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*The contraction of England; an
 inaugural lecture 1984*

There should be no need for another Smuts Inaugural. Eric Stokes should be with us still. His early death robbed us of a star in our firmament. His sparkling *English Utilitarians and India*,¹ *The Zambesian Past*,² and following his return to Cambridge, to India and to Kipling,³ *The Peasant and the Raj*⁴ have been lodestars to very many of us. On so many personal grounds it is hard to accept he is gone. The first Smuts Professor graces our company still. Nicholas Mansergh's superb edition of the British documents on *The Transfer of Power*⁵ in India is currently crowding the footnotes. He and I share debts to Keith Hancock; still the doyen of our limb of the profession; and in the fulness of his days Smuts' biographer.⁶

But, as my title implies, it is to another luminary to whom I refer. For precisely a century lay between the publication of John Richard Seeley's Cambridge lectures on *The Expansion of England*⁷ and my assumption of the Smuts Chair; and my purpose here is to ruminate upon what has happened in the interval. Seeley, so we were lately told, was the first truly notable Regius Professor of Modern History in the University of Cambridge.⁸ The History Faculty named its Library after him, and on 24 April 1945 successfully recommended to the University that it should teach a course on

¹ Oxford, 1959. ² Edited with R. Brown, Manchester, 1966.

³ "The Voice of the Hooligan": Kipling and the Commonwealth Experience', Inaugural Lecture, reprinted in *Historical Perspectives: Studies in English Thought and Society in honour of J.H. Plumb*, ed. Neil McKendrick, London, 1974.

⁴ Cambridge, 1978.

⁵ 12 volumes, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, London, 1970–83.

⁶ W.K. Hancock, *Smuts: The Sanguine Years 1820–1919*, Cambridge, 1962, and *Smuts: The Fields of Force 1919–1950*, Cambridge, 1968.

⁷ London, 1883.

⁸ G.R. Elton, *The History of England*, Inaugural Lecture, Cambridge, 1984, p. 2.

The Expansion of Europe,⁹ that it has done ever since, which is essentially still based on Seeley's perspectives.

It is astonishing to recall that as Seeley lectured, Britain's African empire had scarcely begun. In the ensuing century, precipitated by that, there has been much disputation over economic imperialism. It was given a stir from this University by Gallagher and Robinson with their 'Imperialism of Free Trade'.¹⁰ More recently studies of 'the periphery',¹¹ and of the relationship between Britain's own economic history and its imperial thrusts rather more precisely,¹² have opened vistas that were never seen down the blind alleys into which Hobson and Lenin led us. But I shall not dwell on these. Nor on that other preoccupation since Seeley's day – the constitutional history of the Empire and Commonwealth; though I confess to one rather special interest in it. For its discussion ordinarily overlooks the fact that Buckingham Palace is as much part of the Westminster system as 10 Downing Street, Whitehall and the Houses of Parliament. Even in the past year the point has been at issue in Queensland, Malaysia, Grenada, Kashmir, Andhra Pradesh, the Solomon Islands, and not so long since in Fiji and Australia too.¹³ Early in 1983 some thought it could have been in issue here also.¹⁴

Let me turn instead to some other matters relating to the expansion of England. From Cambridge we have in recent decades been inducted into 'the official mind'.¹⁵ We have been introduced to the colonial collaborator. 'The choice of indigenous collaborators', so Robinson put it, 'more than anything else, determined the organization and character of colonial rule.'¹⁶ We know about colonial resisters as well.¹⁷ But we must be careful not to let these engross the whole scene. So let me begin by offering some comments on three other considerations: force, legitimacy and assuagement.¹⁸

⁹ Report of the Faculty Board of History on the Addition of a Paper on The Expansion of Europe to the Schedules of Subjects for the Historical Tripos', 24 April 1945, *Cambridge University Reporter*, 15 May 1945, pp. 729–30.

¹⁰ *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser. 6 no. 1 (1953), 1–15.

¹¹ D.K. Fieldhouse, *Economics and Empire 1830–1914*, London, 1973.

¹² P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, 'The Political Economy of British Expansion Overseas, 1740–1914', *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser. 33 no. 4 (1980), 463–90.

¹³ See now D.A. Low (ed.), *Constitutional Heads and Political Crises, Commonwealth Episodes, 1945–85*, London, 1988; and David Butler and D.A. Low (eds.), *Sovereigns and Surrogates. Constitutional Heads of State in the Commonwealth*, London, 1990.

¹⁴ Correspondence in *The Times* before the 1983 election.

¹⁵ R. Robinson and J. Gallagher with A. Denny, *Africa and the Victorians*, London, 1961.

¹⁶ R. Robinson, 'Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism: Sketch for a Theory of Collaboration', in *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism*, ed. R. Owen and B. Sutcliffe, London, 1972, p. 139.

¹⁷ Especially since T.O. Ranger, *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia 1896–7: A Study in African Resistance*, London, 1967.

¹⁸ I hope that what follows is a development upon my *Lion Rampant*, London, 1973, chs. 1 and 3.

It is time to repeat that empire was fundamentally based upon force. Frontier war in Australia was extraordinarily sophisticated. Aborigines learnt the range of shot and ball, and made tracks to keep out of it. They knew as well how long muskets took to load, and timed their attacks accordingly. Upon the sparse edges of settlement they killed perhaps 2,000 whites. But they were of course overwhelmed themselves, shot down, perhaps 20,000 all told, 25 at Pinjarra in 1834, 28 at Myall Creek in 1838 (for which seven whites were hanged), 59 near Burketown in 1868, and on countless other station battlefields both before and after.¹⁹ 'No doubt the policy of trying to make omelettes without breaking eggs', Lugard was to write from Northern Nigeria, 'has the cordial support of Exeter Hall. . . . It was not the way our Raj was established in India or elsewhere.'²⁰ It was not indeed. Were there not all those minor imperial wars; big wars to those that lost them? Mahratta wars, Sikh wars, Burmese wars, Kaffir wars, Maori wars, Ashanti wars, Zulu wars, Sudanese wars, Matabele wars. In western Kenya there was a 'punitive expedition' for almost every one of the first twenty-five years of British rule, and upwards of fifty episodes all told.²¹ Force did not always of course have to be applied directly: 'Rhodes mowed down a mealie field with machine guns before the paramount of eastern Pondoland and his councillors and explained that their fate would be similar if they did not respond.'²² They did of course.

It is no use, however, confining this point to the beginnings of empire. Time was when I was a Second Lieutenant in the 16th/5th Lancers whose chief regimental memory even today is that in 1846 they charged the Sikhs at the Battle of Aliwal.²³ They were also, however, the regiment of Lord Allenby which as British High Commissioner he paraded before the prime minister's house in Cairo in 1924 when he thrust at Zaghul Pasha a draconian ultimatum.²⁴ By that time in India twenty-eight battalions of British troops, as compared to only twenty-two Indian ones, were invariably committed to internal security duties,²⁵ and when later the British

¹⁹ E.g. Henry Reynolds, *The Other Side of the Frontier*, Townsville, 1981; C.D. Rowley, *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society*, Harmondsworth, 1970; Clive Turnbull, *Black War*, Melbourne, 1948; Noel Loos, *Invasion and Resistance*, Canberra, 1982.

²⁰ Lugard to Burdon, 17 April 1902, Nigerian Archives Kaduna S.N.P. 7/3/40, quoted in R.A. Adeleye, *Power and Diplomacy in Northern Nigeria 1804-1906*, London, 1971, p. 257.

²¹ J.M. Lonsdale, 'The Politics of Conquest: The British in Western Kenya 1894-1908', *Historical Journal*, 20 no. 4 (1977), 841-70.

²² Monica Wilson, *Reaction to Conquest*, 2nd edn., London, 1961, p. 412.

²³ Strictly it was the 16th Lancers that charged at Aliwal. The regiment's annual day is still Aliwal Day.

²⁴ Henry Graham, *History of the Sixteenth, the Queen's Light Dragoons (Lancers) 1912 to 1925*, Devizes, 1926, p. 132; Viscount Wavell, *Allenby in Egypt*, London, 1943, pp. 109-17.

²⁵ National Archives of India, H. Poll. 79/30.

were faced by the great 'Quit India' movement of 1942 they speedily mobilised no less than 57½ battalions against it.²⁶

Force then; but legitimacy too. For in establishing and maintaining their empire it was vital for the British not simply to secure collaborators but to work with (and not against) the grain of local notions of political legitimacy. A former prime minister of Pakistan neatly put the central point thus; 'Whoever could conquer a country was accepted as its legitimate ruler . . . The British had no more and no less right to rob or rule India than all the other rulers who had held the country by force before them.'²⁷ Lytton's Great Assemblage in Delhi in 1877 at which Queen Victoria was proclaimed Empress of India in ultimate succession to the Mughals,²⁸ or Rhodes' funeral in the Matopo hills in 1902 at the hands of the Ndebele he had defeated,²⁹ dramatised such transitions powerfully. It was much the same where the British retained the pre-existing native states. Here, Sir John Kirk, of East African fame, engagingly put it, 'we are the "longest sword" and have become the electors and patrons of the throne';³⁰ while in those 'stateless society' situations the anthropologists have elucidated for us, it was usually easy for a European district officer to move into the indigenously accepted position of 'Big Man'.³¹ Woe betide, however, those who contravened the mores here, as the British discovered with their greased cartridges in 1857, or with their abortive plans for a Malayan Union in 1945.³²

Then beyond this let me offer a new thought: assuagement. I once traced the collaboration between the British and the native chiefs of Buganda, the largest kingdom in southern Uganda, through three successive phases.³³ The British position there by no means turned only, however, on that collaboration. It depended on British assuagement of the concerns of

²⁶ 'Summary of events . . . during which Communications with Bihar were dislocated', National Archives of India, H. Poll (I) 3/30/42 Pt II; 'Statement made by . . . the Home Member to the National Defence Council . . .', 8 Sept. 1942, H. Poll. (I), 3/26-42 (2).

²⁷ Firoz Khan Noon, *From Memory*, Lahore, 1966, p. 81.

²⁸ Professor Bernard Cohn is working on this; see his contribution to *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, Cambridge, 1983; and B.S. Cohn, *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays*, Delhi, 1987.

²⁹ S.G. Millen, *Rhodes*, London, 1936, ch. 38. There is an interesting comment on the desolation of the Matopo hills in E.L. Woodward, *Short Journey*, London, 1942, pp. 191-3.

³⁰ Kirk to Anderson, 22 Nov. 1892, Foreign Office Confidential Print, 6362, 214.

³¹ E.g. the 'bog barons' in the southern Sudan or kiaps in Papua New Guinea. On the former, see Robert O. Collins, *Shadows in the Grass, Britain in the Southern Sudan, 1918-1956*, New Haven, 1983. On the latter see, e.g., Marshall D. Sahlins, 'Poor Man, Rich Man, Big Man, Chief: Political Types in Melanesia and Polynesia', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 5 (1963), 285; J.K. McCarthy, *Patrol into Yesterday: My New Guinea Years*, Melbourne, 1963.

³² A.J. Stockwell, *British Policy and Malay Politics during the Malayan Union Experiment 1942-1948*, Kuala Lumpur, 1979.

³³ D.A. Low, *Buganda in Modern History*, London, 1971, ch. 3.

Buganda's prosperous peasantry as well. In the 1920s their discontents with the landlord chiefs with whom the British were principally collaborating pushed the British into promulgating a rural rent restriction act.³⁴ Two decades later further peasant discontent with these earlier chiefs' successors, and with the way peasant cash crops were then being handled, led to the murder of a chief minister and to riots in 1945 and 1949. Assuagement then followed again with the democratisation of the local council, and a plethora of reforms in Uganda's cotton and coffee industries, all of which clearly prevented the further major crisis which followed from reaching flashpoint.³⁵ The grossest failure to effect assuagement led meanwhile in Kenya to the Mau Mau revolt.³⁶ The circumstances of a settler colony were no doubt peculiar, but no Indian administrator would have allowed that to happen. In India, the British had their collaborators too: princes, landlords, rural magnates, service communities.³⁷ But from the mid nineteenth century onwards, their unending stream of rent restriction, tenant security, and moneylenders' limitation acts composed a sustained effort to assuage what they saw as the principal basis of British power, the acquiescence of the better off peasantry.³⁸ As Gandhi and his followers learnt, at Champaran and Bardoli, the British in India were remarkably quick to assuage peasant discontents when these erupted.³⁹ In 1907 one viceroy vetoed a crucial Colonisation Bill of the lieutenant governor of the Punjab when the colonists revolted against it.⁴⁰ In 1935 another opined that: 'The greatest risk in this country . . . lies in the grievances of the peasantry. The longer they remain unredressed the greater the scope of subversive propaganda.'⁴¹ And in the intervening years one can see in Sir Harcourt Butler's storm-tossed fashioning of the Oudh Rent Bill in 1921, and still more, in Sir Malcolm Hailey's extensive extra-legal reductions of land revenue and rents in 1931, two of Britain's most notable Indian governors wrestling with how to balance the calls of their landlord collaborators with the need to assuage

³⁴ R.C. Pratt, 'The Politics of Indirect Rule: Uganda, 1900–1955', in D.A. Low and R.C. Pratt (eds.), *Buganda and British Overrule 1900–1955*, London, 1960, pp. 236–9.

³⁵ Chapters by Gertzel (pp. 67–72) and Lury (pp. 225–33) in *History of East Africa*, ed. D.A. Low and Alison Smith, vol. III, Oxford, 1976.

³⁶ There is a substantial literature, but nothing has yet replaced Carl G. Rosberg and John Nottingham, *The Myth of Mau Mau*, New York, 1966. See, however, D.W. Throup, *Economic and Social Origins of Mau Mau 1945–53*, London 1987.

³⁷ E.g. R.E. Frykenberg, *Guntur District 1788–1848: A History of Local Influence and Central Authority in South India*, Oxford, 1965.

³⁸ Dietmar Rothermund, *Government, Landlord and Peasant in India: Agrarian Relations under British Rule 1865–1935*, Wiesbaden, 1978.

³⁹ Judith M. Brown, *Gandhi's Rise to Power*, Cambridge, 1972, pp. 52–83; D.N. Dhanagare, *Peasant Movements in India 1920–1950*, Delhi, 1983, ch. 4.

⁴⁰ N.G. Barrier, 'The Punjab Disturbances of 1907: The Response of the British Government of India to Agrarian Unrest,' *Modern Asian Studies*, 1 no. 4 (1967), 353–83.

⁴¹ Willingdon to Hoare, 5 Sept. 1935, National Archives of India, EHL, L & O 43/14/35.

their tenant subordinates.⁴² Plebeian assuagement, I am saying, was at least as important a requirement for effectual imperial rule as the successful enlistment of patrician collaborators.

But it is not about the expansion or maintenance of the British Empire that I am billed to speak, but about its contraction. From all I have said it will perhaps be appreciated, however, that I do not go along with the thesis that this chiefly occurred because the British ran out of collaborators. It is no less important to trace their growing reluctance to shoot to kill; the decline in the legitimacy locally accorded them; and their increasing inability to assuage their subjects' rising demands. Let me allude, however, to two more fundamental propositions. Empire came to Britain – if I may be bold – because, as Seeley said, we had a comparative advantage as an island seapower. It was then enlarged and sustained because we secured the further comparative advantage of being the world's first industrial nation. These advantages first shrank and then disappeared. There is no need to rehearse the details of the shift in world power, principally to America and Russia as Seeley foresaw, that have occurred since he lectured, nor the further developments in Japan and the eastern hemisphere that led in 1983 to the United States trading for the first time more with the Pacific countries than with Europe. (We are now at the point where with South-east Asia as the world's fastest growing region economically, the well informed need to read the *Far Eastern Economic Review* as much as they read *The Economist*.) In an intriguing sense England is still expanding there. Twenty years ago Singapore's primary schools taught mostly in Chinese. Now they teach mainly in English. Since it is a good working rule that what Singapore does today many others will do the day after tomorrow, is it not bizarre that the none-too-easy language of a small island off the north-west coast of Europe should already be much more widely used as the lingua franca of the eastern hemisphere where the most of humanity lives than it is of its own western hemisphere? All the same, we must not exaggerate. In my Cambridgeshire village a stone was recently erected marking the traverse of the Greenwich meridian, but even in Toft we no longer think of ourselves as the centre of the world.

The fundamental fact is that we of the west are the global minority and a shrinking minority at that. We are apt to forget that there are as many Vietnamese in the world as there are British, that for every one of us there is one Filipino, one and half times as many Nigerians, three times as many Indonesians, fourteen times as many Indians, and nearly twenty times as many Chinese. Back in 1800 around 20 per cent of the world's population lived in western Europe; nowadays only 8 per cent do (and by next century

⁴² P.D. Reeves *Landlords and Governments in Uttar Pradesh. Studies in their relations until Zamindari abolition*, Delhi, 1990.

under 5 per cent will).⁴³ The loss of empire accordingly does not seem to me to have been principally due to a treacherous loss of national nerve, or any other such self-flagellating notion. It was *au fond* the entirely to be expected contraction of the all-too-overstretched dominion of a none-too-large and very distant island brought about, as Charles Wilson once said of another such eventuality, by the nemesis of normalcy.⁴⁴ In the late twentieth century a Japanese empire might have been rather more plausible than a continuing British one. I begin therefore by taking my stance with Canute, and not with his cajoling courtiers.

It has after all long been clear that no British government could exercise dominion even over its own kith and kin overseas. I shall not repeat the oft told tale which stretched from the American Revolution, through Durham and Elgin in Canada, to the making of the white Dominions, and their lack of support for Imperial Federation, to the Balfour Report and the Statute of Westminster. The later story is studded with the names of Hughes, Scullin, Mackenzie King, de Valera, Hertzog and Smuts himself.⁴⁵ Commonwealth constitutional historians lately took pleasure in the crucial operational importance in the Rhodesian case of the distinction they had always drawn between Responsible Government – which Rhodesia had possessed since 1923 – and Dominion Status – which neither Rhodesia nor the Central African Federation ever had. But even in that case it was not the British who precipitated the downfall, but the much maligned freedom fighters of the ex-Portuguese territories and Zimbabwe itself.⁴⁶

If I were to review the story here I know best, the Australian one, it would no doubt begin with the currency lads, the early Wentworth, and the Irish, and go on to Henry Lawson and the Sydney *Bulletin*.⁴⁷ It would certainly include the making of the Australian federation.⁴⁸ It would be shot through with ambiguity. 'Even the native born Australians are Britons', Henry Parkes roundly declared in 1890, 'as much as the men born within the cities of London and Glasgow';⁴⁹ and on three occasions Australia went to war as soon as Britain did. The crisis came in 1942 when, contrary to every

⁴³ Sir Bruce Williams, 'The Impact of Technological Change on World Population, Wealth and Employment', Association of Commonwealth Universities, *Technological Innovation: University Roles*, London, 1984, pp. 41–7.

⁴⁴ On this, see P.J. Cain and A.F. Hopkins, 'Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Expansion Overseas', *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser. vol. 39 no. 4 (1986), pp. 501–25, and vol. 40 (1987), pp. 1–26.

⁴⁵ The latest study is R.F. Holland, *Britain and the Commonwealth Alliance 1918–39*, London, 1981.

⁴⁶ John Marcum, *The Angolan Revolution*, 2 vols., Boston 1969, 1978; Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, Report of the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, *Zimbabwe*, Canberra 1980, is a most helpful compendium.

⁴⁷ Principally by reference to C.M.H. Clark, *A History of Australia*, 5 vols., Melbourne, 1962–81.

⁴⁸ J.A. La Nauze, *The Making of the Australian Constitution*, Melbourne, 1972.

⁴⁹ A.W. Martin, *Henry Parkes*, Melbourne, 1980, p. 391.

assurance, Britain failed to hold the Singapore base and protect Australia from the Japanese advance. Indeed, but for the check the American fleet inflicted on the Japanese at the Battle of the Coral Sea – Australia's equivalent of the Battle of Britain – Australia stood wide open to Japanese attack. With that Australia's American alliance superseded its British one. In 1951 the ANZUS Treaty was signed. Australian troops fought in Vietnam as no British did, and whilst little love is lost in Australia for the United States, one more poll recently showed solid support for the ANZUS Treaty once again.⁵⁰ As late as the 1960s Australia had a prime minister in Menzies who broke down when he told the House of Representatives of George V's death and always spoke unctuously of Elizabeth II.⁵¹ But whereas in 1939 over 40 per cent of Australia's trade was with the United Kingdom, it is now less than 4 per cent;⁵² God Save the Queen is nowadays only played when royalty are present; and whatever its origins Australia is now principally to be characterised as one of the two white countries in the up-and-coming eastern hemisphere. Menzies regularly visited London. No Australian prime minister would now do so; what would be the point? The Canadian story is not essentially different. It was capped by the 'patriation' decision in 1981 which finally gave the oldest Dominion the right to amend its constitution without reference to London which every other ex-British territory had had at its inception.⁵³ Ways have been steadily parting.

Chiefly owing to the greatly missed Jack Gallagher we have lately been reminded of the revivals of British imperial ambitions especially in the Middle East at the end of both world wars.⁵⁴ These never, however, came to very much, and instead the central story in the twentieth century has been about the contraction of the British Empire in both Asia and Africa. Let me now turn to this. In Cambridge there has been much pricking of hagiographic bubbles on this point.⁵⁵ Those who criticise Cambridge historians for emphasising the self-seeking that accompanied nationalism face difficulties in explaining the prevalence of such antics post-independence. But a balance here needs to be struck, for while many are aware that latter-day imperialist intrusions often stimulated nationalism, while nationalist movements were rarely linear, it is impossible to accept the primacy accorded to domestic constraints and international pressures; while to pass off every nationalist as a freedom fighter and then deny that either had very much influence can be positively obfuscating. One thing is agreed. There is no

⁵⁰ T. B. Millar, *Australia in Peace and War*, Canberra, 1978.

⁵¹ Manning Clark, *A Short History of Australia*, Sydney, 1963, p. 242.

⁵² On all this see A. F. Madden and W. H. Morris-Jones, *Australia and Britain*, London, 1980; also E. Gough Whitlam, *A Pacific Community*, Boston, 1981.

⁵³ Sheilagh M. Dunn, *The Year in Review 1981: Intergovernmental Relations in Canada*, Kingston, 1982, ch. 2.

⁵⁴ John Gallagher, *The Decline, Revival and Fall of the British Empire*, Cambridge, 1982.

⁵⁵ The principal statement was in John Gallagher, Gordon Johnson and Anil Seal, *Locality, Province and Nation: Essays on Indian Politics 1870–1940*, Cambridge, 1973.

teleology to empire's end. The Whigs are dished. But that in no way disposes of the central importance of nationalism and nationalist agitation to empire's end.

The first need here is to take a wider perspective. By the turn of this century nationalism was already in vogue amongst westernised elites in most of Asia.⁵⁶ There had already been the Philippines Revolution against the Spanish. Much excitement was then provided by Japan's defeat of Russia in 1905, the Chinese Revolution of 1911, and the Russian Revolution of 1917. In India and Indonesia the first Asian mass movements – of Muslims – meanwhile erupted to inspire others,⁵⁷ and out of the First World War there came as well the May Fourth Movement in China, Zaghlul Pasha's nationalist upheaval in Egypt, Gandhi's first national satyagrahas in India, the Young Men's Buddhist Association in Burma, the Ceylon National Congress. In the years that followed there were several major urban strikes and rural revolts in which Asia's first communists were involved. Though these were mostly crushed, secular nationalism nevertheless gathered apace. Great uncertainty followed the Japanese conquests in 1942. But upon the Japanese defeat, the 'new emerging forces', as Sukarno was to call them, were dramatically installed in the three brief years 1946–49 in all of South Asia, the Philippines, Indonesia and China. Given this context we should be wary of overparticularistic explanations of Indian nationalism, especially of an institutional or narrowly economic kind. It is more to the point to see it as one manifestation of a three-quarters-of-a-century-long general crisis in so much of Monsoon Asia that via several abortive leftist revolts in the late 1940s/early 1950s and two successful ones, later moved through the attempted 'renovations' of the late 1950s/early 1960s into the 'second starts' of the late 1960s/early 1970s, only to level out within the last decade or so as conservative regimes have everywhere become entrenched, even in China.⁵⁸

A great deal of recent writing on the earlier period here stems from the opening of the British archives, and that for the unwary has sprung a trap. One needs no persuading that in the expansion of empire Britain's 'official mind' made much of the running.⁵⁹ To no such degree did it hold the initiative when it came to the contraction of empire. Whilst the British were often exceedingly skilful in surmounting actual nationalist agitations, they were deeply vulnerable – as was already plain in Egypt as early as 1919⁶⁰ –

⁵⁶ *Asia: The Winning of Independence*, ed. Robin Jeffrey, London, 1981, contains useful summaries, and bibliographies, for this and the ensuing paragraphs.

⁵⁷ Francis Robinson, *Separation among Indian Muslims*, Cambridge, 1974, chs. 7–9; Gail Minault, *The Khalifat Movement*, Delhi, 1982; Deliar Noer, *The Modernist Muslim Movement in Indonesia 1900–1942*, Kuala Lumpur, 1973, ch. 3; Sartono Kartodirdjo, *Protest Movements in Rural Java*, Kuala Lumpur, 1973, ch. 5.

⁵⁸ Ch. 2 below. ⁵⁹ Robinson and Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians*.

⁶⁰ The latest study is John Darwin, *Britain, Egypt and the Middle East: Imperial Policy in the aftermath of War 1918–1922*, London, 1981. See also Wavell, *Allenby in Egypt*.

to any threat of a nationalist storm. This becomes strikingly clear when one looks at Britain's successive declarations of intent in India from the First World War onwards. Each was made in a vain attempt to head off an impending nationalist agitation, or, after their regular mid-term breaks, check its revival. In relation to the three great waves of Indian nationalist agitation – after the First World War; in the early 1930s; during the Second World War – this was as true for the Montagu Declaration of 1917, the Irwin Declaration of 1929, the August offer of 1940, as it was of the Macdonald statement of 1931 or the Cripps Offer of 1942. Each, moreover, was of first importance, as the British never retracted once these had been made: the Cripps Offer clearly presaged the early post-war departure. Contrary examples underline the case. No further such statements were made as the great agitations collapsed. In 1924 there was a good deal of talk about further constitutional advance that centred about the Muddiman Committee; but in 1924 there was no major nationalist agitation, actual or pending, so there was no constitutional advance.⁶¹

[When it came to Africa the point was very clearly perceived. Rarely was there a consideration of the processes of decolonisation as deliberate as that by the Official Committee in Britain on Commonwealth Membership of 1954, which was presided over by the highly influential secretary of the cabinet, Sir Norman Brook. 'The processes', it roundly told Churchill's last government, 'cannot now be halted or reversed, and it is only to a limited extent that its pace can be controlled by the United Kingdom government. Sometimes it may be possible to secure acceptance of a reasonable and beneficial delay in order to ensure a more orderly transition. But, in the main, the pace of constitutional change will be determined by the strength of nationalist feeling and the development of political consciousness within the territory concerned'.]

But if in the contraction of empire the 'official mind' was no olympian free agent but rather a reactor to nationalism, precisely how, and why, did it react? Here we need to take the important step of discarding the all too prevalent notion that the Indian struggle was in some way its own model. Clear choices stood on offer, and precise choices were made.

In the climactic years, 1946 to 1949, when the victorious Americans granted independence to the Philippines, and the British to four South Asian countries, the far more grievously war-stricken French and Dutch sought to re-establish their dominion over Indochina and Indonesia.⁶² The distinction here can be pinpointed. Burma and Indonesia were both conquered by the Japanese. Both had nationalists who resisted the imperial

⁶¹ Ch. 3 below.

⁶² E.g. David J. Steinberg, *Philippine Collaboration in World War II*, Ann Arbor, 1967; Anthony Reid, *The Indonesian National Revolution, 1945–50*, Melbourne, 1974; Ellen J. Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina 1940–1955*, Stanford, 1966.