

## **The World of Empire**

### **Colouring the Map Red**

At the start of Queen Victoria's reign, British maps of the world were already coloured red for the British Empire. On analysis, they revealed an exaggerated Canada and Australia and showed a swathe of the Caribbean with large tracts of India under the East India Company and various sparsely populated colonies of white settlement. Red colouring was extended with New Zealand acquired as a result of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840 and Hong Kong as a colonial trading post after the Opium Wars of 1842. As large red blobs were added in Africa, the Pacific and South East Asia, so Queen Victoria became more interested as she emerged into public life, following a long period grieving for Prince Albert after his death in 1861.

Commenting in 1909, Professor George M. Wrong, a Canadian clergyman and historian, said: Today "Britain controls today the destinies of some 350 million alien people, unable as yet to govern themselves, and easy victims to rape and rapine and injustice, unless a strong arm guards them. She is giving them a rule that has its faults, no doubt, but such, I would make bold to affirm, as no conquering state ever before gave to an independent people." His views were widely shared but how times and opinions change.

When writing 'Empire,' published in 2003, Niall Ferguson came across a BBC website entry, written for a young audience. "The Empire came into existence by killing lots of people, less sharply armed than themselves, and stealing their countries, although their methods later changed, killing lots of people with machine guns." This was in reference to Hiram Maxim whose machine gun, introduced in 1860, fired 600 rounds a minute to devastating effect.

In 1999 a valuation was placed on the financial impact of the slave trade and assessment of gold, diamonds and other minerals, notably copper, ivory and much more, taken from Africa during the Colonial period. The £500 trillion put forward by African countries was grossly inflated. A more realistic valuation was a mind-boggling £150 trillion. Yet there were many who questioned whether the Empire was worth the effort in distracting from much needed social development at home. We may speculate also who the prime beneficiaries were and what legacies were left in supposedly civilizing and developing nations, some of whom, such as India, gained from an infrastructure so very helpful to aspirations of independence from British rule.

### **The Great Exhibition of 1851**

The Great Exhibition of 1851, held in Hyde Park from 1 May to 15 October, was the first of several World Fairs, providing an extravagant showcase for the industry of Britain and other nations. The enthusiastic Prince Albert was the most prominent contributor to the organizing committee, comprising members of The Royal Society for the Encouragement of the Arts, Manufactures and Commerce. They drew heavily on the expertise of Henry Cole. Organiser, pioneer of the Penny Post, producer of the first commercial Christmas card in 1843 and, not least, designer of the Minton tea service, Henry Cole possessed all the right credentials for such an extravaganza. Affectionately known as Old King Cole for his royal connections, Cole was an innovator and man of action who had designed and produced several smaller but important exhibitions.

On display was the entire world of Empire, exhibiting British art and culture and the nation's superior manufacturing ability. The proud claim was these carefully selected exhibits "held

the lead in almost every field where strength, durability, utility and quality were concerned.” Cotton spinning machines, impressive locomotives, talking telegraphs and steam turbines vied for space with printing machines, scientific instruments and cameras. About 100,000 exhibits from around the world and British Empire were housed, from the technical and artistic to the glitzy and eccentric, in this huge glass Crystal Palace. It measured 1,851 feet long by 454 feet wide and was constructed using a cast iron frame. Made in Birmingham, it was an engineering and architectural marvel, thanks to the brilliant architect, landscaper and engineer Joseph Paxton.

On 1 May, half a million people thronged Hyde Park with many still en route caught up in a huge traffic jam. At 11.00 am precisely famous balloonist Charles Spencer began his ascent. The Great Exhibition was declared open and Queen Victoria and Prince Albert visited an hour later. A trumpet fanfare heralded their arrival, soon to be eclipsed by an organ concert and accompaniment of 200 instruments and 500 voices. Queen Victoria was enthralled by this wonderful spectacle with “joy expressed in every face.” Oozing admiration, she singled out waving palms, wonderful flower displays, delicate statues, trees of every description and flowing crystal fountains. No wonder Queen Victoria returned twice and total visits exceeded six million with many visiting several times.

The Great Exhibition was memorable and supremely successful, making a profit of £186,000. It was the finest possible testament to the workshop of the world, the British Empire itself and British craftsmanship. Some foreign observers offered a different opinion, not so much ostentatious, grand and elaborate as a depiction of Britain’s avowed independence, and its growing insularity. They had a point.

The world of Empire was accentuated in the curricula of state and public schools, not just with impressive facts but in pride and jingoism with overtones of racial superiority befitting a civilized, superior and industrialised nation. Much of the content was emotive and patriotic, enthusing wildly about imperial ideals and British supremacy. Religion reinforced the mantra as it instituted moral fibre and discipline. Mention of Empire prompted stories of derring-do, valour and dangerous exploits, eagerly read in comics and journals.

Rarely were children and adults given a more unbalanced view, as economic self-interest in far-flung reaches of the British Empire conflicted sharply with realities of oppression, cruelty in some cases, conquest, and threat to indigenous ways of life. In an impassioned address to the Oxford Union in 1870, John Ruskin urged Britain to found colonies and encouraged the wealthy and the worthy to advance the power and cause of Britain. In the one hundred years to 1912, some twenty one million people left these shores for anywhere offering the prospect of a better life. Historian Ronald Hyam believes that by 1900 an extraordinary two-thirds of English speaking people lived outside Europe.

### **Christianity, Civilization, Commerce & Conquest**

Even as early as 1795 a missionary intent was to “spread the knowledge of Christ among the heathen and other enlightened nations.” Canon Max Warren referred to three phases of: fly-casting, scaffolding and institutionalising. Africa beckoned and in 1816 Robert Moffat and his wife Mary left for Capetown and then ventured into the interior of Bechuanaland, a staging post for the Zambezi that David Livingstone would use, and Cecil Rhodes too but his motives were rather different.

The contribution of Livingstone in opening doors to trade was immense in his approach to civilization by treating Africans as equals in the eyes of God. With his lifelong abhorrence of slavery, and acceptance of many tribal customs, he believed that white people were invited guests and needed to speak local languages. On arrival in Africa he stayed with the Moffats and in 1845 married their daughter, Mary. On return to England in 1856, Livingstone was given a hero's welcome with medals, honours and a personal audience with Queen Victoria. His book, *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa*, sold 28,000 copies in 7 months. Charles Dickens was captivated. Much impressed by the resilience of Livingstone in the face of hardship, he stated, "I used to think I possessed the moral virtues of courage, patience, resolution and self-control."

Disillusioned that the Zambezi River was navigable only in stretches, he set off for his third expedition on 13 August 1865 in an attempt to find the source of the White Nile. Livingstone never returned. Worn out by his travels and recurrent malaria he died on 4 May 1873 and was given a State funeral in Westminster Abbey. The explorer Henry Morton Stanley, a pall-bearer, gave a moving tribute. Lord Curzon summed up the feelings of the British public on the contribution of Livingstone. "As a missionary he was the sincere and zealous servant of God. As an explorer he was the indefatigable servant of science," adding "as a denouncer of the slave trade he was the fiery servant of humanity."

Revered and trusted by indigenous Africans, David Livingstone was de-facto an ambassador. He discovered the gateway to the interior for others to pour into as the pied piper for trade, commerce and missionaries, but Livingstone felt that Christianity and Commerce should be separated. How right he was.

A recurring image of Cecil Rhodes is striding across South Africa, leaving gigantic boot-print impressions, and of extraordinary wealth and narrow pursuit of British interests. But that is to misunderstand the man, his ambitions and above all grand vision of a Cape to Cairo route. Only Queen Victoria, the Pope and Tsar commanded as much attention on the world stage. Those who knew Rhodes well much admired him, as he inspired loyalty and friendship too but he provoked dread and hate in equal measure. Much like a prism he presented different faces. Obsessing Rhodes was all things British and spread of the English language, rather than the accumulation of extreme wealth alone.

In 1898 he formed the British South Africa Company. Directors included Earl Grey, financier Alfred Beit and Duke of Abercorn and Duke of Fife whose sole interests were a decent return on capital invested. It was left to Rhodes and acolytes to negotiate concessions, agreements and treaties with African leaders, unused to legal minutiae and carefully drafted documents.

History has a jaundiced view of Rhodes, though not General Bramwell Booth of the Salvation Army who shared a train journey. Rhodes said of him, "You are set on filling the world with knowledge of the Gospel. My ruling purpose is the extension of the British Empire." Much inspired by study at Oriel College, Oxford for a degree, the most significant contribution of Rhodes was the award of scholarships to percolate and perpetuate British influence around the world. In this and the spread of the English Language he was eminently successful.

### **Ineptitude & Incompetence**

In late November 1853, Turkey declared war on Russia who then destroyed a Turkish naval force. Britain and France allied themselves with Turkey and declared war on Russia in March 1854. The harrowing reports of William Howard Russell of the Times vividly described the

appalling care of the sick, wounded and dying and shortages. Even before a shot had been fired, 20% of the expeditionary force had gone down with dysentery, diarrhoea and, more ominously, cholera. Florence Nightingale arrived with a band of nurses on 4<sup>th</sup> November to the dreadful news Balaclava had fallen 10 days earlier.

The enormous Barrack Hospital had 1,730 patients, soon to be swelled by 600 following the battle of Inkerman the next day. A "vast field of suffering and misery awaited" with sewers "loaded with filth." Men lay on thin vermin infested sacking in squalor. Minimal clothing and linen, scarcity of medicine and absence of surgical utensils and other essentials summed up the debacle, and epic tragedy of incompetence and abysmal leadership on a massive scale. The task was Herculean, given entrenched Army attitudes with eight levels of authority from the War Office and Treasury to Victualling Office and Army Medical Department.

Florence Nightingale catalogued the absurdity. "Not a basin, nor a towel, nor bit of soap, broom or scrubbing brush," adding, "Orderlies stood in line from 4am to 9am daily to draw food stores, carefully weighing quantities by two's, threes and fours, impossible to conceive unless one has seen it." Raw meat, drawn too late, remained in the ward until next day. The kitchen, a proverbial Tower of Babel, was piled high with a conglomeration of food, clothing, linen and rubbish, whilst nurses and servants whizzed along miles of corridors to take meals that would arrive cold, often with meat uncooked.

In early January 1855, two months after arrival, Florence Nightingale wrote to Lord Herbert. "I am a kind of general dealer in socks, shirts, knives and forks, wooden spoons, tin baths, tables, forms, cabbages and carrots, operating tables, towels and soap, small tooth combs for picking out lice, scissors, bed pans and not least stump pillows." To her amazement and horror, unopened supplies included 27,000 shirts requiring inspection by the Board of Survey before release. It was little wonder that mortality in Scutari hospitals between January and March 1855 soared to 33%, with a peak of 52% in February.

Another letter to Lord Herbert four days later pulled no punches. A six point plan for Army Reform cited purveying incompetence, ineptitude on a huge scale, an absence of structure and men who lacked organising ability. Regulations, written for peacetime not war, were in need of drastic revision. What she sought was a clear system of centralization whereby "the component parts may be worked in unison."

The next month a Sanitary Commission headed by Dr John Sutherland of the Board of Health was appointed to carry out inspections and "purify the hospitals of foul air and preventable mischiefs." Whilst Florence improved the organisation of just about everything, "sewers were flushed, walls limescaled, air circulation improved, waste emptied daily and rotting bodies of dead animals removed." A month later the mortality rate at Scutari had fallen to 20% and only 2% in the spring by which time there were 1,100 patients only in the Barrack Hospital. When peace came on 30<sup>th</sup> March 1856 this was still the case. Mortality rates were no higher than a Manchester hospital.

Concerning Florence was the war dead, "73% in eight regiments from disease alone." In the hospitals of Scutari and Crimea she had witnessed the death of 4,600 soldiers. At its height, mortality from disease exceeded that of the Great Plague of London and cholera epidemics. Those killed by the enemy were just one eighth of all mortality. Bordering on the apoplectic Florence said, "We might as well "take 1,100 men per annum onto Salisbury Plain and shoot them." The Army was an operational shambles.

In guidance notes for the British Army, Florence wrote, "It would be a noble beginning of the new order of things to use hygiene as the handmaiden of civilization." This and the correct and consistent use of statistics, had a huge impact at home, especially on sanitation. She sought to include questions in the 1861 census on the numbers of sick and infirm on the day and to obtain data on housing and social conditions. For Sir George Lewis, Home Secretary, these were not proper questions. For Florence it was the response she might expect from a Lord Raglan, Sir John Hall and Andrew Smith. "The connection" she insisted "between the health and the dwellings of the population is one of the most important that exists." She then cited smallpox, fevers, measles and heart disease as all matters affecting the national health. The emphasis in underlining health, dwellings and national is hers alone.

## Crushing Rebellion

The East India Company, founded in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, practised religious toleration out of pragmatism in the aim to boost trade. Thomas Twining, tea merchant, was one example though his main plantations were in Ceylon, now Sri Lanka. By the late 1830s almost 40% of the value of Indian exports was in opium, heralding the demise of the Company within 20 years. Chaplains were banned and entry of missionaries restricted but the former Director, Charles Grant strongly objected, as did William Wilberforce. Concerning them was the moral darkness and abomination of infanticide, strangulation of unwary travellers by thuggee quasi priests and the barbaric practice of suttee, whereby a Hindu widow was burned alive on the funeral pyre of her husband.

The rock of British rule was the Indian Army of which 80% or were sepoys, drawn from warrior classes. The mutiny at Vellore in 1806 over changing army dress regulations was a warning of insensitivity. The cockade on a newly designed turban appeared to be made of pig or cowhide. This sparked unrest, fuelled also by poor pay and conditions and genuine fear that Christianity would be imposed. In 1857, rumours of a new cartridge, lubricated with animal fat, ignited a tinderbox. Before firing, the end had to be bitten off. This act of defilement heightened concerns of suppression of indigenous religions. Added to that was fury as land rights, inherited through generations, were swept aside in cavalier fashion.

A mild skirmish in February was followed by the jailing of 85 men in the Bengal Light Cavalry at Mirath, near Delhi. More than "a thousand cut-throats and scoundrels of every sort" then descended on the jail, released the men, and massacred British officers wives and children. The riot spread north-west of Delhi. In June, at least 180 women and children were killed at the besieged Cawnpore barracks, or were later hacked to death having been assured safe passage. An appalling sight awaited British troops on entering the blood-stained courtyard and rooms of a nearby house. Long tresses of matted and congealed hair led to a dry well, into which dismembered bodies were thrown. Tangled arms, legs and gashed torsos were clearly visible.

A defining point was the siege of Lucknow, triggered by British annexation of the province of Oudh the year before. The garrison dug in, holding out for nine months, until British forces arrived. The Union Jack flew throughout and was not lowered until independence in 1947. Some 30% of casualties amongst officers, and 80% of other ranks, were merely reported as 'native,' but to the British at home the mutiny was a revolt of black against white, fuelled by lurid and graphic accounts.

Not content with murder "they added outrage and nameless mutilation. I beheld that was all left of the wife of an adjutant, who before she was shot and cut to pieces, had her clothes



set on fire by men who were no longer human." This was from a Private Bowater. In Delhi it was claimed that 48 British women had been paraded, publicly ravaged and put to death. Reported too was of a captain's wife boiled alive in ghee (liquefied butter). Lucknow was to pay a heavy price. Two thirds of the town was flattened and the entire population moved out. They could return only on payment of taxes to compensate for this destruction.

An outraged British public demanded action and swift suppression. At the Crystal Palace an audience of 25,000 listened intently to Baptist preacher, Charles Spurgeon, urging that "the sword must be taken out of its sheath, to cut off our fellow subjects by their thousands." His plea was heeded. Before execution, mutineers were forced to lick the blood of white victims. At Peshawar, 40 men were strapped to cannons and blown apart whilst Delhi witnessed an orgy of slaughter.

The Times demanded, "every tree and gable-end in the place should have its burden in the shape of a mutineer's carcase." A banyan tree in Cawnpore was festooned with 150 corpses and villages burned. The intention to modernise India and indoctrinate its population had gone disastrously wrong. Warnings by the East India Company went unheeded. Attempts to interfere with native customs and religions would create nothing but trouble.

On 1 November 1858 the East India Company was formally handed over to Crown control. In the proclamation Her Majesty gave two assurances. There would be no further meddling into Indian religious culture, and equality in appointments was to exist between "Europeans and Natives." Admirable in sentiment, these pronouncements were a hostage to fortune.

The summer torment of disease, extreme heat, sweat, smells was replaced by hill-stations such as Simla with cool mountain air, breathtaking views and towering pines. From 1864 Simla became the summer capital and Viceregal Lodge, atop Observatory Hill, the Viceroy's official summer residence from 1888. Her Majesty was proclaimed Empress of India in 1877. The Raj would rule for 70 years.

An elite Indian Civil Service of little more than 1,000 administered India. Zachary Macaulay, also of the Clapham Sect, sought "a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect." Competition for places was fierce as by now meritocracy replaced patronage. Languages, Law, History, Logic, Mental & Moral Philosophy, Treasury Procedure and Revenue Accounts needed clear analysis, articulation and argument. Some posts were hardly onerous as a position of magistrate and district collector illustrated; exercising the horses, a little gardening, work between 11 and 5, a game of tennis and chat on the verandah before dinner.

Suppression of an Indian elite changed in 1880 with appointment of the Marquess of Ripon as Viceroy. Queen Victoria was "greatly astounded," regarding Ripon as weak. One issue was the conduct of trials. Indians were not permitted to conduct those of white defendants in criminal cases and for Ripon this was an anomaly. Fresh from Balliol, and his chambers in Chancery, Courtenay Peregrine Ilbert was given the task. Justice would be colour-blind as within weeks of publication of the bill in early 1883, a 'white mutiny' erupted.

The strident views of 'King' Keswick, senior partner in a tea and trading firm, were cheered by others. "Truly and verily the jackass kicketh at the lion." For Ripon the issue was clear-cut. Was India to be ruled "for the benefit of the Indian people of all races, classes and creeds," or "in the sole interests of a small body of Europeans?"

The implications were clearly spelt out. "Is it England's duty to try and elevate the Indian people, to raise them socially, to train them politically, to promote their progress in material prosperity, in education, and in morality; or is it to be the be-all and end-all of her rule to maintain a precarious power," over a subject and subjected race? The comments by Ripon were thoughtful and prescient but largely fell on deaf ears.

The bill was emasculated. A white defendant in a criminal trial, to be heard by an Indian magistrate, could insist on at least half the jury being English or American. Vindictive and venomous letters in the press served only to spark zealous opposition, from Hindus and Muslims to Sikhs, Bengalis and Punjabis. The Indian National Congress was born. From the outside, the palace of the Raj seemed splendid, but inside the fittings and floorboards were gradually being broken up and furnishings removed, though institutions were kept. Much valued were the legal system, machinery of government, English Language so helpful for international trade, railways and not least the game of cricket enjoyed by millions.

Queen Victoria and Prince Albert understood well the connection between Britain's economic power and global mastery, reminded constantly by the frescos at Osborne House. By 1860 Britain had HMS Warrior, the world's most powerful battleship, just one of 240 ships crewed by 40,000 sailors. Britannia ruled the waves, by jingo. The telegraph meant that messages could be received from afar in a matter of hours. The first short stretch of railway opened in India in 1853. By the turn of the century 24,000 miles of track had been laid. Economic and social life was transformed. So was administering military control and civilian society but the Empire had become over-extended – and costly too. But never mind, the sun still shone.