead! Brooke has prominent white eyebrows, bags beneath the eyes, a wrinkled turtle-neck and a bulky cleft jaw, but above all it is the expression of the face that holds our attention—the expression of a man who makes his own rules, in a sphere of action altogether unique, dealing in subjects that we know nothing whatsoever about, and would be wise not to make foolish comments on.

Haughty in a very different kind is 'Bobo' Young, an employee of the British South Africa Company in north-eastern Rhodesia, who was previously a private in the Scots Guards, and a cook in the Bechuanaland Border Police, and who policed his tribes with a ferocious sang-froid—he once killed twenty-five natives in a single fight. He is pictured sitting with his arms folded, against a prison-like background of a brick wall, wearing a high-collared military tunic, and squinting sidelong at the camera, so that his face looks one way and his eyes another: he has a waxed moustache like a drill sergeant's, his eyes are fiercely gleaming, and his mouth is set in a sardonic, slightly contemptuous smile, such as might shrivel an African chieftain to insignificance, or in another incarnation wither an importunate customer in the cab queue at the Savoy.[1]

And finally a great lady of Empire, Daisy Bates. Miss Bates first set eyes on Australia in the middle nineties, a young Irishwoman of literary leanings and polished manners. She had married an Australian cattle-rancher, but was to spend her life in the service of the aborigines, whose fate as a people she assumed to be sealed, and whose last generations she wished to comfort. She was a woman of truly Victorian resolution, and did nothing by half-measures, living for years alone among the tribes, learning their languages, accepting the squalors of their society, and never passing judgement. In our picture we see her setting off by camel-buggy for a particularly ghastly journey around the Great Australian Bight. Beside the two

[1] Young died in England, while watching a cricket match, soon after the First World War, and Lake Young, in the Chinsali district, has reverted to its old name of Shiwa Ngandu—The Home of the Crocodiles.

camels stands a tall and heavily bearded aborigine, smoking a pipe, with a linen hat pulled down over his ears. On the driving-seat, hung about with baggage, pots and pans, is an aboriginal woman all in black, shaggy matted hair protruding from her bonnet: and immaculate beside her sits Miss Daisy Bates. Her face is stern, her neck is stiff, her hands lie lady-like upon her lap. She wears a high-collared blouse fastened with a ribbon, a severe black coat and skirt down to her ankles, and a white straw hat with a fly-veil over her face. She seldom, indeed, wore anything else: and if the strength of the White Rajah lay in his facial expression, the power of Daisy Bates was in her posture: high up there on her rickety buggy, with aboriginals for company and camels to tow her, she sits superbly, flamboyantly erect, as if to show that a good British upbringing, with sensible corsetry, could fortify a woman against hell itself.[1]

Powerful figures all four, full of sap or gristle, who brought to the developing Empire a vigour all too often tamed by red tape and the hope of promotion, in the secretariat buildings up the road.

6

Among the white settlers everywhere the Englishman had undergone some metamorphosis, making him taller, or broader, or cockier, or coarser, than before. In Canada he was already half an American, neither quite an Englishman nor quite a Yank, and a little conscious of deficiencies in both. In South Africa his accent was beginning to acquire the queerly distorted diphthongs of the Afrikaner. In New Zealand, we read, he was already of a darker complexion, a quicker speech, a livelier manner, a more sociable disposition and a more argumentative turn. In Australia, where he was most conscious of the freedom and freshness of the colonial life, the release from all the old bonds of convention, he was still pre-eminently a man of the open spaces, not yet buttoned by the city ways of the seaboards. The physical splendour of the young Australians was already a legend,

[1] They fortified her for half a century in the Outback. When she died in Adelaide in 1951, aged 90, she knew more about the Australian aborigines than anybody else, and her papers now form part of the Australian National Archives.

and their dialect was rich and beguiling. 'Where are you off to?' asks a character in Tom Collin's novel ***Such Is Life***. 'Jist as fur back as I can git,' is the answer. 'But you'll stay in Echuca tonight?' 'Didn't intent. But I'd like to have a pitch with you, sposen I wouldn't be in your road.'

The migrants had taken with them, none the less, old seeds of social consciousness. There were snobs in the colonies too, and in some parts the settlers were evolving class distinctions peculiar to themselves. In New Zealand the English rural hierarchy had suffered a sea-change into orders of a different kind: the gentleman farmer had become the run-holder, the yeoman was the cocky, and yesterday's yokels were the musterers, shearers and drovers of the South. The *élite* of Canada, especially in the Maritime provinces of the east, was provided by descendants of the Empire Loyalists, those unshakeable Tories who had trekked northwards into Canada rather than remain in the American Republic: they often lived beautifully, in white colonial mansions with negro servants and horses, but were by now more like patricians from New England than from Old. In Australia there was a class awareness of a very different kind. There the people known as 'exclusives' were those who had no convicts in their ancestry: among the others, the squalid origins of New South Wales were not often mentioned. 'It is a sore that is not yet healed,' one lady told von Hübner. 'Take care how you touch it: never utter the word "convict".' Even in that free-and-easy nation, the normal social ambitions were stirring, too. By the nineties few of the emigrants to Australia were down-to-earth working men, and urban, bourgeois standards were beginning to count: girls arriving in Australia on immigrant ships often found themselves engaged for domestic service by telegram before they even docked.

For the colonists were British still, brought up in a tradition of social respect. Their ingrained deference towards the manners and customs of the English upper classes did not evaporate when they unpacked their bags in Queensland or Manitoba. They knew that the word 'colonial' often had pejorative undertones in England—suggestions of hick, bumpkin or even criminal—and some of them were already self-conscious about the inadequacies of the colonial cities, so grand and bustling to local innocents, so provincial to

visiting dudes from the Mother Country. The Australian Arthur Patchett Martin wrote a poem, *My Cousin from Pall Mall*, about this feeling, describing the arrival in Melbourne of a particularly superior new-comer:

On the morrow through the city we sauntered, arm in arm.
I strove to do the cicerone—my style was grand and calm.
I showed him all the lions—but I noted with despair
His smile, his drawl, his eyeglass and his supercilious air.

As we strolled along that crowded street, where Fashion holds proud sway,
He deigned to glance at everything, but not one word did say;
I really thought he was impressed by its well-deserved renown,
Till he drawled 'Not bad—not bad at all—for a provincial town.'

7

The maverick patrician escaped all this: Lord Henry Paulet with his Salisbury sawmills, 'Lord Have-One-More' on the Klondike trail, or Sir Drummond Dunbar, the eighth baronet, whose home at this time was an uninviting shack in Johannesburg. So did the roving company of the imperial bums, those loiterers, beachcombers and scavengers who roamed the Empire from end to end, occasionally pretending to be Americans when the law was at their heels, but generally recognizably British. We meet them everywhere. The sweep of their indigence was marvellously wide, and the same rogue Briton might turn up in Queensland and Borneo, Egypt and Rhodesia, wherever the presence of the Empire gave him some nominal protection and privilege. In the Transvaal, where the protection was most nominal and the privilege non-existent, most of the Uitlanders were British, and a wild lot they were—'wanglers', wrote one contemporary observer,[1] 'workers of snaps', 'fixers-up', Artful Dodgers and Slick Sams. 'They bribed, they lied, they

[1] Vere Stent, a journalist who accompanied Rhodes on his peace-making mission in the Matopos, and who described in *Environs of the Golden City and Pretoria* the impact of the Uitlanders upon the Biblical pastorialism of the Afrikaners.

swindled. They lived at the best hotels and drank champagne at eleven o'clock in the morning. When not involved in some sordid financial intrigue, they spent their time making open and indecent love to the maids behind the bars set up at almost every corner.'

In the Yukon that summer hundreds of such adventurers were stumbling over the high passes towards the Bonanza creek, many of them fresh from England, many others from Australia or the older goldfields of British Columbia, and hundreds more were wandering through the Outback or the High Veldt, surviving as often as not by grub-staking—pledging a share of any claim they pegged in return for supplies in the meantime. In India many old soldiers of the East India Company army, still drawing a pension of 1/- a day, wandered from job to job, barracks to barracks, often with half-caste wives. Here and there across the Empire we come across the trail of somebody who has deliberately turned his back on his own kind, an imperial renegade, a mystic. The original of Browning's Waring became Prime Minister of New Zealand,[1] but there were others who really did choose 'land-travel or sea-faring, boots and chest or staff and script', and wandered off to be Avatars in Vishnu-land. In a small kraal between King William Town and East London, in South Africa, a blind English lady lived at this time with the Kaffirs, who treated her with kindly courtesy: occasionally they took her into town to beg from the white people, but in the evening she always returned to the kraal, and shared her profits with her hosts. And sometimes the English children of Simla crept up the hill of Jakko, high above the town, to the temple of Hanuman the monkey-god: and there beneath a tree, alone among the monkeys, they would see a young Englishman dressed in the yellow robes of a *sadhu*, with a head-dress made of a leopard skin. He was Charles de Russet, son of a well-known local contractor, who had abandoned his family and his faith to become a disciple of the Jakko fakir. For two years he sat there, all alone. Sometimes an attendant came from the temple, to give him food: and sometimes the children, peering through the brush, would hear the old priest calling his monkey-

[1] He was Alfred Domett (1811–87), who eventually retired to London with a C.M.G.—

Oh, never star was lost here but it rose afar!

children by name to their victuals—*Ajao! Ajao!*—and away they would bound, Raja and Kotwal and Budhee and Daroga, helter-skelter through the undergrowth, leaving the Englishman silent and solitary beneath his tree.[1]

[1] De Russet, 'the leopard fakir', was still in Simla in the 1920s; by then he had apparently forgotten the English language, and lived in a temple below the town.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Imperialists in Particular

Oft as the shades of evening fell,
In the schoolboy days of old—
The form work done, or the game played well,—
Clanging aloft the old school bell
Uttered its summons bold,
And a bright lad answered the roll-call clear
'Adsum,—I'm here!'

Heaven send, that when many a heart's dismayed,
In dark days yet in store,—
Should foemen gather; or, faith betrayed,
The country call for a strong man's aid
As she never called before,—
A voice like his may make answer clear,
Banishing panic and calming fear,
'Adsum,—I'm here!'

A. Frewen Aylward

and the bodyguards and the obsequies of princes—it was all a kind of charade. The Viceroy was only a temporary Civil Servant, on a five-year term, and would presently go home again. The rules of British India were inescapable, and exact. When a Viceroy sailed out to assume his dignities he was entitled to a grant of £3,500, to cover his travel expenses and equipment. When he returned to England at the end of his service he was allowed a ship of the Indian Marine as far as Suez, the limit of his power: but once there, he and his Vicereine were all on their own, could claim no more divine appurtenances, and must seek the help of Thomas Cook's for their onward travel, paying their own fares.

James Morris from Pax Britannica

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Consolations

Oh, I've seen a lot of girls, my boys, and drunk a lot of beer,
And I've met with some of both, my boys, as left me mighty queer,
But for beer to knock you sideways and girls to make you sigh,
You must camp at Lazy Harry's on the road to Gundagai.

We camped at Lazy Harry's on the road to Gundagai,
The road to Gundagai! Five miles from Gundagai!
Yes, we camped at Lazy Harry's on the road to Gundagai.

Australian Bush Song

15

THE New Imperialism was born out of a medley of moods and circumstances, not all of them happy, some of them distasteful. It emerged a boisterous credo, full of swank, colour and sweep. On the face of it the British seemed to be having a marvellous time, bathing in the glory of it all, swathed in bunting and lit up with fireworks. The late Victorians were not half so strait-laced as their reputation was presently to imply. Their young men were full of dash and energy; they revelled in the stimulations of the outdoor life; the pleasures of Empire lay not only in national pride, duty performed and dividends paid, but also in the particular consolations a people could devise for itself, when placed in a position of absolute command in an alien land and climate.

2

Sport was the first. The British took their games with them wherever they went. Sport was their chief spiritual export, and was to prove among their more resilient memorials. They took cricket to Samoa and the Ionian Islands, and both the Samoans and the Ionians took it up with enthusiasm. They went climbing in the Canadian Rockies, and by 1897 the Canadians had their own Alpine Club. They introduced football to the aborigines of Australia, and wherever in the world the ground was flat enough they seem to have built a tennis court. The highest golf course in the world was made by the British at Gulmarg, in the Himalaya, 8,700 feet high: the highest cricket pitch was near by, at Chail. In Salisbury, Rhodesia, the pioneers were already playing cricket matches between the Public Schools Boys and the rest, and a chief qualification for a job on the administration was said to be a good batting average. The first American golf course was laid at New York in 1888, but the

British had been playing the game at Calcutta since 1829. Boxing was compulsory in the British Army. 'Open order, march!' the order ran. 'Front rank, about turn! *Box!*'

Above all the British took with them everywhere their taste for equestrian sports, inherited as it was among their friends the Indian princes from the warlike tendencies of their forebears. In those days the horse and the gentry still went together, racing and hunting were the passions of the English upper classes, and horsiness was more than a social phenomenon; it was an historical legacy, too. The thoroughbred horse went with them always, and there was scarcely a town in the Empire which did not have its race-course—a scrubby little ring of beaten-out turf on the veldt, or splendid arenas like Calcutta's or the Curragh in Ireland, with their glittering grandstands, brilliant white rails, club-houses and sprinkled lawns. They used to have race dances at Calcutta, with public breakfasts, and curious alternations of sweepstake and country dance, and at Madras the sportsmen of the East India Company had built themselves a delightful set of assembly rooms beside the track, a tall big-windowed building with fine wide terraces and flagstaffs, and emanations of punch and nosegay. As early as 1891 Lord Randolph Churchill was complaining that his horse had been nobbled at a race meeting at Salisbury, Rhodesia, a charge that rings all too true: and when Queen Victoria sent four envoys from the Royal Horse Guards to visit Lobengula in his kraal, almost the first thing they did was to arrange a race meeting, including the Zambesi Handicap and the Bulawayo Plate.

The race-course at Simla was on the high plateau of Annandale, surrounded by tall pines and deodars, and deliciously secluded. The race-course at Colombo was in the middle of the city, like a bullring in Spain.[1] The race-course at Hong Kong was in Happy Valley, separated from the Chinese cemetery only by a fence of bamboos. The Poona race-course was inside the General Parade Ground. The Badulla race-course ran all the way round a little lake. An artillery range straddled the Lucknow race-course. The Darjeeling race-course was said to be the smallest in the world, and the Calcutta race-course was claimed to be the largest. In many parts of the

[1] It is now an open air lecture-hall of the University of Ceylon.

Empire the climax of the social season was a big race meeting. From every part of Australia the graziers made their way to Melbourne in October, to ensconce themselves and their families in the comfortable old-school hostelries of the city, and show themselves off at the Melbourne Cup: often the whole year was remembered by what happened that day, and Australians would refer to the past as 'the year Newhaven won the Cup', or 'the year Wait-a-Bit lost by a head'.[1] The great day of the Calcutta year was the day of the Viceroy's Cup race, for a cup given annually by the reigning Viceroy. 'The grandstand is filled', wrote G. W. Forrest in the nineties, 'with noble dames from England, from America and all parts of the world, who have come with their spouses to visit the British Empire. In the paddock is a noble duke, a few lords, one or two millionaires from America, and some serious politicians, who have visited this land to study the Opium Question, and feel ashamed of being seen at a race-course. The air resounds with the cries of the bookmaker, and an eager crowd surges around the totalizer—for on the Viceroy's Cup day even the most cautious bank manager feels bound to have one bet.' After the church and perhaps the law court, the race-course was the principal landmark of a British imperial city—as prominent as the amphitheatre of Rome, and with much the same meaning.

When they were not racing the British were likely to be hunting, for wherever they went they scratched together a pack of hounds, reinforced it with the odd terrier, and set off in pursuit of fox, jackal, elk, pig, hare, red deer, hyena, or whatever else was available to be chased. (Everybody in the Empire seemed to possess a fox-terrier, a bullterrier or a spaniel: no group photograph is complete without a dog in somebody's arms, and in India many imperial households had their own dog-boy, generally the son of a more senior employee.) There were scores of light-hearted hunts in India, and in Africa, so strong was the ethos of the British, even a few Boers took up the sport, and were to be seen authentically costumed in pinks, shouting Tally-ho in Afrikaans. The Montreal Hunt, founded

[1] The Cup is still the great event of the Australian season, and the Windsor Hotel in Melbourne, one of the graziers' favourites, seems to me on the whole the most comfortable I know.

by British officers in 1826, flourished in the heart of French Canada.[1] The Calpe Hunt started with a pair of foxhounds actually on the Rock of Gibraltar, where foxes lived high in the brush among the apes: by the nineties it was one of the smartest imperial hunts, was regularly entertained by Spanish grandees on their estates across the frontier, and once went over to Tangier, 'where a wolf gave an excellent run of over 40 minutes and a distance of nine miles'.

In India pigsticking, like polo, was pursued with passion, encouraged by immense silver trophies presented by Maharajahs. The Kadir Cup for pigsticking was one of the principal sporting trophies of India (it was won in 1897 by Mr Gillman, Royal Horse Artillery, on Huntsman). This tremendously exciting sport, in which a single man on horseback with a spear was pitted against boars, tigers, buffalo, or even rhinoceri, had been popular among the British since the early days of the East India Company: by the nineties the north-west provinces of India were its headquarters, and on the great day of the Kadir Cup sometimes a hundred spears competed, and the men and their horses settled in gay tented camps upon the Punjab plains, practising their runs with stampeding hoofs and dust-clouds in sunshine, like knights before jousting.

Whatever there was to chase or kill, the British pursued. In those days the reaches of the Empire teemed with multitudes of game, the deer and the zebra roamed Africa in their countless thousands, and conservation was not yet a preoccupation of nature-lovers. Hawkers called 'hare-wallahs' used to frequent the Indian cantonments, selling live hares and wild cats to be chased by the soldiers' whippets, or jackals to be pitted against two or three dogs in a ball-alley. If there was nothing to fish, the imperialists stocked their rivers with trout and salmon from home, so that some of the highland hotels of New Zealand, for example, faithfully reproduced all the tangy pleasures of Scottish fishing inns, with knowledgeable ghillies in attendance, fishing books lovingly kept up, malt whisky before big log fires at the end of the day. No colonial handbook was complete without its

[1] It was only in the 1950s that French-Canadians were welcomed in any numbers to this very exclusive hunt: until then, I was once told in Montreal, the country was only hunted by 'English Montrealers of a certain type'.

chapter on the blood sports, though when Sir George Scott compiled his admirable Burmese guide he was obliged to observe that the Burmese did very little hunting themselves owing to the 'mingled pity and dislike' with which hunters were regarded by Buddhists.

3

Drink came next—food did not interest them half so much. 'Diseases Affecting the Whole Empire', was a heading in Volume VI of the *Oxford Survey of the British Empire*, and the very first ailment to be discussed was Alcoholism. It is easy to see why. All classes of the British abroad, Governors to troopers, seem to have drunk terrifically—sometimes to alleviate a grim climate, sometimes because they were lonely, and often because it was part of the general effervescence of life. In the imperial cities the breweries went up almost as fast as the race-courses, and many brewers in England produced beers especially for colonial markets—'Produced by Brewers', as was claimed for Wrexham Lager Beer, 'thoroughly conversant with the requirements of a Tropical Country'. Millers, the Colombo importers, offered a lager bottled for them in Germany, and a malt whisky especially bottled in the Highlands. The sundowner was an institution throughout the tropical Empire—that first delectable drink of the evening, brought to your veranda with glistening paraphernalia of ice-bucket, napkin, carafe, and soda-siphon, by a servant in a long white gown and a crimson cummerbund, a tarboosh or a turban: the custom began, it was said, because it was thought that the moment of sunset was particularly ill omened for malaria, and that a strong drink taken then, perhaps with a shot of quinine in it, was the best prophylactic.

It was the British from Britain who were the heaviest drinkers. None of the colonials could match them. The Australians already had a reputation as beer-drinkers, and they also produced excellent wines—Trollope thought the white wine of the Upper Yarra vineyards, at 6d a pint, the best *vin ordinaire* he had ever tasted: but their consumption of alcohol per head was hardly more than a third that of the British at home. The Indian breweries were producing rather more than 6 million gallons of beer annually: 3 million gallons of it was

drunk by the British soldiery, who called it 'neck-oil', 'purge', or 'pig's ear', and who often grouped themselves in 'boozing schools' dedicated to the common spending of all available funds on drink. The greatest single problem facing the Calcutta police in the 1890s was the spate of drunken British seamen at week-ends: in the Royal Navy more officers were court-martialled for drunkenness than for any other offence.

Among the moneyed classes, and the gamblers, champagne was the drink of the day. When West Ridgeway, later Governor of Ceylon, marched under Roberts from Kabul to Kandahar, he was haunted throughout by the thought of iced champagne. So terribly did it pursue him that when Roberts ordered him to ride as fast as he could to the nearest railway station, with an urgent dispatch for the Viceroy, the first thing that occurred to him was that at any Indian railway station iced champagne would be available. He telegraphed ahead to reserve a bottle, he rode breakneck for three days and nights—'and oh! the disappointment: the ice was melted, the champagne was corked, and the next morning I had a head'.

So important was champagne to these men of Empire. One of the many complaints of the Assistant Commissary-General, when Wolseley's army was having difficulties in the Sudan campaign of 1884, was that the champagne, officially taken for medicinal purposes, was 'of very indifferent quality, and calculated to depress rather than to exhilarate the system'. Officers' messes normally carried vast amounts of champagne around with them on campaigns—General Buller, on this same advance up the Nile, used to give seven-course dinners in his tent, washed down with any amount of it—and champagne was ordered as a matter of course for any imperial triumph or venture. 'Champagne' Anderson, a jolly old prospector of the Rhodesian nineties, got his name because after selling a claim for a satisfactory profit he ordered himself a hotel bath of champagne, at 25s a bottle. Lord Avonmore set off for the Klondike with seventy-five cases of champagne: unfortunately it froze, and was auctioned off in the main street of Edmonton—it went for 25 cents a case, successful bidders instantly breaking the necks of the good bottles, and drinking them there and then.

Paradise Alley, Dawson City, Klondike, 1897

It is not surprising that the temperance workers were active in these hard-drinking years of the imperial heyday. The Army had its own Temperance Association, whose canteens in every overseas station sold only soft drinks, cakes and bread and butter; members were given a medal after each six months of teetotalism, and official positions on the association were much coveted, allegedly because good money could be made on the side, to spend on whiskey. One of the most eminent reformers was Thomas Cook, the travel king, who began life running a temperance hotel, and whose first conducted tours were temperance outings. Cook never demanded total abstinence of his clients, as did his rivals, Frames Tours, but he never hid his distaste for strong liquor, however happily the British officers, feet up on the rail, swigged their whisky on his Nile steamers. He was an active teetotaller all his life, and once recorded with satisfaction that there were 5,908 recorded abstainers in the Indian Army. The dangers of contaminating native peoples with alcohol were always alive in the evangelist mind—and with reason, for the Australian aborigines, the Canadian Indians, the Maoris and the Polynesians had all been half-rotted by liquor, when first introduced to it by the British. Sometimes a native ruler saw the point, and proved in his conversion more abstemious than his converters. Khama, the great king of Bechuanaland, not only compelled his entire tribe to turn Christian, but in the 1880s decreed prohibition throughout his domains. In a country several times the size of England the only place where a drink could be sold to anyone, African or European, was the railway refreshment room—that ultimate haven of Empire. Khama called alcohol 'the enemy of the world', and wished it could all be spilt into the sea: but he was out of his time, for there has probably been no more effective agency for distributing this particular consolation throughout the world, than the thirsty Empire of the British.

4

They liked their creature comforts, and were able to indulge them more luxuriously than they generally could at home, especially in the tropical possessions. With their coveys of servants and their

The Mazoe Patrol, Rhodesia, 1869

social privileges, they could live in a class above themselves, elaborated in grandeur as they rose in rank, until at last in their retirement back they went to England, to live in obscurity with a housekeeper and a jobbing gardener, and be known to the neighbours, after ruling a couple of million people for half a lifetime, as having been 'something in the colonies'. In the early days of Empire they had adopted the sybaritic ways of the natives, dressed themselves in silks and reclined languidly on divans with hookahs: as late as 1859 Samuel Shepheard, founder of Shepheard's Hotel in Cairo, was portrayed dressed altogether as an Egyptian, feet up on a wide and squashy sofa, with a shallow tarboosh on his head, a parrot at his elbow, and a splendid brass hubble-bubble conveniently at hand. By the nineties the British usually preferred their own varieties of relaxation, and wherever they went they took with them the chintz, the leather arm-chairs, the glass decanters and the potted plants that were the hall-marks of cultivated leisure at home.

The club was pre-eminently a product of this portable décor, barring only the chintz. Insulated against the world outside, barred almost certainly to natives and very likely to females, with its own hierarchy of president, committee and senior members, the club was a comforting enclave of Englishness, its familiar features unchanged whether it was deposited in equatorial heat or near-Arctic cold. It was social centre, library, hotel, town forum, recreation ground all in one. If ever the British community wished to forgather, it would do so 'up at the Club': and whenever the wandering Briton wished to find company of his own kind he had only to get himself introduced to a member, and soon he would be standing at the bar as if he owned it, asking his neighbour if he happened to know 'Tommy' Oldbourne, who'd been Forest Officer in those parts in the eighties. Some clubs were exceedingly luxurious. The Kimberley Club, in the heyday of Rhodes and his diamond cronies, was as lavish as you might expect: it was a graceful low white building, arcades below, veranda above, with wrought-iron railings, imposing lamp standards, a pair of tall flagpoles and a small projecting balcony, like those on the Doge's Palace, from which overwhelmingly successful financiers might harangue or encourage the toiling speculators below. It reeked of success, lived by diamonds, and was

frequented by all the flashiest millionaires of the day—Rhodes himself, lounging in his wicker chair on the terrace, the indefatigable Alfred Beit, who dined there every evening, returning to his office after dinner to continue making money till midnight, or Barney Barnato, the ex-boxer from London, who drowned himself by jumping from a ship in Cape Town harbour on Jubilee day.

The club at Madras was described, in *Ivey's Club Directory*, as 'one of the most magnificent clubs in the world, amidst the splendours of tropical vegetation and surrounded by luxuries which Nature and Art combine to offer those who can enjoy spacious apartments, cool colonnades, the grateful sea-breezes wafted across green fields laden with the perfume of roses and mendhim, while ice, fruit and flowers —to say nothing of admirably trained servants—contribute to the snatches of Sybarite enjoyment in which even a soldier may at times be allowed to indulge'. It was in the club at the hill station of Ootacamund in southern India—'Snooty Ooty'—that a subaltern called Neville Chamberlain, in 1875, first thought of adding an extra coloured ball to the billiards table, and thus invented the game of snooker: it was named after the term given in the British Army to a first-year officer cadet, and the original rules were hung on a wall in the Ootacamund Club, at the start of their phenomenal journey around the world.

In Australia the clubs very early became strongholds of established wealth and dignity in a disrespectful continent. The grandest of them was the Melbourne Club, which had begun indeed as a rip-roaring affair, whose members went in for false fire-alarms, pushing policemen into mud-holes, stealing door knockers or fighting not very deadly duels—they had a special annexe to creep into, to sleep it off or lie low. It had matured into a very bastion of respectability, with handsome renaissance premises in Collins Street, liveried menials and large lace-curtained windows through which the eminent bankers, politicians, graziers and mining men of Victoria could look out upon the life of their metropolis, and deplore the passing of the old days. The Rideau Club in Ottawa had elegant premises directly opposite the Parliament Buildings of the Canadian Confederacy, with balconies allowing members a canopied grandstand view of every ceremonial. The Kildare Street Club in Dublin

was the stronghold of the Anglo-Irish, a fortress of British ascendancy almost as formidable as Dublin Castle itself, and designed by the architect Benjamin Woodward in his most overpowering Venetian Gothic.

Let us visit, for a taste of imperial club life at its most agreeable, the Hill Club at Nuwara Eliya in Ceylon. This little town lay high among the tea estates of the interior, in country which had known the young Samuel Baker among its first British settlers, and the baby Jack Fisher among its residents. It was the principal hill station of Ceylon, and a perfect period piece of the Victorian Empire. Set on a grassy plateau among the hills, immediately below the highest mountain on the island, it was like a model hill station in an exhibition. The British had laid out a park, with a maze and a botanical garden. They had dammed a little lake. They had marked out gentle walks around the surrounding woods, and named them for great ladies of the colony—Lady Horton's Walk, or Lady McCallum's Drive. Fir trees flourished, and gave the place a Highland look. There was a big half-timbered Grand Hotel, and a gabled cottage for the Governor of Ceylon, with a pond and a croquet lawn of exquisitely mown buffalo grass. There were the inevitable golf and race-courses, and villas strung about the lake like fishing lodges round a loch; and an English church, of course, and a lending library; and poised most benignly above the plateau, the Hill Club.

It was a low, baronial sort of building with gardens all around it. Its windows were mullioned, and inside it the atmosphere of an English or more properly a Scottish country house was diligently re-created. If the private houses of the British Empire tended towards the suburban, the clubs smacked distinctly of landed gentry. *Blackwood's*, *The Field*, the *Illustrated London News* lay on the smoking-room table, and *The Times* and the *Morning Post*, not more than a month old, were carefully smoothed in the breakfast room. Glass-enclosed upon the walls were the champion trout of the local hill streams, descendants of those first brought to Ceylon by the British fifty years before. There were rod racks about, landing-nets, somebody's waders in the back passage, and when a rattle of wheels was heard outside out ran a couple of turbaned servants to help another sportsman from his tonga, collect his bags and his rod case, his walnut fly box and his boots, and usher him inside for his bath and his sundowner. Service at this club was paternal, or perhaps avuncular. The planting families used it as a second home, and the club servants were like family retainers to them all. The Hill Club had a useful little library, mostly books about Ceylon, but it was chiefly a place for outdoor men. The grave seniors of the Indian Civil Service might not feel at home here: this was the Pax Britannica at its most boyish and breezy, where the bedroom fires flickered in the mountain evenings like nursery memories, and a chap slept like a log.[1]

5

Throughout the length and breadth of the Empire a well-spoken, reasonably well-connected young man, with a few introductions in the right places, and a sufficiently entertaining line in small talk, could travel by himself without feeling the need for an hotel. If he did not stay at clubs, somebody was sure to invite him to stay at a bungalow. Family travellers, though, must depend upon hotels or the official rest-houses which the British erected in most of their Eastern possessions. Then as now the good traveller did not greatly care. Henry Beveridge,[2] a retired Indian Civil Servant on a sentimental revisit to India in the 1890s, happily put up at the Temperance Hotel in Mango Lane, Bombay, where the daily all-in charge was 3s 4d, and the monthly tariff £4. Others were less easily satisfied. G. W. Steevens thought there were only four hotels in India that could 'indulgently be called second-class', while all the rest were 'unredeemably vile'. The only country inns in Rhodesia were thatched huts of clay attached to the trading stores, and Kipling paints a compassionate portrait of a British commercial

[1] Nuwara Eliya (pronounced more or less *Noorellya*) has miraculously defied the years. The little town is almost unchanged, the Governor's cottage is impeccably kept up for the Prime Minister of Ceylon, and in 1965 the Hill Club still had not admitted a single Ceylonese to membership.

[2] Father of Lord Beveridge and so grandfather of the Welfare State. He joined the East India Company in 1836 and died in 1929, the year the British Labour Government declared Dominion status to be its goal for India.

hotels sprang up, spaciously called the Château This or That, and sometimes so dominating their cities that the hotel in the centre of Quebec has been popularly supposed, ever since, to be the ancient fortress that was the city's *raison d'être.*

All these were very grand hotels indeed.[1] They lived by the Empire, had mostly risen with its fortunes, and were now in their plushy, palmed and Electric-Illuminated prime. Perhaps more suggestive of the best imperial pleasures, though, were the houseboats for which the British had a particular fondness. At Aswan, high up the Nile, one could hire a *dababia*, one of the long-prowed sailing boats which still provided passenger service down to the Delta for those who could not afford Cook's steamer fares. This would be exquisitely converted by Cook's, and equipped down to the last table napkin, and it could be towed more or less where you wished, preferably within reach of one of the better hotels, for tea-dances or tennis. Even more delicious were the houseboats of Kashmir, moored on the celestial lake of Srinagar beneath the Karakoram, and served by floating shops that drifted out from town each morning. These quaint craft were devised because a Maharajah of Kashmir, fearing an influx of retired British officials into his arcardian State, forbade Europeans to own land there. The Europeans took to the water instead, and in about 1875 the first of the Kashmir houseboats were launched. They looked like little Thames-side chalets mounted on hulls, with dormer windows and shingle roofs, the whole slightly orientalized by curving prows: and on their decks the exiled British, gazing across the water towards the white ramparts beyond, took their tea and crumpets, did their embroidery, devised new phrases for their journals in uninterrupted content.

[1] Most of them still thrive. Shepheard's was destroyed in the Cairo riots of 1952, but has been rebuilt on an even better site, beside the Nile. The terrace of the Casino Palace at Port Said is sadly dingy now, but the hotel service is still geared to the passage of the India boats through the canal. The Crescent Hotel at Aden is still the best in town, while the Taj Mahal in Bombay remains the most imposing building in the city, and is perhaps the grandest hotel in Asia. The G.O.H. in Colombo has been redecorated in advanced colours and indigenous motifs, removing its last traces of imperial splendour, but Raffles has kept its character, and the Canadian Pacific hotels still boast in the Royal York at Toronto 'the largest hotel in the Commonwealth'—1,600 rooms, and an Imperial Lounge.

6

They had developed to a new pitch of finesse the art of living in tropical countries. The specialist outfitters of London offered all kinds of ingenious devices for defeating the equatorial climates—patent ice machines, spine-pads, thornproof linen, the Shikaree Tropical Hat, in white and brown canvas, from Henry Heath's Well Known Shoppe for Hattes in Oxford Street. The tent of a British Army officer in the tropics was a sight to see, with its portable writing-desk, its canvas camp bath, the gleaming boots laid out on their trees beside the 'Union Jack' Patent Field Boot Container, the taut white 'Up-Country' Mosquito Net and the 'Unique' Anti-Termite Matting on the floor. Private houses, though stuffily packed with the bric-à-brac of the day, were shaded by verandas and cooled by hand-powered fans, worked by invisible servants in the room next door (in the best-ordered households the punkah magically started swaying the moment you showed signs of pausing in a room, to glance at a picture or pin your hair up). Every kind of al fresco activity was popular. The British loved picnics, and camping parties, and boating, and often at Government Houses, if there were too many guests for the bedrooms, great comfortable tents would be erected on the lawn for the overflow.

Even so, the Victorians in their tropical possessions must have been fearfully hot and sticky. Their clothes were so heavy, they were so loaded down with protective devices like puttees (against snakes) and neckpads (against heat-stroke), that a dressy occasion must have been horribly uncomfortable. For the most part to be smart was to be dressed just as you would be at home in England, even though the temperature might be 109 degrees in the shade. Women used to order complete outfits from London, with dress, hat, gloves, bag and shoes to match (or if they could not afford it, at least took great pains to conceal the fact that their dresses had been made by a tailor in the bazaar). When one took a turn on the Madan at Calcutta one wore a thick frock-coat and a top-hat. Men really did dress for dinner in remote tropical outposts, if only to keep some sense of root and order. The British soldier in the tropics,

traveller stuck forlornly in an hotel—'dark and bungaloathsome'—in one of the sleazier corners of Empire. 'Isn't this a sweet place? There ain't no ticca-gharries, and there ain't nothing to eat, if you haven't brought your victuals, and they charge you three-eight a for bottle of whisky. Oh! it's a sweet place!'

It was only along the great trade routes that the Empire sponsored its own luxury hotels, whose names had entered the vocabulary of travel. Of them all the most famous was Shepheard's in Cairo. Its new building had been finished in 1890, and it stood in Italianate glory, looking across the Ezbekia Gardens to the Opera House, with Cook's almost next door. Its original fortunes had been built on the Overland Route to India, before the cutting of the Suez Canal. Now it prospered largely because of the Cairo winter season, which brought hundreds of rich Europeans and Americans to Egypt each year. Shepheard's wide terrace was the most celebrated of rendezvous, with its carpeted staircase to the street, its vast potted palms, the impassive gold-braided suffragi at its door and the medley of snake-charmers, souvenir-sellers, dragomen, donkeymen, and miscellaneous touts who haunted the pavement outside, sometimes shouting to the toffs above to suggest a trip to the Pyramids, the purchase of a camel saddle or some small expression of *baksheesh*.

Everybody knew Shepheard's. The hotel's Golden Book was full of fame and royalty, and that welcoming terrace became a mirage-like objective for travellers labouring down the Nile out of Africa. There is a drawing of Stanley arriving there in 1890, after three years in the interior looking for Emin Pasha: he is dressed still in his pith helmet and high boots, and as the manager, in a frock-coat, clasps the explorer's right hand with both of his own, an Englishman on the terrace waves his hat and raises a cheer, a flounced lady lifts her *lorgnette*, and a porter in a tarboosh looks curiously through the front door of the hotel—'the fashionables of Cairo,' Stanley wrote, 'in staring at me every time I came out to take the air, made me uncommonly shy'. Rudolf von Slatin, escaping from eleven years' imprisonment by the Mahdi, made for Shepheard's to write his book *Fire and Sword in the Sudan*: he became one of the hotel's best-known regulars, and a staff with a taste for honorifics loved

referring to him by his full sonorous title—General Baron Sir Rudolf von Slatin Pasha.[1] It was at Shepheard's, too, that Gordon had stayed, impatiently waiting for Cook's to complete the travel arrangements, before he left Cairo in 1883 for Khartoum and his death. Shepheard's was a legend already, and one of the classic travel experiences of the imperial age was to sit on its terrace on a winter morning, with a Turkish coffee and a sticky cake, watching a parade march by outside—the tarbooshed bandsmen puffing away at their bugles, the British commander ineffably superior on his horse, and in front Shepheard's own water-man laying the dust with squirts from his leather water-bag, backing away before the advancing military, and chivvied by testy superiors on the pavement.

No other hotel was quite so famous, but several more were as familiar to the travellers of Empire as home itself. There was the Casino Palace at Port Said, with its huge glass-roofed terrace, looking across the mole to where the P. and O. lay coaling, or the Crescent at Aden, which opened directly upon the British Army's horrible hot parade ground. At Bombay they were building the monumental Taj Mahal, which was to be the most imposing building in the city, outshining even the great structures of Government, and standing flamboyantly striped, turreted and balconied upon the Apollo Bund, the very first thing to greet the new arrival in India. At Colombo there was the G.O.H.—the Grand Oriental Hotel—a huge lumpish hostelry called by *Murray's Handbook* 'one of the best hotels, if not the best, in the East'. At Calcutta there was the awful Great Eastern, monumental and morose, at Singapore Raffles', a delightfully sun-shaded, courtyarded, loose-limbed sort of hotel, famous for its long cool drinks and its food, notorious in those days for its squalid rooms. At Hong Kong the hotels on the waterfront, run on American lines, sent their own launches, house flags at the prow, to meet the liners steaming into harbour. All across Canada, wherever the Canadian Pacific Railway passed, enormous castle-like

[1] von Slatin, born in Austria in 1857, governed a Sudanese province under Gordon, and was captured by the Mahdi in 1883. He escaped to Egypt in 1895, returned to Khartoum with Kitchener, and became Inspector-General of the Sudan when Anglo-Egyptian rule was restored there.

though he changed into white uniform, still had his jacket brass-buttoned to the chin—and carefully dandified himself each evening, buttons polished and hair slicked, even if he had nowhere to go but the canteen in the cantonment. As if all this were not enough, a favourite recreation of the British was the fancy dress ball, to which guests often came weighed down with elaborate fineries—when Lord Roberts gave one at Simla in 1887, eighteen officers of the Royal Irish came in a body in long scarlet coats and powdered wigs.

There was an overpowering aura of closeness—one can scarcely speak of sweatiness in such a context—to the whole grandeur of Empire, the epauleted, gold-braided jackets, the heavy silks and long skirts, the dark brown paint of the Government offices. The taste of the late Victorians was ill suited to the administration of a tropical Empire. There is a picture of the Wiltshire Regiment officers' mess at Peshawar in 1886 which depressingly suggests this portentous clutter. The table is thick with regimental silver, trophies and elaborate oil lamps and sauceboats and pepper-pots and goblets, and the walls seem to sag beneath the weight of antlers. Flags are draped here and there, napkins are impeccably folded, and the sixteen chairs for the officers are packed so tightly together in the midst of it all that there looks scarcely room for the servant to manoeuvre a crested soup plate between them. The homes of the senior civilian officials were just as overloaded with consequence. Government House at Poona, where the Governor of Bombay spent his summers, was built in the château style, like a Canadian hotel, and had an eighty-foot tower, a grotto, a lake and innumerable gazebos, arbours and summer-houses. Inside it was burdened all over with dark wood panelling and chandeliers, festooned with pictures of kings and maharajahs, crammed with gigantic and lugubrious pieces of furniture. It must have been difficult indeed for the Governor, when wearing his sword for ceremonial receptions, to pass from one saloon to another: but he was used to it all—his other palace, in Bombay, had two dining-rooms, one for the dry weather, one for the monsoon.

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They enjoyed themselves with tourism. The British, for all their

aloofness, were indefatigable sightseers. The Victoria Falls very soon became a tourist spectacle, and even India was full of the symptoms of the trade—the blackguardly guides, bowing obsequiously, the picture-postcard man at the Taj Mahal, or the chairs with long poles attached to them, in which the trippers from Bombay were carried by coolies up the long steep steps to the caves on Elephanta Island. A team of four guides was considered convenient for sightseers in Madras—'No 1 to lead, No 2 to see that he does it, No 3 to see that No 2 does his duty, while No 4 supervises the lot'. They habitually called British tourists 'My Lord', in the Empire of those days: Kipling says gharry-men in India used to warn off rival carriages by claiming they were 'rotten, My Lord, having been used by *natives*'.

The British enjoyed themselves with the theatre, too. Calcutta had four professional English-speaking theatres, Melbourne three, and there was even one in Rangoon—though most of them only played music-hall and harmless farce. Sometimes fairly distinguished companies from London undertook a tour of the more urbane imperial centres: Charles Carrington, one of the best *avant-garde* producers of the nineties, spent three years touring India, Australia, New Zealand and Egypt with Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. Well-known musical companies from London toured the garrison theatres of India, and Thespians in the mellow tradition of ham and fly-by-night often turned up on the frontier stations; like the well-known Professor who was a familiar figure of the Rhodesian veldt, plodding with his sad troupe from one stand to the next, Hamlet to pantomime. Amateur theatricals flourished almost everywhere, and seem to have formed an absolutely essential part of the imperial way. When Kipling wanted to invent a conversation to show the sameness of imperial conversation everywhere, this is what he wrote: 'And then, you know, after she had said *that* he was obliged to give the part to the other, and that made *them* furious, and the races were so near that nothing could be done, and Mrs —— said that it was altogether impossible.' The most familiar photograph of social life in the Empire of the nineties, to be found in faded sepia print in picture albums from British Columbia to the Cape, shows Colonel Hampstead, Mrs Rathbone, Miss Susan Walkley-Thomas and the Reverend Arthur Millstead, poised precariously in too much make-

up holding teacups, at a climactic moment of last year's production of *Caste*.[1]

And naturally they enjoyed themselves with sex. The late Victorians were, for all their later legend, as full-blooded as any other generation, and the annals of their imperialism are rich in sexual adventure. Frank Richards recalled, in his book *Old Soldier Sahib*, the irrepressible randiness of the British soldier abroad in those days. Commanding officers often established regimental brothels, to cope with it: in Burma the military authorities imported Japanese prostitutes, and most Indian garrison towns had brothels reserved for the white troops, inspected by military doctors for cleanliness and patrolled by military police, who did not hesitate to beat up any native seen approaching the girls. Itinerant whores—'sand-rats'—habitually followed any British regiment on the march in India, and the pimp's cry 'jiggy-jig, sahib' haunted the British soldier the moment he set foot outside his barracks.

As for the women of Empire, Kipling badly damaged their reputation for purity with his stories of the goings-on in the Indian hill stations. The historical novelist Maud Diver undertook to restore it in a book called *The Englishwoman in India*, but even she had to allow that the British grass widow in the hills had many temptations to resist. The two most insidious dangers, Miss Diver thought, were military men on leave and amateur theatricals, but many memsahibs fell too for the exotic allure of the East. Dennis Kincaid, an Indian civil servant, reported that they were often much moved by a well-known Pathan marching song called *Wounded Heart*, and sometimes asked to be told the words: but unfortunately the least obscene lines in the song, Kincaid said, were those of the final verse, which ran: 'There is a boy across the river with a — like a peach, but alas I cannot swim'.[2]

[1] A play (by T. W. Robertson) which seems to have obsessed the Empire, dealing as it did with a humble girl's marriage to an aristocratic guardsman and his unexpected return from the colonial wars to dash the predictions of those who thought that never the twain would cleave.

[2] Kincaid tells this story in his exceedingly entertaining *British Social Life in India*, 1608–1937 (London, 1938). *Old Soldier Sahib* (London, 1936) was the first, and possibly the only, full account of a British private soldier's life under the Raj.

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One easily detects pathos in these pleasures. These were often people putting a brave face upon it. Some were pretending to be grander than they were. Some were tortured by that cruel and incurable disease, home-sickness. Some were compensating for pleasures that England denied them. Some were just making the best of things, drinking themselves silly, gambling themselves broke. The first-generation emigrant was generally disillusioned, and hung on only for the sake of his children. The expatriate merchant only wanted to make his pile before he hurried home to Guildford or Inverness. Perhaps the only really happy men of Empire were the men of lofty duty: those to whom it was not a spree at all, nor even a passable way of spending a few profitable years, but a vocation. Real happiness emanates from the pages of the missionary journals, with their bright-eyed conviction of Christian opportunity: and they seem to have been genuinely happy men who sat in their tents dispensing justice to the backward peoples, decreeing imprisonment here, waiving a levy there, in the absolute knowledge that the Raj was right.